BRINGING THE ANCIENT WORLD BACK IN: HUBRIS AND THE RENEWAL OF REALIST INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORY

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies in
partial fulfilment of the requirements
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Elements of a Critical Realist
International Relations Theory

by   **Robert W. Farkasch**

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ABSTRACT

The multi-disciplinary initiative taken in this dissertation will ignore the conventional academic distinctions demarcating the study of history, politics and economics. A revision of realist international relations theory emphasizing the political economic relations comprising the state will combine theoretical insight with historical perspective to acknowledge how recurring conflictual processes rooted in the human condition are institutionally expressed through changing material relationships. The realist approach to international relations has conventionally been understood within the field as minimizing the importance of how political order is institutionalized. To discard realism altogether in favor of an alternative approach would overlook how the writings of classical realists such as Reinhold Niebuhr and Hans Morgenthau are capable of providing foundations that would allow realism to address how material conditions coalesce with intra- and inter-state conflict to determine the expressed form a state will take. A revision of the realist approach to international relations will confront humanity's faith in the ability to design and implement institutions capable of eradicating or indefinitely postponing hubris' destructive effects by alternatively suggesting how a renewed realist appeal to a transcendent truth offers a more prudent way of moderating the moral arrogance that accompanies individual and collective expressions of hubris. By emphasizing hubris, this dissertation aims to provide a bridge between ancient political thought and modern realism and in so doing, contribute to the richness of the realist tradition.

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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

Either, therefore, we must discover some fear more potent than the fear of death, or we must admit that here certainly we have not got an adequate deterrent.

Diodotus 3.45

The multi-disciplinary initiative taken in this dissertation will ignore the conventional academic distinctions demarcating the study of history, politics and economics. A revision of realist international relations theory emphasizing the political economic relations comprising the state will combine theoretical insight with historical perspective to acknowledge how recurring conflictual processes rooted in the human condition are institutionally expressed through changing material relationships. The realist approach to international relations has conventionally been understood within the field as minimizing the importance of how political order is institutionalized. To discard realism altogether in favor of an alternative approach would overlook how the writings of classical realists such as Reinhold Niebuhr and Hans Morgenthau are capable of providing foundations that would allow realism to address how material conditions coalesce with intra- and inter-state conflict to determine the expressed form a state will take. A revision of the realist approach to international relations will confront humanity's faith in the ability to design and implement institutions capable of eradicating or indefinitely postponing hubris' destructive effects by alternatively suggesting how a renewed realist appeal to a transcendent truth offers a more prudent way of moderating

the moral arrogance that accompanies individual and collective expressions of hubris. By

emphasizing hubris. this dissertation aims to provide a bridge between ancient political

thought and modern realism and in so doing, contribute to the richness of the realist

tradition.

Of all the historical periods available, Greek and Roman antiquity was not only

chosen for its relative familiarity within the field but, more importantly, for the

comparative insights it offers into the preceeding feudal and absolutist periods that have

shaped our modern era. A justification for including historical research in studying

international relations theory is to take to heart Karl Marx's statement from the

Eighteenth Brumaire: "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they

please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under

circumstances directly found."[1] The study of international relations deals primarily with

contemporary events but the circumstances in which more current events transpire have

institutional roots that are traceable back to antiquity. In antiquity, the way in which

political and economic practices were constituted and historically layered to form

democratic rule in Athens and republican rule in Rome attests to how hubris, more so

than market relationships or class struggle, was the *primary* catalyst behind institutional

change in Athens and Rome. The impetus behind the manifestation of political struggles

in antiquity has bearing on whether more current struggles share similar stimuli and

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[1] Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1978) 595.

whether hubris still operates as a catalyst in defining global patterns of international politics. After all, the framers of the American constitution looked to the Roman Republic and Athenian democracy for guidance which suggests that despite differences in time, culture and geopolitics, there was recognition that insights could be garnered from fellow human beings faced with the predicament of instituting political order.

These insights will be oriented around two primary arguments based on the realist premise that the roots of conflict are not necessarily determined by the institutions nor by economic relations themselves, but by recurring tendencies within human nature. The first argument revives the twentieth century realism of Reinhold Niebuhr and Hans Morgenthau through the ancient texts of Thucydides and Polybius to illustrate the necessity of engaging in a moral exercise. The writings of Thucydides and Polybius will be linked with those of Niebuhr and Morgenthau to stress how an appeal to a transcendent morality can limit the onset and severity of hubris. The argument is not that a supernatural force actually determines causality in international relations, but that a belief in and deference to a higher authority can facilitate moderation and enhance the possibility for establishing a more benign peace. The second argument revises realism through an historical and material examination of ancient Athenian and Roman forms of state and empire to historically supplement an understanding of international relations based on the struggle for power.

The idea of a transcendent appeal is employed in this dissertation as a dynamic, historically-shaped construct whose particular expression varies. However, there are

residues of the past in the present. and the persistence of political institutions like the state and the hubristic actions which have patterned human behavior will distinguish the realist approach taken in this dissertation from a radical scepticism which contextualizes every point of view to deny that there is anything universal or objective. Since this dissertation endeavors to study Greek and Roman antiquity in order to understand the degree to which political societies are capable of change, there is a difficulty in combining a research program based on a transcendent appeal which is construed as being a permanent part of human behavior and a historical approach that emphasizes the differences in behavior as expressed through the variability of state forms.

A research program incorporating a transcendent appeal which, by definition. is timeless and without history with illustrations from ancient Athens and Rome that emphasize historical appears contradictory. Rather than a contradiction, the combination of these two arguments reveals a tension between the way the world *is* as opposed to the way it *ought to be*. Transcendent appeals to objective standards of adjudication operate at the most basic level of human understanding, expressing a universal and eternal quality independent of our perceptions. Natural law traditions, the moral laws of the Old Testament and Plato's hypothesis of the "Forms" all recognize an independent existence for these universals which are beyond the phenomena they inform. Tension arises when appeals to these universal standards are filtered through particular historical circumstances as their manifestation is always conditioned by human thought and action. It is when transcendent standards move from an appeal to a move towards

implementation that historical considerations fully come to light.

The invocation of a transcendent appeal has both a descriptive and normative component. It is descriptive in the sense of its historical expression as will be illustrated through the Melian Dialogue and the destruction of Carthage, and normative in the sense that it reminds international relations practitioners of human fallibility and the need for moral obligation to moderate the effects of hubris. Without the employment of a transcendent appeal both in its descriptive and normative sense. the study of international relations becomes more susceptible to the dangers of

> an unrestricted relativism that is no longer limited by objective rational and moral standards and, hence, finds itself at the mercy of the preferences of society. From those preferences there is no appeal to a "higher law," rational or moral, aesthetic or economic, political or religious.[2]

With regards to the explicit principles on which transcendent standards are based. the variety of diverse interpretations based on faiths, both secular and non-secular, contravene a literal codification to establish a universal code acceptable to all. Such a code can only be known in the most general sense since it would embrace ideals such as love. peace, and liberty. Therefore. although the existence of the transcendent can be made in lieu of history, the traditions, laws and hypotheses associated with the transcendent are historically and politically conditioned approximations of the transcendental existence of a timeless truth.

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[2] Hans Morgenthau, *The Purpose of American Politics* (New York: Vintage Books, 1960) 222.

An implication of appealing to an unknowable transcendent standard is the recognition that such a standard can not be implemented for the adjudication of disputes in international relations. A danger in making a transcendent appeal is that the appeal itself opens the way for those who are in power to rationalize and enforce their interests over others, a danger, as we will see from Thucydides and Polybius, that rests on the denial of human fallibility which gives the illusion that everything can be learnt and known. If every viewpoint is so embedded in its particular historical context, then the questions and judgements regarding individual and collective manifestations of hubris are not intelligible, meaningful or applicable to succeeding ages. Situating political action and political structures within their historical contexts to examine how the struggle for power unfolds provides the basis on which statements about the persistence of political regularities can be made. For instance, the way in which antiquity grappled with the issues of domination and resistance exhibits the institutional regularities through which political struggles transpire and the way in which political institutions both perpetuate and moderate hubris. The aim is to understand and explain how people have acted in contested inter-state environments and, in so doing, have modified or reproduced the political institutions in which they were enmeshed. Realism's focus on resistance coupled with an enduring human nature whose expressed form changes in light of political and historical circumstance, explains how the political struggles for power in democratic Athens and the Roman Republic did not always result in more inclusive and perhaps less oppressive institutionalization of order.

The endeavor to contain hubris and promote moderation are generalizations that

help to explain the behavior of human beings and their institutions. As such, even though the ancient and modern worlds differ in terms of their material foundations, an awareness of how Thucydides, Polybius, Niebuhr and Morgenthau wrestled with the moral implications arising from political struggle demonstrates how the questions surrounding human nature, hubris and a belief in the transcendent can shape and has shaped institutional formation. The possibility of there being a higher authority and justice to which we are accountable does not ignore the significant differences between contemporary times, the Greeks, the Romans, or any other peoples for that matter but it does suggest the different ways such appeals have been made operational. This dissertation posits that the circumstances in which people find themselves are not completely unique since history does not merely deal with change.

The decision to choose Thucydides and Polybius as the ancient authors upon which this dissertation's revival of realism is partly based on the relative familiarity of the international relations literature with these authors, particularly Thucydides, as opposed to other ancient authors. Authors like Herodotus and Confucius could have been chosen to highlight the dangers of hubris on political order. Besides the relative unfamiliarity of Herodotus and Confucius in the international relations literature, Thucydides and Polybius were also chosen for their explorations into the relationships between political action, the human condition and the role of the gods. Like Thucydides and Polybius, the writings of ancient authors like Herodotus and Confucius were a response to the times in which they lived as they attempted to grasp and respond to the struggles engulfing them.

However, it is Thucydides' and Polybius' observations and reflections on politics and inter-state behavior that distinguishes them from other ancient writers. Thucydides was exiled form Athens and Polybuis was a Roman capitive but that does not detract from the challenging insights they present concerning the relationship between political order and hubris. Even though both Thucydides and Polybius were members of the aristocracy, they both condemned aristocratic degeneration and the deficiencies of aristocratic rule as they also condemned the deficiency inherent in democratic and monarchical rule. Like all great writers, their reflections extend beyond their immediate political context. The observations made by Thucydides and Polybius regarding political relationships within and between states and the way in which these relationships are grounded in the human condition allow students of international relations to ponder questions of perennial importance. What form should a political order take, how are individuals and institutions to navigate between the extremes of ideological absolutism and the relativity of thought, and how can aggrandizement be moderated? These questions are as valid today as they were two thousand years ago. The ancient world which Thucydides and Polybius experienced differs from our modern one, particularly with regards to political-economic relations, but historical contexts are not separate or isolated compartments. Whether we are dealing with ancient Greeks or twenty-first century North Americans, there is a shared human condition that accounts for the persistence and continuity of political arrangements and patterns of behavior. Therefore, in spite of the historical specificity of Thucydides and Polybius which renders their *particular* policy suggestions and intimations somewhat

time-bound, it is their understanding of the human condition, hubris and the necessity of transcendent appeals that highlights the persistence of political structures and patterns of human conduct.

The writings of Thucydides and Polybius coincide with the dissertation's second primary argument which is to revise realism through an historical and material examination of fifth century Athenian and Roman Republican forms of state and empire. The abundance of historical scholarship devoted to Athens and Rome offers the opportunity to examine more fully fifth-century Athens and Republican Rome relative to other historical periods. This scholarship provides for challenging insights into what some historians consider to be the "world's first democracy" in Athens[3] and into the inclusive form of state known as the Roman Republic. Monarchical, centralized, re-distributive bureaucratic systems dominated by kings and a caste of priests have overwhelmingly defined political order throughout history but it was the ability of the Athenian and Roman peasant-citizen to participate politically that allows for the challenging insights from this period to more closely approximate the struggles that modern democracies face. The "ineluctable tension"[4] between moral norms and political action expressed in the texts of Thucydides and Polybius and later restated in Niebuhr and Morgenthau, serves to

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[3] Donald Kagan, *Pericles of Athens and the Birth of Democracy* (New York: Touchstone, 1991) 2.

[4] Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace,* 5th ed. (New York: Knopf, 1978) 10.

remind contemporary international relations theorists of the challenging dilemmas, no

matter what the degree of political inclusiveness, that persist without a final resolution.

A particular difficulty in acknowledging realism's intellectual debt to Thucydides

and Polybius arises from an unfamiliarity with the cultural context in which they wrote.

No interpretation or translation can return directly to the original meaning of a text since

it will be influenced by the subjective proclivities of the translator and reader which are

beyond the scope of this dissertation. An advantage that Thucydides' contemporaries had

was not that they knew Greek better or that they shared historical and cultural perspective,

but that they were able to discuss political life without the limitations of political science

or the limitations imposed by academic specialization.[5] Given the unfamiliarity of the

majority of readers with ancient Greek and Latin, the accessibility of the respective Rex

Warner and W.R. Paton translations of Thucydides and Polybius were chosen in this

dissertation to convey the linguistic systems of antiquity. Rex Warner's translation of

Thucydides' text into contemporary English was used in place of Thomas Hobbes'

seventeenth century older English language translation and Richard Crawly's nineteenth

century translation of Greek into Victorian English. Robert Strassler's recent update of

the Crawly translation, while contemporary, does not have the breadth of readership of

the Warner translation. Although Ian Scott-Kilvert's 1979 translation of Polybius'

writings as contained within "The Rise of the Roman Empire" is more attuned to

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[5] Clifford Orwin, *The Humanity of Thucydides* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) 12.

contemporary English usage. W.R Paton's translation from the 1920's was chosen since it is a complete translation of all of Polybius' existing work rather than a selection of particular passages. A true appropriation of the meaning intended by Thucydides and Polybius is not possible, even in the original Greek, but these complete and accessible translations provide the reader with the ability to contemplate why an understanding of the human condition is vital for the study of international relations.

The inclusion of scholarship from the fields of history, political philosophy and the classics joins the analyses of self-identified international relations theorists with the observations of a broader set of scholars whose reading of Thucydides and Polybius has affected their interpretation of more contemporary issues in world politics. The classicist W. Robert Conners' fascination with Thucydides began in the 1950's during the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States. The "immediate applicability" of the Peloponnesian War to the Cold War conveyed to Conner how "deeply the sufferings of war are rooted in human nature".[6] The political philosopher Leo Strauss also recognized the contemporary relevance of Thucydides asserting that "the crisis of the West" compels a turn towards classical antiquity in order to counter the threat posed by the belief in infinite progress.[7] A more recent call for a return to classical political philosophy made by the political theorists Thomas Pangle and Peter Ahrensdorf suggests

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[6] W. Robert Connor, *Thucydides* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984) 3,250.

[7] Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964) 1-12.

that "the crisis of our state-centered global civilization" posed by the universalizing

effects of technology and global markets on the one hand, and from the factionalism of

self-serving groups promoting parochial interests requires an understanding of ancient

texts to better understand our moral and spiritual limitations.[8] The classicist Donald

Kagan's interpretation of Polybius as offering "the most extreme" claim for the scientific

study of politics, while not directly related to contemporary concerns, nevertheless does

influence the reader's reaction to how Polybius' *Histories* are applicable to the study of

international relations.[9]

International relations scholars who have interpreted Thucydides' text and drawn

inspiration from the broad themes contained therein have included Kenneth Waltz,

Michael Doyle, Daniel Garst and Laurie Johnson Bagby. These authors directly confront

the relevancy of associating the realist perspective with Thucydides and, in the solitary

case of Robert Gilpin, the writings of Polybius. How international relations scholars

associate realism with Thucydides and Polybius influences the contemporary lessons that

are derived from studying history. Unfortunately, international relations theorists share a

tendency either to bypass Niebuhr's and Morgenthau's debt to Thucydides regarding the

resistance to power and the necessity of appealing to a transcendent truth or they simply

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[8] Thomas Pangle and Peter Ahrensdorf, *Justice Among Nations: On the Moral Basis of Power and Peace* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1999) 4.

[9] Donald Kagan, *The Great Dialogue: History of Greek Political Thought from Homer to Polybius* (New York: The Free Press, 1965) 259-60.

misrepresent the contributions of these critical realists. Michael Doyle's assertion that

Thucydides distinguishes intra-state from inter-state politics on the grounds that ethical or

legal standards do not sufficiently constrain the exercise of power in inter-state politics

overlooks the implication in Thucydides' text as to why such standards are necessary.[10]

Appealing to the idea of a transcendent truth, while not sufficient in constraining hubris,

was deemed necessary not only by Thucydides, but by Polybius as a means of moderating

human behavior irrespective of whether power is exercised in a domestic or international

context. Kenneth Waltz's *Theory of International Politics* criticizes Morgenthau's and

Niebuhr's "reductionist" approach to international relations and their suggestion that

changes in international outcomes are directly related to changes occurring within

individuals or states.[11] Waltz's earlier work, *Man, the State and War* recognized how the

human condition and political institutions must be accounted for when analyzing the

forces instigating changes in the relations between states but even in this work, the

emphasis on the "third image" and the claim that the placement of states within an

anarchically-structured international system determines state behavior narrowly limits his

reading of Thucydides and, by implication, Polybius.[12]

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[10] Michael Doyle. "Thucydidean Realism," *Review of International Studies* 16 (1990): 234.

[11] Kenneth N. Waltz. *Theory of International Politics* (New York: Random House, 1979) 60-79.

[12] Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959) 40, 127.

Some international relations scholars like Johnson-Bagby eschew a realist reading

of Thucydides altogether. Thucydides is read as having departed "from the realist position

in both outlook and methodology" and that a "close reading" disagrees with the emphases

and conclusions reached by classical realists.[13] However, instead of basing her argument

on a critique of the actual writings of realists like Niebuhr and Morgenthau, Johnson

Bagby bases her argument on Robert Keohane's arms-length definition of classical

realism which reduces it to a theory based on rational, power-maximizing states.[14] To

claim that Thucydides would have disagreed with the classical realist approach requires at

the very least that the writings of authors associated with this approach be studied first-

hand. Had the writings of Niebuhr and Morgenthau been considered, Johnson Bagby may

have found their theoretical vision capable of guiding practitioners to obtain a fuller

vision of international politics. Bypassing an analysis of Niebuhr and Morgenthau

altogether, Daniel Garst's thoughtful essay on "Thucydides and Neorealism" criticizes

neo-realists like Waltz for associating Thucydides with an approach to international

relations that mistakenly claims that decipherable, general laws of global anarchy shape

international relations.[15] While offering a convincing critique of neo-realism, the

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[13] Laurie M. Johnson Bagby, "The use and abuse of Thucydides in international relations," *International Organization* 38 (Winter 1994):132-33.

[14] Johnson Bagby, "The use and abuse of Thucydides" 132.

[15] Daniel Garst, "Thucydides and Neorealism," *International Studies Quarterly* 33 (March 1989): 3.

conspicuous absence of a classical realist understanding of power and hegemony questions the uniqueness of Garst's "alternative reading" of Thucydides in lieu of the insights offered by Niebuhr and Morgenthau.

In stark contrast to Thucydides, Polybius has been almost completely overlooked in the international relations literature. Robert Gilpin is alone among international relations scholars in acknowledging Polybius' insight into how a state's constitutional make-up critically determines its capacity to overcome environmental constraints and to take advantage of external opportunities.[16] Gilpin reads Polybius as endorsing the view that the *fundamental* cause of war among states resides in "the uneven growth of power among states".[17] However, for Polybius, as for Thucydides, the fundamental cause of war resides within human beings, limiting the ability of systemic or state-level explanations to effectively quantify, predict and control the variable and recurring traits associated with human decision-making. Polybius' text underscores the complexity of the human condition as it relates to theorizing about international politics through an exploration into how the unmoderated pursuit of power eventually implodes upon the perpetrator. Polybius, like Thucydides, recognized the necessity of appealing to a transcendent truth as a way of moderating hubris within and between individuals and collectives contrary to there being, in the words of Michael Clark, "a refusal to appeal to any level of

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[16] Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981) 101.

[17] Gilpin, *War and Change* 15.

abstraction".[18]

The Appeal to Transcendence

The concept of transcendence serves at least two purposes for theorizing in international relations. An appeal to a transcendent truth *will not* resolve the dilemmas plaguing the field nor free international relations from the discourses and dualisms that have shaped Western thought since the time of classical Greece.[19] An appeal to a transcendent truth *will* dismiss the idea that the whole of reality is self-fulfilling and self-explanatory. If human beings are *less likely* to succumb to the belief that they are the only and ultimate judges of their own actions, more moderate choices and policies can be implemented. Transcendence connotes that which is beyond the concepts of time and space, forming the sensibilities binding human experience.[20] Joseph Campbell's application of the idea of a collective unconscious to the study of mythology identifies transcendent appeals as a universal theme, functioning similarly in different parts of the world at different times.[21] These appeals derive from a common psychological source producing similar, but not identical, responses to political predicaments, reflecting the

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[18] Michael T. Clark, "Realism Ancient and Modern: Thucydides and International Relations," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 26 (September 1993): 492.

[19] R.B.J. Walker, "Realism, Change, and International Political Theory," *International Studies Quarterly* 19 (1987): 75, 83.

[20] Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth* (New York: Anchor Books-Double Day, 1988) 75.

[21] Campbell, *The Power of Myth* 61.

continuity of the human condition as expressed through common dreams, visions, myths and religious ideas.[22] However, the different ways in which transcendent appeals are expressed depends on environmental, historical, and cultural conditions along with the subjective proclivities of the actors involved. In the case of the political choices that were made by the Athenians at Melos and the Romans at Carthage, Thucydides' and Polybius' presentations of these episodes speak both to the differences of time and place and to the recurrence of hubris.

A realist invocation of a transcendent appeal is premised on deferring to the idea of a higher authority as a way of facilitating the prudence necessary to check self-righteousness of purpose. The religious connotations associated with this higher authority are evident in Thucydides, Polybius, Niehbuhr and Morgenthau as are the risks of approximating the spirit of moral universal law when individuals and states "blasphemously identify their mission with a divine purpose."[23] As Chapter Four's examination of Athens' promotion of Panhellinism and Rome's invocation of the 'just war' doctrine will attest, the appeal to the transcendent so as to make it politically effective is complicated by the fact that human beings can have different interpretations of justice and strive to satisfy different desires and aspirations which are often mutually exclusive. Since one can only hope to approximate justice which is true, good and right in

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[22] Carl Jung, *Conversations with Carl Jung and Reactions from Ernest Jones*, ed. Richard Evans (Toronto: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1964) 57.

[23] Hans Morgenthau, *The Purpose of American Politics* 7.

international relations. the spirit of contrition that is concomitant with an appeal to

universal moral principles precludes the adoption of a one size fits all blueprint given the

particular circumstances that comprise all political situations. Therefore, in an effort to

contain self-interest and hubris, realism's invocation of a transcendent appeal is more of a

philosophy and theoretically-informed perspective than a fully-formulated theory of

international relations.

The ancient Greeks believed that hubris, defined as the excessive enjoyment of

power and wealth, would lead to the overstepping of boundaries. The resulting moral

condemnation from engaging in intentionally dishonorable conduct had religious

connotations as it was generally believed that those individuals or communities guilty of

hubris would be duly punished for their godlessness and lawlessness.[24] Apollo's shrine at

Delphi reinforces these beliefs with divine warnings against hubris as captured in the

inscriptions to "know thyself" and to undertake "nothing in excess". The Delphic

admonition exposes the limitations of human reason but the religious connotations

associated with hubris strikes at the very heart of human motivation. Hubris offers an

explanation as to why political institutions must embody inequity and, in so doing, relates

the concept of transcendence to the institutional condition that defines the state.

Although the institution of the state has not been *the* universal form of political

organization assumed by all human societies at all times. it is highly unlikely (barring a

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[24] Jacqueline de Romilly, *The Rise and Fall of States According to Greek Authors* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1977) 19.

catastrophic population decline) that a political order without systemic social inequality

can be re-instituted. Up until approximately 3000 to 5000 BC, population growth and

territorial demarcation increased competition for areas of habitation effectively trapping

human beings "into particular social and territorial relationships, forcing them to intensify

those relationships rather than evade them."[25] Increasing population growth required more

extensive leadership to organize the production of foodstuffs which gradually eroded the

egalitarian foundations on which hunter-gatherer societies were based.[26] If chiefs and

elders attempted to convert their authority into coercive power by limiting access to the

resources which had been collectively entrusted to them, they would either be deposed or

have discontented members of the tribe leave to establish themselves elsewhere.[27] With

the pressures exerted by demography and "ecological caging", societal inequality came to

be institutionalized through the hierarchical ordering of status positions and the ability to

effectively restrict access to land.[28] However, such an explanation does not fully consider

why people went from egalitarian societies based on sharing to rank and stratified

societies capable of converting temporary political authority into permanent coercive

power. An explanation as to the impetus behind the establishment of rank, stratification

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[25] Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power: A History of Power from the Beginning to A.D. 1760* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986) 75.

[26] Morton Fried, *The Evolution of Political Society: An Essay in Political Anthropology* (New York: Random House, 1967) 183.

[27] Mann, *The Sources* 37,68.

[28] Fried, *The Evolution* 53.

and the culmination of the state as an institution possessing a permanent monopoly of

sanctioned violence is offered by cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker. Becker posits that

the divide between egalitarianism and inequality ultimately stems from the divide

between the

> mortal and immortal, between feeble human powers and special
> superhuman beings. Once things started off on this footing, it was only
> natural that class distinctions should continue to develop from this first
> impetus: those individuals who embodied supernatural powers, or could
> plug into them or otherwise use them when the occasion demanded, came
> to have the same ability to dominate others that was associated with the
> spirits themselves.[29]

Renewing realism's intellectual debt to Thucydides and Polybius acknowledges this

divide in terms of the impact that hubris has on political order and the limitations it places

on our ability to offer new political initiatives.

Michael Ignatieff's thoughtful response to the relationship between modern ethnic

warfare and moral obligation offers a contrasting view of the relationship between human

nature and political initiatives. He posits that even though the violence waged between

Croat and Serb or that between Tutsi and Huttu evokes the biblical account of Cain and

Abel where the passionate hatred between brothers surpasses the hatred between

strangers, there is nothing within human nature that makes ethnic or racial conflict

unavoidable.[30] New political initiatives are possible since the longstanding antipathies

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[29] Ernest Becker, *Escape from Evil* (New York: The Free Press, 1975) 43.

[30] Michael Ignatieff, *The Warrior's Honor* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1998) 46-48.

observed in ethnic war zones are regarded as institutional defects, expressions of fear

generated by "the collapse or absence of institutions that enable individuals to form civic

identities strong enough to counteract ethnic allegiances."[31] In other words, even with or

without state forms of political organization, there still exists the possibility that

aggression and violence may take on a different, more benign expression.

Contrary to Ignatieff's belief in the ability of individuals to create ordered states

based on communities of citizens bearing equal rights, Thucydides, Polybius, Niebuhr

and Morgenthau starkly expose the limitations inherent in humankind's ability to shape

the world as desired. Ignatieff's faith in the ability of institutions to cultivate collective

identities based on freedom and rationality must be tempered with a recognition of how

the cultivation of these identities can easily lapse into collective righteousness. By

distinguishing the classical realist insights of Niebuhr and Morgenthau from neo-realist

variants and by reading Thucydides and Polybius with a renewed eye towards the struggle

for and resistance to power, the challenge, then, is not in creating new or morally better

social and political institutions but the necessity of transcendent appeals as a way of

moderating hubris. Political practitioners applying the ancient insights of Thucydides and

Polybius through a classical approach to realism may be occasionally guilty of immoral

acts, but by recognizing that absolute resolution can only exist outside of the human

experience, realist practitioners can not be accused of endorsing immorality.

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[31] Ignatieff, *The Warrior's Honor* 7.

Revising Realism: The Political Economy of Resistance

Thucydides and Polybius did not intend to have their ideas apply to the field of international relations theory nor did Niebuhr and Morgenthau intend to have their reflections on the state augmented with an analysis of the material processes involved in the construction, perpetuation and overthrow of state formations. They were adept at recognizing how adversity and prosperity affect human behavior, but offer little in the way of linking material concerns with theoretical explanation. An empirical analysis of the ancient economy of Thucydides' and Polybius' time affirms how hubris, rather than market trade relations or class struggle, catalyzed political change. As a result, Marxism's recognition of class struggle as constituting the driving force behind institutional change in all forms of political organization, excluding egalitarian forms,[32] will not be adopted by this dissertation. Instead, Marxism's emphasis on how one group or individual is institutionally positioned to take advantage of others or prevent them from being taken advantage of will help explain how conflict shaped the more inclusive democratic and republican forms of state in Athens and Rome and how the struggle for power and the impetus to exploit was extended beyond the confines of Athens and Rome.

An analysis of the political and economic practices that constituted democratic rule in Athens and republican rule in Rome will also illustrate how state formation was integrated with imperial conquest and how conquest in turn shaped the expression of

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[32] Tom Bottomore, ed. *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, 2nd ed.(Oxford: Blackwell Publishers. 1991) 84-85.

political conflict within the state. Why Athens and not some other Greek city-state came

to dominate the Hellas and why the military success of the Republic ironically

contributed to its demise are questions that require international relations theorists to

extend the boundaries of international relations theory. David Boucher's assertion that

Athenian daring liberated Athens after the Persian War and that the love of the Athenian

citizenry for Athens distinguished it from other Greek city-states only goes so far in

addressing the success of the Athenians.[33] Empirical research is required to explain the

historical circumstances which shaped these collective Athenian traits since other

collectives no doubt considered themselves daring and in love with their respective

poleis. A comparison between democratic Athens' and republican Rome's forms of state

and empire will help to distinguish Athens' uniqueness as an expression of the historical

confluence between international environment, domestic processes, material

circumstances and the continuity of the human condition. Such a comparison will also

underscore how Athens' Panhellenic justification for empire and Rome's use of a "just

war" doctrine similarly express a self-serving moral justification for aggrandizement.

<u>Chapter Outline</u>

Chapter One differentiates the classical realism of Niebuhr and Morgenthau from

the neo-realism of Kenneth Waltz. Waltz's ahistorical application of systems theory will

be critiqued in order to renew classical realism's embrace of the normative insights

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[33] David Boucher, *Political Theories of International Relations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) 77-79.

arising from an exploration into the human condition. This exploration is extended into

Chapters Two and Three to more fully acknowledge Niebuhr's and Morgenthau's

intellectual debt to Thucydides and Polybius. The ancients' emphasis on the human

condition, their awareness of the corrupting effects of hubris on moral choice, and the

consequent necessity of appealing to a transcendent truth is shown as corresponding with

the attempts of Niebuhr and Morgenthau to replace self-love or selfishness with

moderation and self-control to approximate justice in human behavior. Chapter Four

revises classical realism through a political-economic analysis of the state to ascertain

how political choices have public repercussions beyond one's borders and how these

repercussions are conditioned by the internal and external environments of states. An

exploration into humanity's predilection for faction, augmented by environmental and

material specificities from ancient Athens and Rome will open up the international

relations field to unfamiliar interpretations and questions not previously considered.

Conflicts over land ownership, the strength of patronage relations and the ability of

popular assemblies to participate in the governing process will help explain the divergent

paths of state construction taken by Athens and Rome. A distinction between Rome's

penchant for territorial expansion and Athens' pursuit of naval hegemony will aid in

determining how their divergent state forms effected imperial strategy. While the

institutionalization of empire empowered poor Athenians and reinforced citizen

democracy, Rome's implementation of partial citizenship allowed the aristocracy to

maintain and extend its rule without making radical changes to the political structure of

the Republic.

CHAPTER 1

Renewing Classical Realism:

Conceptualizing the Human Condition and the State

It is not ignorance or misjudgement, that is, intellectual errors, against which the Greek tragedians and biblical prophets warn the powerful of the world but hubris and pride.

Hans Morgenthau[34]

Explorations into the human condition, hubris and the necessity of appealing to a transcendent truth as contained within the writings of Thucydides and Polybius are not limited to the ancient world, but cut across 2300 years to establish an affinity with the realist writings of Reinhold Niebuhr and Hans Morgenthau. Establishing this affinity brings the dilemma between power and morality back to the forefront of international relations theory, as well as the corresponding practical challenge involved in making prudent choices for which there are no perfect solutions. Polybius' insight into the options and limitations imposed by Fortune combined with Thucydides' suggestion of there being a divine dimension to human history resonate in the present, speaking to the issue of whether there exists, or needs to exist, the idea of an objective moral standard to guide policy choices in international relations. This very issue which appeared in the Melian Dialogue and in Polybius' account of Rome's destruction of Carthage would reappear in Morgenthau's response to E.H. Carr's *The Twenty Years' Crisis*.

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[34] Hans Morgenthau, "The Moral Dilemma of Political Action"in *Politics in the Twentieth Century*, 3 vols. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1962) I:326.

More than just a lust for power and glory, a renewal of Reinhold Niebuhr and Hans Morgenthau's the critical realism acknowledges how the imposition of authority and the resistance to that authority is integral for assessing the possibilities and limitations involved in institutional construction. Morgenthau's response to E.H. Carr's *The Twenty Years' Crisis* will remind contemporary international relations scholars that a belief in and deference to a higher authority can help moderate policy choices in international relations without succumbing to the argument that a supernatural force actually determines causality. Carr's misplaced faith in institutional progress as a way of achieving domestic and international peace will affirm why a classical realist understanding of international relations that embraces the human condition will be better enabled to explain how recurring conflictual processes rooted in the human condition find institutional expression. While Niebuhr and Morgenthau were adept at recognizing how adversity and prosperity affect human behavior, tendencies to personify the state and efforts to demarcate political processes from economic ones hampers realism's ability to accommodate the incorporation of normative insight with the effect material relations have on institutional construction. This ability has been further hampered by efforts within the realist school seeking to uncover scientific laws applicable to international relations.

Bringing the Human Condition back to Realism

Classical realist thought is customarily associated with two twentieth century texts: Hans Morgenthau's *Politics among Nations* and E.H Carr's *The Twenty Years'*

Crisis.[35] Binding these twentieth century realists to their ancient forebearers is a

skepticism regarding the human condition and the possibility of establishing a lasting

peace based on a just political order. For Morgenthau, political thought encompasses two

major claims.[36] The first claim defines international politics as a struggle for power while

the second asserts how politics is governed by *objective laws* which have their roots in

human nature. Like domestic and international relations, human nature is part of an

inherent struggle between one's love for humanity and the need to impose one's will

upon others.

> To improve the world one must work with those forces [inherent in human
> nature], not against them. This being inherently a world of opposing
> interests and of conflict among them, moral principles can never be fully
> realized, but at best be approximated through the ever temporary balancing
> of interests and the ever precarious settlement of conflicts.[37]

Human nature, then, is not necessarily good *or* evil but the expressed historical form that

our nature takes in terms of accentuating and abating some character traits over others

does change. The contradictions and tensions arising from the benign and malign

character traits that comprise our nature define our human condition, restricting our

efforts to make and re-make the world in an attempt to absolutely attain what is good.

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[35] E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis 1919-1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations,* 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1956); Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations.*

[36] Ulrik Enemark Peterson, "Breathing Nietzsche's Air: New Reflections on Morgenthau's Concepts of Power and Human Nature," *Alternatives* 24 (1999): 93.

[37] Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations* 3.

Carr's "dual character" conception of the human condition corresponds to Morgenthau's

emphasis on politics as struggle conflict given that "coercion and conscience, enmity and

good-will, self-assertion and self-subordination, are present in every political society."[38]

The preceding quotations form the ontological heart of classical realism to reveal

how tension and conflict are part of our nature and endemic to the human condition. Ulrik

Peterson's insightful reading of Morgenthau's conception of power and human nature

paves the way for a more reflective understanding of human beings not necessarily

defined by biological imperative. Morgenthau's conception of human nature is a

metaphysical principle which moves beyond motives or desires.[39] Human beings are to be

understood as finite beings who are incapable of grasping the totality of their existence

and their relationship to the world, a relationship premised on the consciousness of death.

Yet, humankind persists in its aspirations to rise above nature and natural desires. Instead

of recognizing human fallibility and incompleteness as ultimately deriving from human

mortality, humankind's overriding faith in its ability to master the knowledge required to

resolve the uncertainties that confront empirical existence has led to the death of God. In

Petersen's words,

> The death of God signifies the death of the belief in the possibility of
> postulating the existence of a harmonious or monistic ontology, and thus
> denies modern thought access to the metaphysical resource it has relied
> upon, consciously or unconsciously, to successfully negotiate the

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[38] Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis* 96.

[39] Petersen, "Breathing Nietzsche's Air" 99.

dilemmas and uncertainties of man's empirical existence. It throws into doubt the very possibility of truth, identity, and meaning by uprooting them from their foundation.[40]

The belief that the source of truth resides within humankind so radically stresses the subjective basis of how we view our position in the world and cosmos, that the consequent 'existential loneliness' comes to define human political behavior. "In that existential loneliness man's insufficiency manifests itself. He cannot fulfill himself, he cannot become what he is destined to be, by his own effort, in isolation from other beings. The awareness of that insufficiency drives him on in the search for love and power."[41]

Morgenthau points to political masters like Alexander the Great who sought to compensate for the love they could not attain with an ever greater accumulation of power.[42] A search that transcends all historic configurations and what Morgenthau deems to be the modern mind's inability to see the connection between love and power. This inability also extends to the way in which realism's conception of human nature has been misunderstood by international relations theorists [43] even with Reinhold Niebuhr's assertion that the exclusively secular discourse within Western political science has left

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[40] Petersen, "Breathing Nietzsche's Air" 89.

[41] Hans Morgenthau, "Love and Power" in *Politics in the Twentieth Century*, III: 8.

[42] Morgenthau, "Love and Power" 12.

[43] As such, realism should not be simply misrepresented as entailing a "lust for power and glory." Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of it: the Social Construction of Power Politics." *International Organization* 46 (Spring 1992): 408; Michael Doyle, *Empires* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986) 225; Justin Rosenberg, *The Empire of Civil Society* (London: Verso, 1994) 23 .

the modern mind unaware of the fact that loneliness is at the root of the lust for power.[44]

The intractability and universality of original sin defines the limitations of human reason

and virtue for Niebuhr with Christianity providing an awareness of the sense of humility

and toleration that derives from the inability to know God's law.[45] However, one does not

have to subscribe to Niebuhr's particular faith in Christianity's understanding of the

universality of human sin to recognize realism's attempt to foster a disposition that

recognizes inherent human limitations and the dangerous illusion that the world can be

made and re-made to attain institutional perfection. Whether these limitations are based

on original sin or an existential loneliness does not detract from realism's understanding

of politics as a struggle for power, a struggle that recognizes the moral ambiguities

involved in politics from the perspective of those imposing and those resisting the

enforcement of political order.

> The relations between groups must therefore always be predominantly
> political rather than ethical, that is, they will be determined by the
> proportion of power which each group possesses at least as much by any
> rational and moral appraisal of the comparative needs and claims of each
> group.[46]

The realist approach to international relations has also been erroneously

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[44] Reinhold Niebuhr, "Intellectual Autobiography," in *Reinhold Niebuhr, His Religious, Social, and Political Thought,* ed. Charles Kegley (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1984) 6.

[45] Mark L. Hass, "Reinhold Niebuhr's 'Christian pragmatism': A principled alternative to consequentialism," *The Review of Politics* 34 (1999): 73.

[46] Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932) xxiii.

considered as a natural home for those disposed towards a conservative ideology[47] even

though the roots of realism are essentially critical. As defined by Niebuhr, realism

denotes a "disposition to take into account all factors in a social and political situation

which offer resistance to established norms, particularly the factor of self-interest and

power."[48] The struggle for power is at the heart of political life, both domestic and

international, and in order to understand politics, international relations scholars must

recognize how power and the resistance to that power lie beneath all institutions and

structures.[49] In the words of Morgenthau,

> A political science that is true to its moral commitment ought at the very
> least be an unpopular undertaking. At its very best it cannot help being a
> subversive revolutionary force with regard to certain vested interests -
> intellectual, political, economic, social in general. For it must sit in
> continuous judgement upon political man and political society, measuring
> their truth, which is in good part a social convention, by its own. By so
> doing, it is not only an embarrassment to society intellectually, but it
> becomes a political threat to the defenders or opponents of the status quo
> or to both: for the social conventions about power, which political science
> cannot help subjecting to a critical -and often destructive examination, are
> one of the main sources from which claims to power, and hence power
> itself derives.[50]

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[47] Barry Buzan, "The Timeless Wisdom of Realism?" in *International Theory: Positivism and beyond,* ed. Steve Smith, Ken Booth and Maryisa Zalewski. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 55.

[48] Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Relevance of Christian Realism: An Orientation" in *Reinhold Niebuhr on Politics,* ed. Harry R. Davis and Robert C. Good. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960) 64.

[49] Niebuhr, "Groups in the Struggle for Power" in *Reinhold Niebuhr on Politics* 92.

[50] Hans Morgenthau, *Dilemmas of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958) 29-30. Critical realism's call for active intervention to challenge vested interests is at

The dilemma faced in adopting a realist disposition can be articulated through George Grant's corresponding understanding of the philosopher's task which does not solely lie in explaining how the contradictions and complexities of the world can be temporarily placated. The task is in simultaneously recognizing that the historical world in which one lives is not of one's making but that humankind is free in its attempt to build institutions capable of addressing the evils of the world. The dilemma for the philosopher and realism alike lies in reconciling these assertions.[51] Consequently, the critical realism of Niebuhr and Morgenthau aims to resist the imposed altruism of individuals, groups, and states who define norms such as peace in absolute terms, but it also strives to attain a measure of justice in political action. The core of realist international relations endeavors to understand how issues of power and domination inundate all human relationships despite ever-changing historical environments.

Realism and Hubris

Niebuhr considered injustice to be the social consequence of pride[52] with Morgenthau also invoking the warnings of Greek tragedians and Biblical prophets to

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odds with Polybius' preference for aristocratic rule but not with the primary role assigned by both Thucydides and Polybius to human agency and moral choice.

[51] William Christian, *George Grant: A Biography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993) 190.

[52] Niebuhr, "Structures of Power" in *Reinhold Niebuhr on Politics* 119.

reiterate the dangers accruing from hubris and pride.[53] Power manifests itself through the

domination and coercion of others but history teaches us that such power inevitably

corrupts, enslaves and destroys the possessor of power. That power corrupts may appear

to be a trite observation but it speaks to the enduring importance of how the exercise and

preservation of power hinges on the moral choices made by individuals and their

communities. The dangers associated with wealth and power are not limited to inter-state

or even intra-state relations but rooted in the "internal" dangers that arise from the

corruption of both body and soul. Morgenthau attributed this danger to human finiteness.

> Man is born to seek power. Yet his actual condition makes him a slave to
> the power of others. Man is born a slave, but everywhere he wants to be a
> master. Out of this discord between man's desire and his actual condition
> arises the moral issue of power.[54]

Echoing Morgenthau on humankind's inability to transcend the actual condition of

finiteness, Niebuhr considered human ambitions to be limitless but practically

unobtainable in light of human mortality. For Niebuhr, "Man is tempted, in other words,

to break and transcend the limits which God has set for him. The temptation thus lies in

his situation of finiteness and freedom."[55]

The relevance of invoking the human condition for the study of international

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[53] Morgenthau, "The Moral Dilemma of Political Action" in *Politics in the Twentieth Century, I:* 326.

[54] Hans Morgenthau. *Scientific Man versus Power Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946) 68-169.

[55] Niebuhr, "Human Nature and the Will-To-Power" in *Reinhold Niebuhr on Politics* 74.

relations is that in order to grapple with the question of what motivates the drive for

domination, expansion and hegemony, one must come to terms with the idea that human

character traits are not primarily determined by the social and material conditions of life,

thereby restraining the extent to which human behavior can be changed. Even if a

classless society were possible, aggressive and competitive drives would not give way to

social ones since these drives are in themselves an expression of the finitude inherent in

our very being.[56] Nevertheless, skepticism should not lapse into cynicism with special

care being taken to ensure that the expression of malign behaviourial traits not be

regarded as normative.[57] Corruption is inevitable but simply to accept such inevitability is

self-fulfilling. To curtail cynicism and yet emphasize the dangers of hubris, both Niebuhr

and Morgenthau suggest how a tempered belief in a transcendent truth that eschews self-

righteousness can serve to moderate violent behavior.

Realism's Appeal to the Transcendent

Invoking hubris and a concomitant belief in the idea of a transcendent truth for the

modern study of international relations is substantiated in Morgenthau's response to *The

Twenty Years' Crisis*. Since theories of social morality are always the result of a dominant

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[56] It can be argued that the origins of inequality begin with the realization of human mortality relative to divine immortality. As a result, class distinctions are not confined to the material or even the political world since inequality also involves the much neglected consideration of the spiritual dimension. Ernest Becker, *Escape from Evil* (New York: The Free Press, 1975) 43.

[57] Niebuhr, "Augustine's Political Realism" in *Christian Realism and Political Problem* 123-24.

group which identifies its interests with those of a community at large, Carr argued that

theories of international morality "*are always*" the product of dominant groups or

states.[58] Morgenthau's difficulty with such a position is that it essentially amounts to a

radical scepticism that contextualizes every point of view to deny any standard of truth

other than that of power.[59] To avoid the disconcerting realization that morality is an

arbitrary construct with no political objective remaining beyond the pursuit of power

itself, Carr believed in the ability of human reason to initiate change as a progressive

factor in human history.[60] The problem with Carr's faith in the expanding power of reason

is that he fails to consider how progress can also advance and enhance the negative traits

that comprise the human character. Although Carr had become mired in relativism, he

searched for meaning within history believing in the "progressive development of human

potentialities" never losing faith in Stalinist Russia or the planned economy as embodying

human progress.[61] Instead of emphasizing the costs of the human suffering involved,

Carr's *History of Soviet Russia* reflects his belief that the apparent failures of Soviet

Russia could actually be a part of the greater achievements that would come to fruition in

the future. Carr was steadfast when he asserted that the political, social and economic

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[58] Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis* 79.

[59] Morgenthau considered Carr's position as being unable to appraise the phenomenon of power given the absence of a transcendent point of view. Hans Morgenthau, "The Political Science of E.H. Carr," *World Politics* I (1948): 134.

[60] E.H. Carr, *What is History?* (New York: Penguin Books, 1964) 164.

[61] Carr, *What is History?* 119,129.

institutions stemming from the October Revolution represented "a striking advance towards the realization of the economic program of socialism".[62] Regrettably, Carr turned a blind eye to the terrors, the exterminations and the Gulags by ignoring how both the ideational and material understandings of history are essentially rooted in a human condition comprised of malign and benign traits. Therefore to have faith in the ability of history to make progressively better choices is to have faith in an inadequate god.[63]

It is primarily because of the failure of institutions to eliminate or prevent the malign within the human condition from surfacing that Morgenthau believed that history could not eliminate humankind's quest to dominate since "there is no escape from the evil of power regardless of what one does."[64] Given this statement, one would expect him to adopt the relativist position for which he criticizes Carr. But even though Morgenthau argues that there are no standards of justice and equality concrete enough to have universal meaning, he steadfastly maintains that a belief in the idea of states being subject to universal moral principles is imperative. "I have always maintained that the actions of states are subject to universal moral principles, and I have been careful to differentiate my position in this respect from that of Hobbes."[65] Like Carr and Hobbes, Morgenthau

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[62] E.H. Carr, "Interview. The Russian Revolution and the West," *New Left Review* 111 (September 1978): 26.

[63] Niebuhr, "The Soft Utopians: Liberalism" in *Reinhold Niebuhr on Politics* 21.

[64] Morgenthau, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics* 201.

[65] Morgenthau, "The Problem of National Interest" in *Politics in the Twentieth Century, I:* 106.

believed that moral principles are only applicable to concrete situations dependent upon

the content they are given by society.[66] Unlike Carr, he did not endorse a position where

the competing moral claims of various societies would "meet under an empty sky from

which the gods have departed."[67]

Invoking the use of moral judgement to protect himself from the relativism he saw

in Carr could be interpreted as rendering judgement post hoc, with Morgenthau

essentially treating his otherworldly conception of morality as irrelevant to practical

problems of policy.[68] Yet despite these criticisms, the merit in Morgenthau's call for a

belief in an unknowable standard of justice and truth is that it inclines political

practitioners to at least defer to an authority outside of themselves in order to avoid the

self-righteousness of purpose. Niebuhr's reading of Augustine concurs with this call

suggesting that the leavening influence provided by a higher loyalty serves to help correct

self-interested myopia.

> That is, unless some larger love or loyalty qualifies the self-interest of the
> various groups, this collective self-interest will expose the community to
> either an overt conflict of competing groups or to the injustice of a
> dominant group which 'when it is victorious it will become vice's slave'.[69]

Morgenthau believed that states were subject to a transcendent moral law but to pretend

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[66] Morgenthau, "The Primacy of the National Interest," *American Scholar* 18 (1949): 211.

[67] Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations* 196.

[68] Michael Joseph Smith, *Realist Thought from Weber to Kissinger* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 1986) 146.

[69] Niebuhr, "Augustine's Political Realism" 128-29.

to know what is morally required of states in any given situation was quite another matter for him.[70] Instead, what is required is that political action rest on achieving the lesser evil rather than the absolute good,[71] forcing international relations practitioners to ultimately question the moral choices they have made.

Fostering a realist disposition able to avoid the self-righteousness of purpose on the basis of a transcendent appeal begs the questions of just what is being appealed to and how such an appeal can be made politically feasible in a world that has embraced "a profound and neglected truth hidden in Hobbes' extreme dictum that the state creates morality as well as law and that there is neither morality nor law outside the state."[72] In response to the first question and despite the truthfulness in Hobbes' dictum, Morgenthau held that individuals and states were nevertheless subject to universal moral principles. Morgenthau was not a moral relativist given his insistence on the existence of universal moral laws. The closest Morgenthau comes to actually defining an "absolute moral principle, which must be obeyed regardless of considerations of national advantage"concerns genocide.[73] Given an absolute law against the "mass extermination" of humans, limitations are to be placed on political conduct to moderate individual and

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[70] Morgenthau, "The Primacy of the National Interest" 106.

[71]Morgenthau, "The Primacy of the National Interest" 80.

[72] Hans Morgenthau, *In Defense of the National Interest: A Critical Examination of American Foreign Policy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951) 34.

[73] Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations* 240.

institutional behavior. In terms of practical application, an inability to fully comprehend

or practically apply a conception of justice applicable to all situations does not negate its

possible existence. The inability to determine which principles take precedence or which

rules are valid in a given circumstance should not detract from the reason for making a

transcendent appeal in the first place, an appeal that both Niebuhr and Morgenthau

thought should be premised on love.

> Perfect love is sacrificial love, making no careful calculations between the
> interests between the interests of the self and the other. Perfect justice is
> discriminate and calculating, carefully measuring the limits of interests
> and the relation between the interests of the self and other. The spirit of
> justice is particularly well served if reason finds the points of coincidence
> between the interests of the self and those of the other, or if not, if it makes
> careful and discriminate judgements between them.[74]

Love serves to mitigate the self-righteousness inevitably present in political conflict and it

is through love that humankind seeks to form a union. Perfect justice would embody

such a union but, as Morgenthau reminds us, if "love is reunion through spontaneous

mutuality, power seeks to create a union through unilateral imposition."[75]

Conceptualizing the State

As a theoretical approach, the realism of Niebuhr and Morgenthau recognizes how

war and exploitation have been prevalent throughout recorded history. Regardless of the

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[74] Niebuhr, "The Relevance of the Love Ethic to Politics" in *Reinhold Niebuhr on Politics* 157.

[75] Hans Morgenthau, "Love and Power" in *Politics in the Twentieth Century*, abridged ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1972) *190*.

form of state constructed. realism holds that the tension between coercion and conscience will be present in all political societies.[76] This does not mean that realism endeavors to impose order through a conservative political agenda, only that the characteristics that comprise the human condition cannot be ignored when constructing political and economic institutions. Carr's realism recognizes the opposing tendencies of domination and resistance comprising the human condition but his focus on progressive institutional development overlooked the malign characteristics that would eventually culminate in Stalinist rule. Whether the aim is to understand international or domestic political phenomena, explanations should not be limited to concerns regarding political institutions and processes. The way in which human characteristics translate into social action depends on the relative strength of human drives which depend, in turn, on the social, political and economic institutions which may favor one drive and suppress others.[77] The reciprocal relationship between the constructive and destructive tendencies arising from the human condition and the institution of political order is defined by human nature. The malign and benign traits that comprise our nature existed prior to our ability to interpret just what this nature consists of. This is not to say that human nature, hubris and the idea of transcendence are not socially constructed. As non-physical terms they are infused with

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[76] Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis* 96.

[77] Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations* 36. The degree to which the aim of politics degrades persons as a means of demonstrating one's power is the degree to which politics is "evil". Morgenthau, *Scientific Man* 195.

inter-subjective meanings, perpetuating habits and expectations about behavior that result

from actively engaging in the interpretation and construction of reality.[78] However, people

can not make or re-make the world as they please. Placing too much faith in the role that

shared ideas and norms have in shaping political behavior inevitably questions the

reasons for the prevalence of violence throughout history when institutions and rules

could have already been created to establish a more benign world. The institution of the

state provides a prescient example of how competing ideational and material interests

continuously vie to establish a prevailing order.

To conceptualize the state is to recognize that social cooperation requires a

measure of coercion. This speaks to the inability of humans to transcend their own

immediate interests relative to the interests of their community as a whole. The larger the

community, the more force becomes a prerequisite for social cohesion. By asking the

question of order for whom, Niebuhr and Morgenthau alert students of international

relations to the tragic realization that moral and social advances are incapable of subduing

the conflicting interests and forces arising out of human life.[79] Peace, defined as the

cessation of overt hostilities, begs the question of peace for whom since the

implementation of peace within and between states inevitably involves choices that

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[78] John Gerard Ruggie, "What Makes the World Hang Together? Neo-utilitarianism and the Social Constructivist Challenge," *International Organization* 52 no.4 (1998): 876.

[79] Niebuhr. "Structures of Power"105, 119.

include self-interest and power.[80] Niebuhr astutely captures the essence of political rule

and human behavior through the following assertion.

> At first they create a social peace and a modicum of justice by their power.
> Then they disturb social peace and destroy justice by the exactions of their
> power. They involve society in internal strife by demanding exorbitant
> rewards for the service they render; also they involve it in internal strife by
> using their control of their fellow men for the satisfaction of their imperial
> ambitions beyond their own social system. Thus injustice is the social
> consequence of pride; and the inevitable fruit of injustice is self-
> destruction.[81]

Changing social circumstances are integrally linked with the constitutional form taken by

a particular state, involving variations in the way power is expressed. In recognizing how

power constitutes the state and the external environment in which the state operates, the

"cloak of public respectability" surrounding the state and international institutions can be

stripped away in an attempt to understand and explain how power inundates all human

relationships.[82]

Despite recognizing how the contest of power underpins all institutional

structures, Niebuhr openly supported the democratic process. "Man's capacity for justice

makes democracy possible; but his inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary".[83]

Democracy or any other form of state cannot prevent war or tyranny but governments do

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[80] Niebuhr, "Augustine's Political Realism" 123.

[81] Niebuhr. "Structures of Power" 119.

[82] Robert Cox, "Multilateralism and World Order, " *Review of International Studies* 18
(1992): 176.

[83] Niebuhr, *Children of Light and Children of Darkness* xi.

have the capacity to divert the conflicting and competing forces within a state. The

healthy state for Niebuhr was one where people went beyond their natural inclinations to

establish higher standards of justice. These standards, which are derived in part from

majority ascent, also include an element of resistance against the "immediate

inclinations" of the people charged with implementing them.[84] As a result, democratic

forms of state are capable of promoting more inclusive rule but like all forms of state,

order must be enforced to the detriment of freedom. "[S]ocial peace and order are

established by a dominant group within some level of community; and that this group is

not exempt from the corruption of self-interest merely because the peace of society has

been entrusted to it."[85]

Realism's skepticism regarding the evolutionary possibility of a democratic peace

is surmised in Morgenthau's definition of the state as "but another name for the

compulsory organization of society -for the legal order that determines the conditions

under which society may employ its monopoly of organized violence for the preservation

of peace and order."[86] Where Morgenthau and Niebuhr differ significantly with regards to

international relations is on the possibility of establishing a world state. Niebuhr

dismisses the attainment of a world state as an illusion asserting that those forces which

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[84] Niebuhr, "Structures of Power" 107,110.

[85] Niebuhr, "Augustine's Political Realism" 121-22.

[86] Morgenthau, Politics Among Nations 497.

bind the state domestically are particularly divisive internationally.[87] Humans may share a

common ability to reason but, as Niebuhr quotes Augustine, "dumb animals" of different

species are able to communicate more easily than persons from different linguistic and

cultural traditions.[88] Niebuhr is not suggesting that the idea of a world state premised on

democratic principles should not be aspired to but that the dangers involved in

establishing and enforcing a world state should be heeded lest tyranny arise. Morgenthau

is aware of this danger but argues that a world state capable of instilling a permanent

peace is required in order to prevent the nuclear annihilation of the planet.[89] However, to

construct a world community through the "mitigation and minimization" of international

conflict, diplomacy with recourse to the means of violence may be required to establish

objectives like a supranational atomic agency.[90] The danger in constructing a world state

from the foundations of a world community is to recall Niebuhr's warning and

Morgenthau's own trepidations concerning the exercise of political power. Just as Carr's

faith in the historical progression towards socialism led him to overlook the tyranny of

Stalinist Russia, Morgenthau's fear of the imminent possibility of nuclear annihilation

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[87] Niebuhr, "The Resources of International Community" in *Reinhold Niebuhr on Politics* 246-53.

[88] Niebuhr, "Augustine's Political Realism" 119.

[89] Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations* 503.

[90] As pointed out by Thomas Pangle and Peter Ahrensdorf, *Justice Among Nations: On the Moral Basis of Power and Peace* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1999) 236.

clouds his faith in the ability of a world state to approximate a just political order relative

to a tyrannical one. Aside from the obvious question of how the multitude of moral and

cultural identities would coalesce within a world state, Morgenthau's hope that "men of

goodwill" be involved in the construction of a world state also requires that these men

possess the means of violence to repress "men of ill will".[91] A tenuous distinction indeed

if humankind can understand society no more than human beings can understand

themselves.[92]

Revising Classical Realism

Although the link between the human condition and political institutions forms

the ontological basis for realism, Niebuhr's philosophical queries and Morgenthau's

personification of the state do not provide viable bases upon which to anchor a realist

research project seeking to link the human condition with political order and institutional

change. Niebuhr's understanding of the state is problematic given his pointed

philosophical focus on the issues surrounding questions of legitimacy, authority, prestige

and justice.[93] He was adept at recognizing how forms of state rested on the inter-

relationships between social hierarchy, property, and political institutions but he did not

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[91] Pangle and Ahrensdor 236.

[92] Morgenthau, "The Intellectual and Moral Dilemma of Politics" in "Politics in the Twentieth Century, I: 7.

[93] Niebuhr, "The Organization of Power and the Peril of Tyranny" in Reinhold Niebuhr on Politics 8-14.

offer an analysis of how shifts in the locus of power affected the relationships within and

between states. Morgenthau was also aware of how social power constituted the state but

he emphasized how the actions of leading state persons and diplomats exert a decisive

influence in projecting national power. As a result, the state is personified through the

actions of its leaders.

> For a nation pursues foreign policies as a legal organization called a state,
> whose agents act as the representatives of the nation in international
> affairs. They speak for it, negotiate treaties in its name, define its
> objectives, choose the means for achieving them, and try to maintain,
> increase, and demonstrate its power.....It is to them that we refer when we
> speak in empirical terms of the power and of the foreign policy of a
> nation.[94]

Leaders are assumed to be the agents through which national power is projected onto the

international stage, acting as intermediaries between the ordered domestic societies they

represent and the turbulent international environment they must navigate. Morgenthau

claims that by listening in on the conversations which leaders have with other leaders and

by looking over their shoulders when corresponding, international relations scholars can

"retrace and anticipate" how the thoughts and actions of a leader affect state policy.[95]

Personifying the state through the actions of leaders like Pericles, Charlemagne,

Metternich and Slobodan Milosovic exaggerates their roles as agents responsible for the

success or failure of state policy. Leaders do harness the material and political resources

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[94] Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations* 108.

[95] Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations* 5.

from domestic society by proxy through the various state agencies they may head, but an analysis of how these resources are mobilized in light of competing domestic and international interests is noticeably absent. Not only is classical realism's capacity to understand the state circumscribed by state personification but by neglecting the economy and material processes, realism is hampered in its ability to provide an empirical analysis of the conflictual relations that underpin state construction.

The inapplicability of state personification as an explanation for interstate behavior is mirrored by the separation of the "political" from the "economic". Political-military competition between states and their respective leaders is stressed by both Carr and Morgenthau but the autonomy of the political and the limitations which this autonomy imposes on understanding historical change is most explicit in Morgenthau, who clearly argues for the separation of the political from the economic by asserting that the political realist should maintain the autonomy of the political just as an economist maintains the autonomy of the economy. This permits Morgenthau to distinguish between political and nonpolitical facts in the interest of bringing systematic order to the international sphere.[96]

Carr's analysis of the period between the First and Second World Wars alternately suggests a political economy approach that could further realism's ability to conceptualize change. Notwithstanding Carr's moral relativism and teleological faith in

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[96] Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations* 5.

historical progress, Carr rightly argues in *The Twenty Years' Crisis* that the nineteenth-

century *laissez-faire* harmony of interests of doctrine was based on an illusion. The

separation between the economic and the political as independent scientific domains of

study and manipulation "ceased to correspond to any aspect of current reality" leading

Carr to support an approach to the study of international relations advocating the

convergence between military and economic power.[97] Even though Carr challenges the

separation of the economic from the political, Carr's position is similar to Morgenthau's

in that he neglects to explain how an economy can generate political repercussions not

necessarily reducible to the agency of the state or its representatives. Carr emphasizes

how the victorious powers anachronistically clung to the ideology that every nation had

an interest in "peace" and that any attempt to disrupt this peace was irrational and

immoral. Although the supposed universal interest in peace was anything but universal

because it pitted the interests of the "have" status quo powers against the "have not"

revisionist powers, one would have expected Carr to explain how economic interests

were instrumental in imposing the inter-war peace. Instead, he focuses his attention on

international law, military power and morality. An examination of the interrelationships

between the international gold standard, world trade and international finance on the one

hand, and the "universal peace interest" preached by the status quo powers on the other

could not only have added to a political economic understanding of the crisis but could

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[97] Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis* 117.

also have provided international relations theory with an example of a political economic

application of realist theory.

Overcoming the Objective Laws of Politics

The result of Morgenthau's theoretical and Carr's practical separation of the

political from the economic combined with Niebuhr's emphasis on political and moral

philosophy relative to material processes produces a similar outcome with regards to

studying causality in international relations: a conception of the state separated from the

conflictual appropriation and distribution of resources underpinning its form. To the

detriment of pursuing an historical analysis further, the neo-realist variant of realism takes

the separation of the political from the economic one step further by firmly grounding its

approach on the supposed timeless laws of international politics. Rather than explaining

international relations theory as encompassing both politics and economics, the neo-

realism of Kenneth Waltz extends Morgenthau's separation of the political from the

economic by proposing a singularly political explanation of international relations. To

facilitate this separation, Waltz also challenges the normative foundations of classical

realism. In his *Theory of International Politics* he set out to do what he thought classical

realism had failed to do: establish a scientific basis upon which international relations

theorizing could be tested. Waltz faulted classical realists like Morgenthau for turning to

history and being more concerned with policy than with theory and scientific methods.[98]

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[98] Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* 63.

Kenneth Waltz's *Theory of International Politics* criticizes Morgenthau's and

Niebuhr's "reductionist" approach to international relations and their suggestion that

changes in international outcomes are directly related to changes occurring within

individuals or states.[99] Waltz's earlier work, "Man, the State and War" recognized how

the human condition and political institutions must be accounted for when analyzing the

forces instigating changes in the relations between states. However, instead of revising

realism's conception of the state to better understand how it shapes the conflicts that

affect interstate relations, Waltz's emphasis on the "third image" and the claim that the

placement of states within an anarchically-structured international system determines

state behavior directly challenges the theoretical relevance classical realism attaches to

the human condition and the necessity of invoking transcendent appeals for moderating

interstate relations.[100]

Morgenthau and Niebuhr both invoked the idea of an enduring international

reality but they did not believe that this enduring reality could be deciphered either

through deductive theorizing or by applying economic methodology to the study of

international relations. Hans Morgenthau has served as a model for scholars applying

methodological positivism to the study of international relations. If *Politics Among*

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[99] Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: Random House, 1979) 60-79.

[100] Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959) 40, 127.

Nations is considered in isolation from Morgenthau's writings as a whole, then scholars

may be led to associate his ideas with a willingness to construct a rational theory based on

the "objective laws of politics".[101] Yet *Scientific Man vs Power Politics* contests attempts

to apply scientific principles found in the natural sciences to politics especially since

these objective laws can be only imperfectly understood. Politics is more of an art than a

science, a portrait more than a photograph as it requires the wisdom and moral strength of

a statesperson rather than the rationality of an engineer.[102] Kenneth Thompson correctly

argues that the idea of recurrence in history cannot be studied scientifically no matter how

objective the laws since historical analogy involves an infinite variety of causal

sequences.[103] Nevertheless, Waltz posits that the deductive application of micro-economic

theory to the study of international relations theory can reveal the enduring character of

the systemic anarchy such that "the texture of international politics remains highly

constant, patterns recur, and events repeat themselves endlessly."[104] States are likened to

firms operating in a market where behavior is constrained through reward or punishment.

Like firms, states are defined in terms of their placement within a system's structure

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[101] Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations* 4-5.

[102] Morgenthau, *Scientific Man* 10.

[103] Kenneth Thompson, "The Political Philosophy of Reinhold Niebuhr," in *Reinhold Niebuhr: His Religious, Social, and Political Thought*, 227.

[104] Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* 66.

rather than in terms of their differing internal qualities.[105] The international system is spontaneously generated through the "self-regarding coaction" of states who are singularly motivated by a desire to survive as independent entities. In this anarchic system of competition between functionally-similar sovereign states, states are distinguished from one another by the relative distribution of capabilities between them regardless of their political constitutions. External structure rather than internal composition matters for Waltz to the extent that the "enduring anarchic character of international politics accounts for the striking sameness in the quality of international life through the millennia."[106]

Waltz cautions against placing too great an emphasis on attributing the primary causes of conflict to the human condition since a focus on the individual does not provide researchers with the ability to construct generalizable hypotheses capable of generating specific assumptions required for the construction of theory.[107] Still, he recognized the importance of coming to grips with the human condition as being "useful in descrying the limits of possible political accomplishment"[108] which is in contrast to a more recent expression of scientific realism by Ashley Tellis who takes issue with the inductive

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[105] Waltz. *Theory of International Politics* 72.

[106] Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* 66.

[107] Whether humans are basically malicious or benign can be neither proved or disproved since our species has a predilection to murder, rape and thieve as well as to love, be altruistic and charitable. Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959) 27.

[108] Waltz, *Man, the State and War* 31.

insights of Niebuhr and Morgenthau.

> Their reliance on induction for the purposes of justifying their insights,
> however, remains problematic. and their failure to order their causal
> explanations in systemic. deductive form deprives them of the possibility
> of demonstrating that their conclusions hold not merely due to the
> exigencies of chance but by sheer logical and theoretical necessity.[109]

It is precisely because of the "exigencies of chance" that a demonstrable strength of

classical realism rests in advocating deference to the unexpected and the incalculable.

Emphasizing the human condition as the basis for conceptualizing the relationships

within and between political groupings does not necessarily entail "atheoretical", "fuzzy"

or "murky" thinking.[110] An exploration into the human condition alerts us to our inability

to accurately account for the plethora of variables involved in any social study.

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[109] Ashly J. Tellis, "Reconstructing Political Realism: The Long March to Scientific Theory," *Security Studies* 5 (1995-96): 51.

[110] Michael Spirtas, "A House Divided: Tragedy and Evil in Realist Theory," in *Realism: Restatements and Renewal*, ed. Benjamin Frankel (London: Frank Cass, 1996) 339-400.

CHAPTER 2

Thucydides: The Human Condition and International Relations

The standard of justice depends on the equality of power to compel and that in fact the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept.

The Athenians, Melian Dialogue[111]

For men in general it is always just as natural to take control when there is no resistance as to stand out against aggression.

Hermocrates, Peace in Sicily 424[112]

Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* is not just a simple reconstruction

of an historical event but a study of a war intended for those who seek clarity about the

past as well as the future. He asserts that his work is not designed to appeal to the

immediate tastes of the public but is, instead, a sobering work designed to last forever.

> It will be enough for me, however, if these words of mine are judged
> useful by those who want to understand clearly the events which happened
> in the past and which (human nature being what it is) will, at some time or
> the other and in much the same ways, be repeated in the future.[113]

The relevance of Thucydides for the study of international relations theory has been

acknowledged by Martin Wight who described the text as the only classic of international

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[111] Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner (Toronto: Penguin Books Canada Ltd., 1972) 5.89.

[112] Thucydides 4.61.

[113] Thucydides 1.22.

relations and Robert Gilpin who commended Thucydides for being the "first scientific

student of international relations."[114] These endorsements help confirm Thucydides'

assertion that his is a work designed to last but just what it is designed to teach posterity

is open to interpretation. Rather than focusing on economic modes of production and an

anarchical system of states, Thucydides' emphasis on the human condition as a way of

understanding political behavior confronts the contemporary international relations reader

with how easily human ideals can be corrupted and how fragile domestic and

international political order is. The way in which hubris permeates the individual, state

and inter-state levels of analysis distinguishes Thucydides' text from attempts which

endeavor to categorize international processes as distinct phenomena along the lines

argued by Waltz and Doyle.[115] The *Peloponnesian War* provides a persuasive mirror,

reflecting how efforts to create a more peaceful world through the creation of better

institutions has also resulted in the creation of institutions capable of harnessing the

means to commit ever greater atrocities.

Chronological Narrative

The *Peloponnesian War* offers an exploration into the effectiveness of leadership,

convention and forms of state for postponing indefinitely the onset and expression of

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[114] H. Butterfield and M. Wight, eds.. *Diplomatic Investigations: Essays in the Theory of International Politics* (London, Allen and Unwin, 1966) 33, and Gilpin, "The Richness of the Tradition" 306.

[115] Doyle "Thucydidean Realism" 234; Waltz, *Theory of International Relations* 79; Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations* 12.

hubris. The displays of leadership at the Funeral Oration, at the tenuous peace achieved in

Sicily in 424, at the Mytilenian debate, and at the debate in Athens over the launching of

the Sicilian expedition exemplify both the opportunities and constraints affecting a

leader's ability to influence collective choices. The effectiveness of convention in

preventing the destruction displayed during civil war in Corcyra, the slaughter at

Mycalessus, and the fall of Platea will question the ability of domestic and inter-state

laws to restrain aggrandizing behavior. Finally, Thucydides' expressed reservations

concerning the ability of political projects to prevent the erosion of civic virtue will be

conveyed through his preference for the rule of the Five Thousand. By highlighting the

inability of leadership, convention and forms of state to moderate the effects of hubris,

Thucydides will be read as confronting the reader with the possibility of there being a

divine dimension to human history. The Plague, the exchange between the Boeotions and

Athenians at Delium, the Melian dialogue, and Nicias' speech to the Athenians soldiers

after their defeat at Epipolae are accounts that address issues of piety and how appeals to

a transcendent truth effect political behavior. Far from endorsing the Athenian position at

Melos, Thucydides appeals figuratively to the idea of divine truth as a way of challenging

the disastrous implications of moral relativism and ideological absolutism.

The Human Condition and Limitations to Historical Progress

Thucydides was an Athenian of property and influence who was born sometime

between 460 and 455 BC and who died around the year 400. He was probably in his late

twenties when the war began but his failure to properly carry out a military assignment

led to his exile in 424. providing him with an opportunity to write a contemporary history

of the Peloponnesian War between Athens and its Delian league allies and Sparta and its

Peloponnesian allies from 431 to 404.[116] Thucydides claimed that the Peloponnesian War

was the "greatest war", even greater than the Persian War, not because of the number or

quality of heroic acts nor feats of strategic brilliance, but because of the unprecedented

degree of suffering that was experienced, inflicted and endured.[117] Thucydides'

reconstruction of the early Hellas in the opening pages of the *History of the*

Peloponnesian War immediately displays the limitations of what material progress can

achieve. While there was a degree of material progression in antiquity that allowed for

navies and the building of walled cities, there was no corresponding progression in the

ability of humankind to resist the violence and suffering perpetrated through war.[118] The

separation of the accumulation of material wealth and institutional development from

comparable advances in the ability of human reason to bring about a more peaceful world

is supported by Thucydides' reflections on the similarities between pirates and kings. The

distinction between the violence carried out by pirates relative to kings differs only in

terms of organization and scope; King Minos shared the same basic motives as the pirates

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[116] Simon Hornblower and Anthony Spawforth, eds., *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 1517.

[117] Thucydides 1.23.

[118] W. Robert Connor, *Thucydides* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984) 104.

with the "same system of armed robbery" prevailing on land as it did on sea.[119] It is

through Thucydides' description of the civil war at Corcyra and the slaughter at

Mycalessus that the motivations for avarice pale in comparison to the potentially horrific

consequences accruing from revenge and blood-lust. The past would largely repeat itself

because the most important motive forces of history, the human desire for power and fear

of the power of others, are part of what it is to be human.

Remembering Corcyra and Mycalessus

Once unleashed, the most malign tendencies within human nature can assume the

most heinous of consequences as captured in Thucydides' description of the outbreak of

civil war in Corcyra in 427, presenting international relations scholars with an account of

how the individual, state and structural levels of analyses in international relations

coalesce to expose the fragility of political order. The onset of the civil war was

precipitated by Athenian, Corinthian and Spartan involvement which served to instigate

and compound the intra-state divisions in Corcyra between democratic and oligarchic

factions.[120] Although external involvement combined with the animosity between these

factions was instrumental in the breakdown of Corcyra's social foundations, Thucydides

associates the impetus behind the civil war with a recurring human tendency to bring

about "death in every shape and form".

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[119] Thucydides 1.15.

[120] Thucydides 3.70, 3.72.

> Then, with the ordinary conventions of civilized life thrown into
> confusion, human nature, always ready to offend even where law exists,
> showed itself proudly in its true colours, as something incapable of
> controlling passion, insubordinate to the idea of justice, the enemy to
> anything superior to itself; for, if it had not been for the pernicious power
> of envy, men would not so have exalted vengeance above innocence and
> profit above justice.[121]

Revenge, spurred on by "the love of power", became more important than self-preservation as the inhabitants were overcome by "ungovernable passions" and "violent fanaticism".[122] Thucydides' understanding of the savagery which engulfed Corcyra and "practically the whole of the Hellenic world" is indicative of how a community's breakdown can be traced to an underlying compulsion such that the civil strife at Corcyra was not an anomaly, aberration or some perversion of human nature determined solely by the circumstance of events. Further disheartening is that the collapse or absence of political order does not provide the only venue for unleashing human savagery.

The account of the Thracian assault on the city of Mycalessus in 413 was witness to what Thucydides describes as the most horrible and complete disaster. Particularly noteworthy for Thucydides was the slaughter of school children.

> The Thracians burst into Mycalessus, sacked the houses and temples, and
> butchered the inhabitants, sparing neither the young nor the old, but
> methodologically killing everyone they met, women and children alike,
> and even the farm animals and every living thing they saw. For the
> Thracian race, like all the most bloodthirsty barbarians, are always
> particularly bloodthirsty when everything is going their own way...Among

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[121] Thucydides 3.84.

[122] Thucydides 3.82.

> other things, they broke into a boy's school, the largest in the place, in
> which children had just entered, and killed every one of them.[123]

When sites of worship and places of learning offer no sanctuary from the unrestrained

excesses of human nature, the distinction between war and crime becomes even more

blurred. As Thucydides reminds the reader of human nature "being what it is", the events

at Corcyra and Mycalessus would not only be repeated throughout the Hellas but would

inevitably resurface in the future under different circumstances and with "different

degrees of savagery". Once the malign tendencies within human nature are unleashed, the

consequent violence cannot be deterred by either force or law.

> In the various cities these revolutions were the cause of many calamities as
> happens and always will happen while human nature is what it is, though
> there may be different degrees of savagery, and, as different circumstances
> arise, the general rules will admit of some variety.[124]

The implications of Thucydides' description of what can transpire when the malign

tendencies within human nature are unleashed suggests that the motivations behind

domination, expansion and hegemony in international relations theory are not *primarily*

determined by social and material conditions. Human character traits are influenced by

institutions, but since these very institutions are human creations that embody all the

malign and benign traits comprising the human condition, benevolent character traits can

be and have been overwhelmed. However, to focus exclusively on the negative attributes

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[123] Thucydides 7.29.

[124] Thucydides 3.82.

of human nature is to overlook altruistic tendencies. Thucydides' depiction of the Plague

of Athens in 430 mentions that most of the Athenians who perished, particularly those

who felt ashamed to think of their own safety, did so from nursing the afflicted.[125] Even in

an atmosphere of unprecedented lawlessness there were Athenians who out of a sense of

duty nursed the sick and dying at their own peril, suggesting that in the absence of law

and religion benevolent tendencies can arise. The tragedy which Thucydides alludes to

stems from the inability to create institutions capable of fostering and maintaining human

benevolence for prolonged periods of time. That the murder of sons by their fathers or the

butchering of persons seeking refuge in the temples could be repeated is almost

unconscionable but prophetic nonetheless.

Human Agency and its Limits

Thucydides' use of speeches, debates and judgments like the one at Platea

emphasize turning points in the conflict and are indicative of the emphasis placed on how

deliberate choices made by individuals impinge on the events of history. Daniel Garst's

inquiry into the implications of Thucydides' use of speeches and debates criticizes neo-

realism's scientific interpretation of the *Peloponnesian War* for claiming how regularities

in international politics arise from the systemic configurations of states and not from the

psychological characteristics of individuals.[126] Garst recognizes the enduring insights

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[125] Thucydides 2.51, 2.53.

[126] Garst, "Thucydides and Neorealism" 3.

which Thucydides provides for international relations theory but interprets them as being political rather than scientific since "power and hegemony are above all bound to the existence of political and social structures and the inter-subjective conventions associated with them."[127] However, Garst's call for the necessity of thinking about political praxis when studying international relations must be tempered by the enduring continuity of hubris which places limitations on the ability of human agency to make and re-make the world. Thucydides implies that political choice is not simply a matter of exercising free will.[128] As the reader moves through the text, conflict transforms itself into an agent of war capable of bringing out the worst in human nature as it restricts the opportunities available for the employment of moderation through the creation of political institutions. The expression of psychological characteristics differs amongst individuals but regardless of whether one is a Spartan or an Athenian, Archidamnus' assertion that "there is no need to suppose that human beings differ very much one from the other"[129] suggests a shared commonness amongst humans. Therefore, the historically-bound Corinthian caricature of the national character differences between Athens and Sparta speaks to differences between political communities which are more apparent than real. [130] Tendencies within

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[127] Garst, "Thucydides and Neorealism" 25.

[128] Peter R. Pouncey, *The Necessities of War: A Study of Thucydides' Pessimism* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1980) 144.

[129] Thucydides 1.84.

[130] Thucydides 1.66-1.71.

human nature are modified through national character differences but these character traits are incapable of preventing the onset of hubris.

The claim made by Monoson and Loriaux that "it is simply impossible to identify any recurring set of factors in the *History* that render some patterns of outcomes necessary"[131] overlooks the inevitable recurrence of hubris. Thucydides' elaborations on the struggles which leadership, convention and forms of state face in moderating hubris allow the contemporary reader to more readily question the limits of human possibility and the contending perils which the extremes of absolutism and the relativity of thought pose to international relations theorizing. Leaders unable to subordinate private interests to more public ones, the inability of convention to restrain the actions of states and the failed attempts at organizing forms of state capable of preventing internal strife are attributable to the destructive effects of hubris.

Leadership

The ability of leaders to moderate rather than eradicate hubris is recounted in Thucydides' assessment of Pericles' directive to Athens that moderation be practiced in the acquisition and administration of empire. Pericles' awareness that Athens was compelled to increase its power at the Spartan congress[132] corresponds to his strategy that

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[131] S. Sara Monoson and Michael Loriaux, "The illusion of Power and the Disruption of Moral Norms: Thucydides' Critique of Periclean Policy." *American Political Science Review* 92 (June 1998): 293.

[132] Thucydides 1.75.

"...Athens would be victorious if she bided her time and took care of her navy, if she avoided trying to add to the empire during the course of the war, and if she did nothing to risk the safety of the city itself."[133] To achieve moderation in conquest, Pericles blurs the distinction between private and public interests by telling the Athenians that as citizens of a great city they should be willing to endure great disasters for a glory that is at once both personal and private, an Athens where individual sufferings are to be endured for the collective good of the city.[134]

The precariousness of Pericles' expressed practical desire for the fusion of public and private interests in the Funeral Oration of 431 becomes evident when Thucydides' text immediately follows the Oration with the onset of the Plague in 430. The Plague causes such misery that the proper burials of which Pericles speaks in the Funeral Oration are left in disarray as the living have to bury the dead under the most harrowing of circumstances.[135] Restraint gives way to excess as the civic duty to fall in love with Athens embodied in the Oration[136] is swiftly eradicated by the Plague.

> In other respects also Athens owed to the plague the beginnings of a state
> of unprecedented lawlessness...As for what is called honour, no one
> showed himself willing to abide by its laws, so doubtful was it whether

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[133] Thucydides 2.65.

[134] Thucydides 2.61, 2.41- 42.

[135] Thucydides 2.52.

[136] Thucydides 2.43.

one would survive to enjoy the name for it.[137]

The Plague's placement after the Oration suggests that no matter how able a leader,

rational planning cannot fully account for the unexpected, providing a stark reminder of

the limitations inherent in human calculation despite attempts by leaders like Pericles

who endeavor to exert control over the historical process. More poignantly, the Plague's

erosion of public trust is an existential reminder of human mortality and powerlessness in

the face of that which cannot be comprehended.[138]

Pericles' appeal to the Athenians to be devoted to their city is confounded by the

Athenians becoming more devoted to their personal interests as the war progresses.

According to Thucydides, Pericles' successors were unable to exercise control over the

vices within themselves.

> ...private ambition and private profit led to policies which were bad both
> for the Athenians themselves and for their allies. Such policies, when
> successful, only brought credit and advantage to individuals, and when
> they failed, the whole war potential of the state was impaired.[139]

In an atmosphere of deteriorating public restraints Athens had destroyed itself through

internal strife with subsequent Athenian leaders succumbing to their private ambitions.

Pericles must bear some culpability for having urged the Athenians into war and creating

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[137] Thucydides 2.53.

[138] Clifford Orwin, "Stasis and Plague: Thucydides on the Dissolution of Society, "
Journal of Politics 50 (November 1988): 842-43.

[139] Thucydides 2.65.

a mood of "overconfidence" in the populace.[140] After all, the Spartan ultimatum that

Athens make concessions to prevent war in 432 was rejected by Pericles, who defends his

rejection by reminding the Athenians of the previous advice he had given and how, if they

would follow his advice again, in refusing to grant concessions, they would be able to

credit their intelligence rather than chance when successful.[141] In itself, Pericles' assertion

merely suggests that war or the arbitrariness of events can be understood as being at least

only partially amenable to rational calculation. However, if the emphasis which Pericles

places on intelligent calculation is linked with his strategy of moving all the Athenians in

Attica behind the walls of Athens, the consequent overcrowding in Athens and the

unforeseen exacerbation of the effects brought on by the Plague vividly challenges

Pericles' faith in the ability to credit human intelligence in foreseeing the tribulations

wrought by war.[142] Unlike Pericles, the Spartan king Archidamnus appears more aware of

the limits of human foresight. Archidamnus reminds a Spartan assembly in 432 that by

declaring war on Athens the Spartan regard for caution, self-control, modesty, and the

impossibility of accurately calculating events that are determined by chance would be

compromised.[143] Pericles' faith in human intelligence is soon compromised by the onset

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[140] Thucydides 1.127, 1.40-1.44.

[141] Thucydides 1.140.

[142] The Athenian representatives at Sparta appear to have taken the Delphic warning to heart as they in turn remind the Spartans of the 'great part' that the unpredictable plays in war. Thucydides 1.78.

[143] Thucydides 1.84.

of the Plague given that his own policy led to the overcrowding that exacerbated the

Plague's severity.

The task of moderating hubris within oneself is demanding, but to moderate

Athens' compulsion to increase its power through imperial expansion further compounds

this task. Pericles' attempts at uniting the interests of individual Athenians with the more

public ones of the Athenian collective parallels how the private interests of Athens were

not extended to the more public interests of the wider Greek community. Athens' reaction

to the revolt at Mytilene in 428 and to the Spartan offer of alliance to Athens in 425

highlights the extent to which Athens' narrow pursuit of its interests came at the expense

of a more public ideal which recognized each Greek city-state as an equal member of the

Hellenic community. In contrast to Athens' alienation from the greater Greek community,

the Syracusan Hermocrates moved towards creating a greater Sicilian community in an

effort to counter Athenian immoderation.

Restraint, Hubris and Resistance

The Mytilenian debate of 427 in Athens between Diodotus and Cleon vividly

illustrates how the private interests of Athens were being exclusively considered relative

to the more public and communal interests of the Greek community as a whole. Athens

believed that Mytilene, an ally, revolted without specific provocation and had sought

Spartan aid despite pledging an oath of loyalty to Athens. Cleon, described by Thucydides

as being remarkable for the violence of his character, proposes that all the Mytilenians be

put to death since none is innocent.[144] The emphasis placed on retributive justice

conforms to Cleon's position that it is in Athens' interest to rule the empire without

making concessions.[145] Diodotus counters Cleon by arguing that the punishment initially

prescribed for Mytilene would have repercussions for dealing with future revolts. A

blanket death sentence for all Mytilenians would send the message to other poleis that the

same punishment would be imposed regardless of their assumed guilt or innocence.[146] As

a result, Diodotus argues that these revolts would invariably involve costly sieges for

Athens and diminish a city's capacity to pay tribute.

Despite Diodotus' insistence that advantage rather than justice is the issue being

debated, the way in which Thucydides presents the debate suggests to the reader that

Diodotus' sympathies are more inclined towards the issue of justice given his statement

that "a man with good advice to give has to tell lies if he expects to be believed".[147]

Diodotus must tell noble lies to sway the Athenian crowd to spare the non-guilty but in

doing so he sets a dangerous precedent. "If we are sensible people, we shall see that the

question is not so much whether they are guilty as whether we are making the right

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[144] Thucydides 3.36-3.40.

[145] Thucydides 3.39.

[146] Thucydides 3.46.

[147] Thucydides 3.43, 3.47. Towards the end of his speech Diodotus appeals to the Athenians that they not put the wrong people to death. Still, the acceptance of Diodutus' motion still results in more than a thousand persons being put to death with those remaining paying a yearly tribute to Athenian colonists based on the amount of land cultivated.

decision for ourselves."[148] Telling a lie to spare the non-guilty Mytilenians inadvertently

weakens Athens' ability to consider issues of justice and unwittingly associates justice

with the advantage garnered from exercising power. With this lie Diodotus perpetuates

Athenian hubris contrary to his marked intention of warning Athens of the danger of

immoderate actions.

> Then too, the idea that Fortune will be on one's side plays a big a part as
> anything else in creating a mood of over-confidence; for sometimes she
> does come unexpectedly to one's aid, and so tempts men to run risks for
> which they are inadequately prepared. And this is particularly true in the
> case of whole peoples, because they are playing for the highest stakes -
> either for their own freedom or for the power to control others -and each
> individual, when acting as part of a community, has the irrational opinion
> that his powers are greater than in fact they are. In a word it is impossible
> (and only the most simple-minded will deny this) for human nature, when
> once seriously set upon a certain course, to be prevented from following
> that course by the force of law or by any other means of intimidation
> whatever.[149]

The sobering implication for the study of international relations is that by ignoring the

force of law and by interpreting Fortune as being congruent with one's own interests,

hubris can only be restrained by a force greater than the one being perpetrated.

The repercussions of the failure of the Athenian leadership to contain hubris and

the political atmosphere in Athens which placed Diodotus in the position of having to tell

noble lies extends to Athens' refusal to enter into an alliance with Sparta to end the

Peloponnesian War. The Athenian blockade of the island of Pylos in 425 successfully

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[148] Thucydides 3.44.

[149] Thucydides 3.45.

isolates a group of Spartan hoplites resulting in a decision by the Spartans to send a

delegation to Athens to negotiate a settlement to the war. The Spartans acknowledge

Athens' unexpected success, but suggest to the Athenians that they are now in a position

to capitalize on their present good fortune by avoiding the mistake of striving for more.[150]

In return for releasing the blockaded Spartans, Sparta proposes a settlement that would

allow the Athenians to retain what they had acquired in the war and, remarkably, further

suggests that Athens and Sparta unite in an alliance. "For if we, Athens and Sparta, stand

together, you can be sure that the rest of the Hellas, in its inferior position, will show us

every possible mark of honour."[151] The unexpected success at Pylos had created such a

mood of over-confidence that Diodotus' early prognostication that the Athenians would

take risks for which they would be inadequately prepared and Pericles' directive that

Athens consolidate its holdings during the war was ignored.[152] The Spartan appeal for

peace is rejected by Athens which had earlier been eager to achieve a settlement. As

Thucydides writes, the Athenians "aimed at winning still more."[153]

The hubris which had engulfed Athens at Pylos is followed shortly thereafter in

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[150] Thucydides 4.17.

[151] Thucydides 4.20. The Spartan proposition challenges the positive connotations associated with the term cooperation since unity would be achieved at the expense of subjugating someone else.

[152] Thucydides 3.45.

[153] Thucydides 4.21.

the text by the tenuous peace achieved at Gela in 424.[154] Whereas the Athenians have

been moving in an opposite, more self-interested direction aimed at breaking away from

the more public interests of the larger Hellenic community, Hermocrates' aim was to

subsume the private interests of individual Sicilian states into a much larger and more

public "Sicilian" entity. Most influential in securing the peace at Gela was the Syracusan

Hermocrates who argued that if mutual concessions were granted amongst the Sicilian

states, the immediate purpose of deterring an Athenian conquest of the island could be

achieved. At Gela, Hermocrates judges internal strife to be the main reason for the

decline of city-states, imploring the Sicilian city-states not to stand apart since only a

united front could prevent the subjugation of all of Sicily by the Athenians.[155] Even

though Hermocrates was a representative from the powerful city of Syracuse, he was not

only willing to forego Syracusan aggression to promote the island's collective defense

but, like Diodotus, he was also aware of the limitations of predicting and controlling

future events.

> Yet, when I consider the dangers of the future, I am prepared to give way
> to others. I do not think it right to do such injuries to my enemies that I
> ruin myself, nor out of a mad love of aggression, to imagine that I can
> command Fortune, which is out of my control, in the same way as I can be
> master of my own designs. Instead, I am prepared to make all reasonable
> concessions.[156]

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[154] Thucydides 4.58.

[155] Thucydides 4.61.

[156] Thucydides 4.64.

What is pertinent from the standpoint of international relations is how the external threat posed by Athens helps to facilitate internal consolidation within Sicily. Although Hermocrates admits that Sicilians are united by name rather than nature, and even though he recognizes that future wars between the Sicilians will no doubt occur, his practical aim is to achieve a tenuous unity by propagating the idea of a common Sicilian identity in anticipation of an Athenian invasion. The destructive polarizations afflicting mainland Greece between democrat and oligarch, Ionian and Dorian are countered in Hermocrates' appeal that Sicily not be afflicted with similar polarizations and embroil itself in "civil war".

The Erosion of International Convention

The call for Sicilian unity and the tenuous peace achieved at Gela is reminiscent of the Greek unity achieved during the Persian War. The Persian War had once united the Greeks but when the Persian threat subsided, the victorious Greeks turned to warring amongst themselves. The conventional premise that each Greek city-state had a right to be an equal member in a community where all Greek city-states were to limit their ambitions against one another regardless of wealth and military capability is challenged early on in the Peloponnesian War. At a debate in Sparta in 432, Athenians on "other business" respond to Corinthian accusations that Athens is an aggrandizing city by contending that the empire was given to Athens and that the powerful motives of honor,

fear, and self-interest prevent Athens from giving it up.[157] The Athenians believed that these motives were not contrary to human nature since the compulsion to acquire and defend their empire is supported by the rule that the weak are to be subject to the strong. The Corinthian accusations are further disputed since the Athenians also believe that they should be praised for ruling as justly as possible since it is not possible to refrain from ruling altogether.[158] With such a justification the professed nominal equality between independent cities is summarily challenged. If the unequal power differentials between the different city-states eventually compel the more powerful city-states to become hegemonical or even imperial[159], then the Athenians are unable to justify the acquisition and administration of empire as being consistent with the principals of autonomy, equality and freedom. The claim of the Athenian representatives that subject city-states were treated as equals is contrary to how Naxos and the other allies who revolted from Athens were summarily "forced back to allegiance".[160]

Thucydides asserts that in times of peace, cities and individuals alike follow higher standards but that the onset of war erodes the orderly laws and standards of civilized life by unleashing the malign, vengeful attributes of human nature. War does not create these destructive attributes but it enables them to surface more easily. Thucydides

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[157] Thucydides 1.75.

[158] Thucydides 1.77.

[159] Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964) 239.

[160] Thucydides 1.98.

imparts the message that the drive for power, dominance and self-aggrandizement is grounded within human nature, capable of undermining the conventions that constitute political order. Corcyra illustrates the fragility of *civil* conventions but the Spartan judgement at Platea chronicles the erosion of *inter-state* convention to reveal how the pursuit of self-interested advantage overtakes considerations of justice in the relations between states.

Aside from being the site which sparked the opening incident in the Peloponnesian War, Platea was the site where a united Greek force led by the Spartan king Pausanias defeated the second Persian invasion force in 479.[161] The united Greek victory at Platea symbolized the strength of Hellenic unity but by 431, Platea would ironically come to represent the divisiveness amongst the Greek city-states. Thucydides' rendition of the events and dialogue leading to Platea's surrender to Spartan judgement compels the reader to doubt the viability of the laws mediating the relationship between the Greek city-states. Thucydides' account of the surrender of the Platean garrison directly confronts the dilemma between power and morality in international relations theory by exemplifying how the interpretation of law and convention from perceived advantage can overtake attempts towards reaching for a more just adjudication.

The Theban attack on Platea in 431 triggered the start of the Peloponnesian War. Sparta would eventually become involved in the conflict through its alliance with Thebes

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[161] Thucydides 1.130.

and Athens through its alliance with Platea. After a protracted struggle and without

Athenian military support. the Spartans suggest that the Plateans voluntarily surrender to

Sparta's judgment. The remaining Platean garrison which was in the last stages of

exhaustion and exerting minimal resistance accepted the Spartan proposal in 427.[162] But

as the Plateans surrender, they become immediately suspicious of the Spartan judges who

ask whether the Plateans have done anything to help Sparta and their allies during the

Peloponnesian War. The Plateans rightly suspect the trial to be a mere formality with a

sentence already predetermined to suit Spartan advantage and Theban animosity instead

of a sincere attempt to judge between right and wrong.[163]

Aware of Sparta's bias and overwhelming authority over the fate of Platea, the

Plateans challenge Spartan authority by appealing to "the established laws of the Hellas"

and by evoking "the name of the gods" who witnessed the oaths, pledges and previous

alliance that Platea shared with Sparta.[164] The Plateans warn the Spartans that defining

justice solely in terms of advantage will bring them eventual ruin.

> Remember, too, how incalculable the future is and how impossible it is to
> tell who next. however undeservedly, may be exposed to the blows of

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[162] Thucydides 3.52. The Spartan proposition was motivated by the possibility that in a future peace treaty with Athens, Sparta would not have to return Platea if it surrendered voluntarily. Sparta's technical interpretation of the wording that could arise in a treaty neglects the context in which the surrender occurred. already tainting a future treaty with an element of deceit.

[163] Thucydides 3.56.

[164] Thucydides 3.58.

chance. Thus we, as we have a right to do and as our need impels us, beg
you to grant our requests, calling aloud upon the gods of the Hellas at
whose altars we all worship.[165]

The Thebans who worshiped at these same altars were permitted by the Spartans to

respond to the Platean charges and accuse the Plateans of exploiting the memory of the

Persian War for their own self-glorification while evading responsibility for Thebes'

previous collaboration with Persia. Collaboration, the Thebans claim in their defence, was

not undertaken by the city of Thebes as a whole but by a small group of powerful men

whose rule was close to being a dictatorship and therefore not indicative of the will of all

Thebans.[166] The claim is that the Theban people had not betrayed the Greeks by

collaborating with Persia which differs from how all Plateans, not just a few, betray all

Greeks by allying with the Athenians who seek to enslave the Hellas.[167] When the

Thebans also implore the Spartans to "vindicate" the law of the Hellas the reader is

confronted with the question of whether the Platean or the Theban appeal is more faithful

to the laws. Rather than resolving or even addressing this question the Spartans choose to

base their judgment on the self-interested question of whether the Plateans have recently

helped the Peloponnesian cause. When the Plateans respond that they have not helped the

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[165] Thucydides 3.59.

[166] Thucydides 3.62.Thebes' response to the Spartan judges at Platea is immediately
preceded in the text by the Mytilenian debate. At Mytilene, the Athenians decide whether
the original death sentence should be rescinded to only apply to the oligarchic
conspirators and not to the entire populace.

[167] Thucydides 3.63.

cause. Thucydides concludes that their "merciless" execution along with the razing of the

city was undertaken by the Spartans to appease Thebes in the interests of temporary

advantage.[168] The Platean appeal to "the law of the Hellas" is completely overridden as

Sparta comes to define justice solely in terms of what is advantageous. contrary to

Archidamnus' earlier praise of the Spartan respect for honor. law and custom.[169] In the

span of the five years between Archidamus' speech at the "Debate at Sparta" in 432 and

the fall of Platea in 427, the Spartan respect for honor, law and custom is replaced by an

overriding respect for advantage.

The fragility of inter-state convention amongst the Greeks during the

Peloponnesian War also corresponds to a deterioration in the Hellenic "culture of

argument".[170] An early illustration of the waning effectiveness of convention occurs in

430 when the Athenians intercept a Peloponnesian embassy on its way to Persia. The

captured Peloponnesians are brought back to Athens, quickly put to death and their

bodies. in flagrant violation of Greek custom, thrown into a pit without proper burial. The

Athenians regard their actions as "legitimate retaliation" since the Spartans "kill as

enemies all whom they captured on the sea, whether allies or neutrals".[171] By intercepting

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[168] Thucydides 3.68.

[169] Thucydides 1.84.

[170] James Boyd White. *When Words Lose Their Meaning: Constitutions and Reconstitutions of Language. Character, and Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1984) 67.

[171] Thucydides 2.67.

and executing the Peloponnesian ambassadors, Athens justifies its action based on the lowest common denominator which only serves to undermine conventions designed to moderate the brutalities of war.

As the war proceeds, the escalation of violence overwhelms the ability of states to justify their actions to each other through the medium of speech. The criticism of long speeches by Sthenelaidas in 432 and by the Thebans at Platea who, in 427, associated wordiness with duplicitous intent soon becomes the norm.[172] It was during the Corcyraean civil war in 427 which immediately proceeds the Fall of Platea in the text that Thucydides records how reasonable speeches were impeded so as to have no practical effect. The speeches at Corcyra were not made by representatives from different city-states but between individuals sharing a common citizenry! Not only were words censured at Corcyra so that they would have no practical effect, but the words themselves had succumbed to corruption and degradation brought on by a war that crosses the boundaries between inter-state and intra-state relations. "To fit with the change of events, words, too had to change their usual meanings....Anyone who held violent opinions could always be trusted, and anyone who objected to them became a suspect."[173] Instead of a moderating influence, language had become a political weapon synonymous with advantage. At Melos, the Athenians thoroughly undermine the basis for a Hellenic culture of argument

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[172] Thucydides 1.86, 3.67.

[173] Thucydides 3.82.

by refusing to justify their actions.

The Justice of Power

The Melian dialogue takes place in 416 between representatives sent by the

Athenian generals and "the governing body and the few" of Melos.[174] Thucydides'

rendition of Athens' opening statement quickly alerts the reader to the overwhelming

sense of confidence exuded by the Athenians.[175] The Athenian representatives force an

ultimatum upon the Melians, claiming how "facts of circumstance" dictate that the

Melians spare their city from destruction alerting the reader to the overwhelming

confidence being exuded by the Athenians. At this point in the war the Athenians have

come to disregard justifying the possession of their empire by claiming that a justification

would only amount to "a great mass of words that nobody would believe."[176] How

different this response is from Pericles' earlier claim that words and debate were not

incompatible with deeds and how Athens refrained from rushing into action before

submitting policy decisions to proper discussion.[177] The disregard of words at Melos

suggests a changed Athens. Like the Spartan judges at Platea, the Athenians are only

interested in unilaterally pursuing what they perceive as being in their practical interests

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[174] The dialogue's setting outside of the Melian assembly raises the question that if the Athenians were not invited to speak before the popular assembly, should the entire city be held accountable for the decisions made by the Melian oligarchy?

[175] Thucydides 5.84-86.

[176] Thucydides 5.89.

[177] Thucydides 2.40.

and are not even willing to justify their actions other than on the basis of advantage. The Athenian claim that justice only arises between those who are of equal power and that the weak accept the rule of the strong is resisted by the Melians who remind the Athenians not to destroy the principle of "just dealing" with others. The Melians assert that the principle of "just dealing" is not a principle that can be expressed with mathematical certainty but a principle to be heeded by Athens, "which affects you as much as anybody, since your own fall would be visited by the most terrible vengeance and would be an example to the world."[178] Hubris has made the Athenians forget this prophetic reminder, a loss which they would come to regret.

The Athenian assertion that the weak should be subject to the strong does not necessarily mean that Thucydides believed that the regulating force between states is human nature released from the constraints of justice. [179] The regulating force as implied by Thucydides is resistance against the hubris perpetuated by individuals and states. Therefore, Thucydides did not consider Melian resistance to Athens to be a foolish act[180] nor can the Athenian "offer" of subjugation be considered reasonable[181] since Melos would lose its freedom and become a tribute-paying subject of the Athenian empire.

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[178] Thucydides 5.90.

[179] Contrary to Arlene W. Saxonhouse, "Nature & Convention in Thucydides' 'History'," *Polity* 10 (1978): 464.

[180] Contrary to Strauss, *The City and Man* 189.

[181] Contrary to Garst, "Thucydides and Neorealism" 15.

Melos' unwillingness to submit to Athens was, like the compulsion to subjugate the

weak, an expression of the natural inclination to resist aggression. "For men in general it

is always just as natural to take control when there is no resistance as to stand out against

aggression."[182] To resist, then, is as natural as the desire to subjugate. Even without

Spartan aid the Melians were able to resist the Athenian siege for half a year,

counterattacking twice and forcing the Athenians into sending reinforcements. In the end

the Melians succumbed partly because of treachery within Melos thereby highlighting the

precarious unity of states during wartime more than arguments that question the efficacy

of Melian resistance.

The Sicilian Expedition and the Implosion of Hubris

The juxtaposition of the Melian dialogue immediately before the Sicilian

expedition foreshadows how Athenian hubris would come back to implode upon Athens.

"They had come to enslave others, and now they were going away frightened of being

enslaved themselves."[183] An absence of a moral sense of boundaries in the pursuit of

empire compounded by the Athenians not considering themselves to be the equals of

other states precipitated the divisive challenges to the idea of democratic equality for the

citizenry. The collective hubris expressed at Melos had now turned inward to instigate the

private hubris of individual Athenians. The debate at Athens between Nicias and

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[182] Thucydides 4.61.

[183] Thucydides 7.75.

Alciabades in 415 regarding the decision to launch the Sicilian expedition unfolds in an

atmosphere where Athenian hubris is at a collective peak. Nicias' attempts to temper the

Athenian enthusiasm for the invasion claiming that it would be a mistake to overextend

the empire when the consolidation of the empire would be a more prudent course of

action.[184] Reminiscent of Pericles' advice against imperial overstretch, Nicias cautions

against undertaking the expedition since it was not "the time for running risks or for

grasping at a new empire". An expedition to Sicily would increase Athens' external

enemies and satisfy the self-aggrandizing private pursuits of individuals like Alciabades

to the detriment of Athens' public interests. Alciabades' reply to Nicias' personal attack

confirms his arrogance. He thought it quite natural that he be envied for the

"magnificence" of what he had accomplished and "not be put on a level with everyone

else". Despite the accusations against his private life, Alciabades points to his success in

dealing with Athens' public affairs and how the expedition to Sicily would be consistent

with the characteristic Athenian drive towards continuous and aggressive expansion.[185]

In an atmosphere of "excessive enthusiasm" fueled by the lure of adventure and

the personal and collective gains thought to accrue from the conquest, Alciabades'

position was resoundingly endorsed.[186] The debate between Nicias and Alciabades not

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[184] Thucydides 6.9-12.

[185] Thucydides 6.16, 6.18.

[186] Thucydides 6.24.

only revealed the hostility within Athens, but confirms Thucydides' argument that private

ambition and private profit had destroyed Athens. Alciabades' ambitious pursuit of status

and wealth combined with his eventual willingness to share Athenian military strategy

with Syracuse and Sparta exemplifies how destructive the effects of pursuing private self-

interests can be relative to the collective interests of the state.

Even though Nicias' actions were not traitorous and the particular manifestation

of his hubris is not expressed in the text as corresponding to a desire for material gain.

Nicias also exemplifies the movement away from public to private concerns. After the

Athenian defeat at Epipola in 413, Demosthones suggested that the expedition return to

Athens while there was still a chance for a successful retreat but Nicias decided that it

should wait.[187] The reasons behind his hesitation were not altogether strategic as he feared

that a withdrawal would not be approved by the Athenian assembly.

> For his own part, knowing the Athenian character as he did, rather than to
> be put to death on a disgraceful charge and by an unjust verdict of the
> Athenians, he preferred to take his chances and, if it must be, to meet his
> own death himself at the hands of the enemy.[188]

Internal politics had become so hostile in Athens that both Nicias and Alciabades were

making decisions in their best interests rather than those of the Athenian collective.

The failure of the Sicilian expedition provided those citizens in favor of

implementing oligarchic rule with the impetus and opportunity to challenge the

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[187] Thucydides 7.47-48.

[188] Thucydides 7.48.

convention that Athenian citizens were political equals.[189] The internal ramifications of

the Sicilian defeat for Athens are conveyed by Thucydides through Pisander's suggestion

that to defeat the Peloponnesians, an alliance with Persia and an overthrow of democracy

would be required.[190] Pisander confirms the fear amongst democrats that if democracy

were to be abolished, the most "powerful class of Athenians" would put people to death

with violence and without trial.[191] Thucydides describes the atmosphere in Athens as a

"state of terror", ripe with mistrust, mutual suspicion and violence as propagated by those

supporting the oligarchical revolution.[192] "This period, then, was one of sharp conflict,

with the army trying to force a democracy on the city, and the Four Hundred an oligarchy

upon the army."[193] If leadership and convention were unable to contain strife, the

motivation of the oligarchs to overthrow democracy brings up the question of whether

Thucydides supported the attempt to establish an oligarchical form of state in Athens after

the coup in 411. In conjunction with Thucydides' insight into the human condition, his

preference for either democracy, oligarchy, or monarchy as being more capable of

moderating hubris can potentially offer international relations scholars an example of a

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[189] Thucydides 8.89. Alciabades had previously told the Athenian assembly on the eve of the Sicilian expedition, "And it is perfectly fair for a man who has a opinion of himself not to be put on a level with everyone else;" Thucydides 6.16.

[190] Thucydides 8.54.

[191] Thucydides 8.48.

[192] Thucydides 8.66.

[193] Thucydides 8.76.

form of state more able to moderate both the internal and external projections of hubris.

As such, the democratic peace proposition which argues that democracies have a

demonstrated capacity to make peace with each other could stand to benefit from

Thucydides' historical insight into the state.[194]

A Better Form of State

The stasis that permeated the Greek World did not spare Athens. What was

remarkable about the civil strife in Athens was that despite a political revolution in 411,

Athens was able to endure the war for eight more years under a democratic constitution

which Thucydides describes as being "ready to put everything in order."[195] The infighting

between democrat and oligarch, the resilience of Athenian democracy and Thucydides'

admiration thereof raises the question of whether Thucydides endorsed democracy as the

form of state most capable of restraining hubris. The only explicit reference which

Thucydides makes regarding his preference concerns the short-lived government of the

Five Thousand whose restriction of voting rights amongst Athenian citizens cannot be

defined as being democratic.

> Indeed, during the first period of this new regime the Athenians appear to
> have had a better form of government than ever before, at least in my time.
> There was a reasonable and moderate blending of the few and the many,
> and it was this, in the first place, that made it possible for the city to

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[194] For an overview of the variety positions encompassing the democratic peace
proposition see Steve Chan, "In Search of Democratic Peace: Problems and Promise,"
Mershon International Studies Review 41 (1997): 59-92.

[195] Thucydides 8.1.

recover from the bad state into which her affairs had fallen.[196]

Thucydides' awareness of the shortcomings and strengths of monarchy, democracy and oligarchy led him to consider the reasonable and moderate blending of rule achieved by the Five Thousand to be the best form of Athenian government yet achieved. Hobbes' conclusion that Thucydides favored a monarchical form of state is untenable since this preference is not stated anywhere in the text.[197] Instead, Thucydides confines his discourse regarding Greek forms of state to democratic and oligarchic variants, associating monarchy with the arbitrary rule practiced by Persian monarchs.[198] Thucydides' assertion that under Pericles, Athenian democracy was in effect rule by its first citizen is not an indication for his support of monarchy but an implied criticism of how divisiveness can affect the decision-making capabilities of democracies. Consequently, Thucydides was not an ardent supporter of democracy given his disdain for the Athenian assembly's "crowd-like" behavior in inciting Nicias to give up a military command to Cleon and a critical comment regarding the gullibility of the assembly "whose judgments would be swayed by any clever speech designed to create

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[196] Thucydides 8.97.

[197] Thucydides, *Hobbes's Thucydides*, trans. Thomas Hobbes, ed. Richard Schlatter (New Brunswick: Rugers University Press, 1975) 14.

[198] Maurice Pope, "Thucydides and Democracy," *Historia* 37 (1988): 276, 281. When the Thebans at Platea explain their support for Persia during the Persian Wars their defense is based on the city being neither democratic or oligarchic but on being nearest to a dictatorship and as such, removed from both law and moderation. Thucydides 3.62.

prejudice".[199]

While critical of democracy he was also aware of its merits relative to oligarchical

rule as indicated by his judgment of the oligarchy of the Four Hundred.

> ...it was for motives of personal ambition that most of them were
> following the line that is most disastrous to oligarchies when they take
> over from democracies. For no sooner is the change made than every
> single man. not content with being the equal of others, regards himself as
> greatly superior to everyone else. In a democracy, on the other hand,
> someone who fails to get elected to office can always console himself with
> the thought that there was something not quite fair about it.[200]

Thucydides was not a "confirmed oligarch"[201] given his reservations concerning the

inability of an oligarchy or aristocracy to limit personal ambition. Instead, he places the

blame on the selfish motives of political leaders, regardless of their democratic or

oligarchic affiliations. Elaborations on the Sicilian, Mytilenean and Melian debates and

dialogues do not support the argument that Thucydides uses these episodes to condemn

democracy. Oligarchy is no more successful than democracy in constraining private

ambition and the pursuit of private profit.

Thucydides' preference for the rule of the Five Thousand suggests that had it

continued. a combination of the strengths of both democracy and oligarchy and a

curtailment of their respective weaknesses could have developed into a form of state more

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[199] Thucydides 7.48.

[200] Thucydides 8.89.

[201] Contrary to Malcolm F. McGregor, "The Politics of the Historian Thucydides,"
Phoenix 10 (1956): 102.

capable of restraining the actions of both the many and the few. His awareness of the

shortcomings contained within any political project awakens international relations

scholars to at least consider how the substitution of one political order, be it domestic or

international, for another may only result in substituting one form of oppression for

another.

The implementation of democratic rule in ancient Greece relative to the

preponderance of monarchical rule in the ancient world was a remarkable achievement.

Nevertheless, this achievement must be tempered with the realization that Athens was an

imperial democracy whose prosperity was integrally tied to conquest and domination over

others. Athenians resided in a constitutional realm where political equality amongst

citizens coexisted with a social matrix infused with inequality.[202] The ancient Greek

understanding of democracy was based on the principle of equality and the denial of

hierarchy among citizens[203] whereas Thucydides' conception of a sound regime was one

united by civic virtue and laws whose sanctity was based on a respect of the hierarchy

between the divine and the human.[204] If a moral appeal of democracy is that it embodies

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[202] Josiah Ober, "The Nature of Athenian Democracy," *Classical Philology* 84 no.4 (1989): 326.

[203] Arlene W. Saxonhouse, *Athenian Democracy: Modern Mythmakers and Ancient Theorists* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996) 46.

[204] Strauss, *City and Man* 153.

the fundamental equality of all persons before the divine,[205] then hubris not only

challenges the denial of there being a political hierarchy between Athenian citizens and

the principle of equality amongst Greek city-states, but it also challenges the idea of there

being a hierarchy between the divine and the human.

Appealing to the Divine

The violence generated by the Peloponnesian War had brought unprecedented

suffering upon the Hellas but Thucydides' inclusion in the text of the increased number of

calamities preceding the war's outbreak leaves open the question of whether these natural

occurrences were more than just chance happenings.[206] Earthquakes, eclipses of the sun,

famines, eruptions and the plague wreaked havoc on the rational plans of individuals and

collectives to control outcomes such that the war had surpassed the limits of human

comprehension.[207] The religious appeals made by various individuals and communities

during the Peloponnesian War reflect an understanding of these limits and have a direct

bearing on the promotion of moderation within and between states. The appeals made at

Delium, Melos and Sicily as well as Thucydides' skepticism regarding the

pronouncements of oracles corresponds to the necessity of a figurative rather than literal

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[205] William Christian, *George Grant: A Biography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993) 156.

[206] Stewart I vin Oost, "Thucydides and the Irrational: Sundry Passages," *Classical Philology* 70 (1975): 187.

[207] Thucydides 1.23.

interpretation of a transcendent truth in order to counter the effects of hubris.

Classical scholars have suggested that Thucydides did not accept the intervention of any superhuman power in the Peloponnesian War[208] and that he took the extraordinary step of considering history to be "strictly a human affair".[209] Moses Finley asserts that Thucydides' conception of history was solely guided by human reason without interference from the gods given the expressed contempt for oracles and omens in the text.[210] Although the absence of any explicit mention of the gods in the Archaeology or in the Funeral Oration may appear to substantiate the claim that Thucydides' conception of history was driven solely by human actions, Thucydides was not averse to the possibility of the divine, the supernatural or the irrational in affecting historical outcomes. The reader is confronted with the possibility of there being a divine dimension to human history.

Thucydides admonishes excessive piety and the political manipulation of religious symbolism as manifestations of hubris. He may take issue with some religious appeals such as Nicias' plea to the gods for leniency in Sicily, and even though he displays overall scorn for the pronouncements of oracles and soothsayers who impose literal meanings on

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[208] Victor Ehrenberg, *From Solon to Socrates: Greek History and Civilization during the 6th and 5th Centuries BC* (London: Metheun and Co. Ltd, 1968) 356.

[209] M.I Finley, *Aspects of Antiquity: Discoveries and Controversies* (New York: Penguin Books, 1968) 49.

[210] Finley, *Aspects of Antiquity* 49.

mythological happenings, he leaves open the possibility of a higher standard to which

humankind is accountable. Appeals to the gods were more than simple political devices

designed to instill confidence in a populace, maintain order, or rally the troops. The

implicit message that human beings are not the only and ultimate judges of their actions

corresponds with Thucydides' understanding of power. In the Archaeology, the material

foundations of power consist of walls, navies, and money. Yet Thucydides posits that the

"actual power" of a city is not to be judged solely on physical attributes or measurable

indicators such as the number and size of temples, monuments and buildings. Power is

also based on less tangible characteristics as expressed through social conventions and

political institutions.[211] For example, Sparta was regarded as being a leader of the

Peloponnese exerting hegemony over its allies and extending influence beyond its

frontiers despite the tangible absence of magnificent temples and monuments.[212] Since

power is not solely determined by physical attributes, the possibility of divine influence

as an intangible expression of power is referenced in the text through Thucydides'

skepticism concerning the Pythian oracle's pronouncements on the Plague and the use of

religious proscription to denigrate the enemy at Delium and Melos.

The Plague, Delium and Melos

A secular, modern reader may be inclined to discount the role of the gods in light

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[211] Garst, "Thucydides and Neorealism" 20.

[212] Thucydides 1.10.

of Thucydides' comments regarding the Pythian oracle's warning forbidding the

occupation of the land below the Acropolis. After all, the Plague is nothing more than an

unfortunate natural disaster whose effects were exacerbated by Pericles' policy of

requiring the inhabitants of Attica to leave their fields for the protection offered by

Athenian city walls. The curse accompanying this oracle was noted and explained by

Thucydides and appears to confirm a secular reading.

> It appears to me that the oracle came true in a way that was opposite to
> what people expected. It was not because of the unlawful settlement in this
> place that misfortune came to Athens, but it was because of the war that
> the settlement had to be made. The war was not mentioned by the oracle,
> though it was foreseen that if this place was settled, it would be a time
> when Athens was in difficulties.[213]

Even though Thucydides criticized the interpretations of oracles and soothsayers his

skepticism does not mean that he dismisses the validity of oracles altogether. His

skepticism merely coincides with his efforts to understand the causes behind and the

repercussions of events. In other words, Thucydides does not dispute oracles as much as

illustrate the ambiguity in this particular oracle's ability to provide a convincing

explanation for the cause of the Plague.

The ambiguity of interpretation is glaringly exposed by Thucydides during an

inter-state exchange at Delium between the Athenians and Boeotians in 424. The

Athenians invaded Boeotia with a plan to seize and fortify the temple of Apollo at

Delium. But after capturing the temple and then suffering what was perhaps the worst

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[213] Thucydides 2.17.

loss suffered by a hoplite army in antiquity, the Athenians retreated leaving behind only a

garrison at Delium.[214] A Boeotian herald was sent to address the remaining Athenian

garrison and charge them with desecrating the temple grounds, dishonoring the divinities

and transgressing the Hellenic law whose "rule established everywhere" that invaders

spare temples from violation.[215] The Athenian response to the Boeotian charges was that

they had done nothing wrong since the necessity of circumstance compelled them to

occupy the temple and that "the god would look indulgently on any action done under the

stress of war and danger".[216] In effect, the Athenian response amounted to what has been

described as a "political theology of imperialism" that does not bother to distinguish

between just and unjust conquest. The Athenians believe that conquest confers on them

the legitimate right to claim both the land and the shrines on it.[217] The Athenian

justification has contemporary resonance in the pronouncements made by modern

fundamentalist groups who engage in violent acts and justify their actions on the basis of

divine sanction. Therefore their piety, like the piety expressed by the Athenians, is not

about religious reverence or a love for the gods, but a sanctimonious display of

aggrandizement claiming to have the sanction of divine will.

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[214] Thucydides 4.76, 4.96; *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* 442.

[215] The Geneva Convention governing the treatment of military personal during wartime is analogous to the Boeotian invocation of Hellenic convention.

[216] Thucydides 4.98.

[217] Clifford Orwin, "Piety, Justice, and the Necessities of War: Thucydides' Delian Debate" *American Political Science Review* 83 (1989): 237.

The Athenians were interpreting the divine to further religious proscription at the expense of denigrating an enemy. The irreverence shown by the Athenians at Delium foreshadows the lack of religious deference displayed eight years later by the Athenian delegates at Melos. When the Melians refuse to surrender to Athens and instead place their hope in Spartan aid, the gods and the fortunes of war that offer the weaker party a chance for success[218], the Athenians ironically dismiss Melian hope as a mere comforter.

> And do not be like those people who, as so commonly happens, miss the chance of saving themselves in a human and practical way, and when every clear and distinct hope has left them in adversity, turn to what is blind and vague, to prophecies and oracles and such things which by encouraging hope lead men to ruin.[219]

The dismissal is ironic when the deference shown by the Athenians in their attempts to decipher the oracle's prophecy before the Persian onslaught at Salamis in 480 is contrasted with Athenian actions at Melos. The Athenians, like the Melians, had been faced with what was thought to be an overwhelming power in Persia, but despite the apparent hopelessness of the situation, they were victorious in defeating the Persians.[220]

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[218] Thucydides 5.102.

[219] Thucydides 5.103.

[220] Connor, *Thucydides* 156. Herodotus' account of the Athenian will to resist could just as easily have been made by the Melians. "As for making terms with Persia, it is useless to persuade us; for we shall never consent...that so long as the sun keeps its present course in the sky, we Athenians will never make peace with Xerxes. On the contrary, we shall oppose him unremittingly, putting our trust in the help of gods and heroes whom he despised....". Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. Aubrey de Selincourt (Toronto: Penguin Books of Canada Ltd, 1975) 8.142.

Whereas the Delphic oracle had provided the Athenians with an impetus to resist the

Persians. the reversal in attitude displayed at Delium and Melos begs the question as to

why these Athenian delegates now considered appeals to the gods as leading to ruin. The

reason is that at Melos. the Athenians act as if they have become the gods' equals. The

Athenian delegates do not deem their actions to be unjust. reasoning that they have been

compelled by natural necessity to rule over the weak in accordance with their

understanding of the gods. "And therefore, so far as the gods are concerned. we see no

good reason why we should fear to be at a disadvantage."[221] If. as the Athenians tell the

Melians. standards of justice can only be decided upon by equals and, given the absence

of fear on the part of the Athenians concerning their interpretation of the divine, it is

reasonable to assume that the Athenians are professing that their standard of what is right

coincides with the standards of the gods. The Athenians are claiming that they have

become the gods' equals such that the Athenians are not only capable of comprehending

divine law. but also of imitating it.

Athenian military prowess leading up to Melos had given the Athenian delegates a

false sense of their ability to comprehend and control historical circumstance. The former

deference to a higher. transcendent standard of truth shown at Salamis is replaced by the

power of enforcement and the delusion that the gods are on the side of those having the

biggest battalions. The previous restraint shown by Athens affirmed in Pericles' reference

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[221] Thucydides 5.105.

to the laws protecting the oppressed and to "those unwritten laws of which it is an acknowledged shame to break" are completely debased at Melos.[222] Thucydides' warning for posterity regarding Corcyra and what can happen when human nature shows its true colors in the absence of restraint was prophetic.

> ...men take it upon themselves to begin the process of repealing those general laws of humanity which are there to give a hope of salvation to all in distress, instead of leaving those laws in existence, remembering that there may come a time when they, too, will be in danger and will need their protection.[223]

The subjugation of Melos ends with the execution of all the men, the selling of the women and children into slavery and is followed in the text by the Athenian preparations for the conquest of Sicily during the winter of 415. These preparations were comparable in magnitude to the war against the Persians but the general ignorance and arrogance conveyed by the Athenians regarding the size of Sicily and the complexity of its allegiances served to accentuate the scope of the disaster suggesting that the placement of the Melian dialogue before the Sicilian expedition was more than just coincidence.[224]

Sicily and the implosion of hubris

A recurrent theme in Greek mythology holds that impending disaster awaits those traveling across wide expanses after engaging in excessive violence.[225] When this theme

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[222] Thucydides 2.37.

[223] Thucydides 3.84.

[224] Thucydides 6.1.

[225] Connor, *Thucydides* 161.

is placed in the context of Athens' "excessive enthusiasm" for subjugating Sicily and the

previous episodes at Delium and Melos where the Athenians blurred the boundary

between the divine and the human. Thucydides raises the question of whether divine

retribution was now about to afflict the Athenians. As massive preparations for the

Sicilian invasion were being undertaken, Thucydides points to the desecrations of the

religiously symbolic stone Hermae in Athens. The desecrations which were taken "very

seriously" and regarded as an omen by the Athenians are overshadowed by the growing

political divisiveness within Athens. As at Delium, there was a manipulation of religious

symbolism for political ends. Instead of interpreting the desecrations as a physical

manifestation of the underlying Athenian hubris behind the expedition, the desecrations

were interpreted as providing evidence for a conspiracy aimed at overthrowing

democracy.[226]

The Athenians were not the only ones to overlook the religious implications of the

desecrations. Pointing to the virtual absence of the gods in the text, Peter Euben contends

that Thucydides secularized politics to the extent that politics was transformed into an

autonomous activity and realm distinct from the influence of the gods.[227] The gods,

however, are not absent from *The Peloponnesian War* nor was politics considered to be

autonomous from religion. Thucydides' description of Nicias' fatal decision to delay the

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[226] Thucydides 6.27.

[227] Peter Euben, *Corrupting Youth: Political Education, Democratic Culture, and Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997) 77.

army's withdrawal from Sicily immediately after the defeat at Epipolae in 413 suggests

that Thucydides was not averse to religious devotion but only to excessive degrees of

devotion and superstition. The delay was partly based on the possibility of not being able

to undertake a successful retreat and partly on the hostility that he thought would greet

him in Athens if the expedition was aborted.[228] The delayed retreat was both a military

and personal decision but the desecration of the Hermae implies the possibility of portent.

When Nicias is eventually persuaded to withdraw by his fellow commanders after the

arrival of substantial Syracusan reinforcements, an eclipse of the moon further postpones

the withdrawal on account of Nicias' acceptance of the soothsayers' recommendations.

> When everything was ready and they were at the point of sailing, there was
> an eclipse of the moon, which was at the full. Most of the Athenians took
> this event so seriously that they now urged the generals to wait, and
> Nicias, who was rather over-inclined to divination and such things, said
> that until they waited for the thrice nine days recommended by the
> soothsayers, he would not even join in any further discussion on how the
> move could be made.[229]

The phrase that Nicias was "rather over-inclined to divination" is integral to interpreting

this passage as an expression of Thucydides' own view of religion's relevance in

determining political action. The eclipse of the moon did provoke an excessive response

on the part of Nicias but Thucydides' criticism of the reaction does not mean that he

disparaged religious appeals. Because Thucydides indicates that there is an acceptable

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[228] Thucydides 7.48.

[229] Thucydides 7.50.

degree of religious devotion. the issue is the way in which divine symbols are interpreted

by political leaders and soothsayers. Nicias' overly pious deferral to the recommendations

of soothsayers prevented him from interpreting the eclipse in a way that would allow the

expedition's retreat to continue while still offering deference to the religious significance

of the event. Thucydides offers a figurative rather than a literal interpretation of the divine

in place of Nicias' over-inclination to divination and to the other extreme of divine parity

as practiced by the irreverent Athenians at Melos.

Interpreting the Divine

A figurative interpretation of the divine parallels a religious as opposed to a

theological interpretation. Figurative interpretations are metaphorically fluid, reflecting an

imprecise sense of religious wonder while literal interpretations reduce metaphor to a

theological code of rational analysis.[230] Themistocles' interpretation of the Delphic oracle

before the battle of Salamis as described by Herodotus and Thucydides' own account of

Hermocrates' decision not to immediately pursue the retreating Athenians after the

Syracusan naval victory at sea in 413 suggest a figurative way of deferring to the divine

without being overly-inclined to theology and absolutism. Themistocles recognized the

authority of the Delphic Oracle concerning the fate of Athens but disagreed with the

interpretation of the prophecies given by soothsayers. Unlike Nicias' theological

acceptance of the soothsayers' interpretation, Themistocles' religious beliefs allowed him

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[230] Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth* (New York: Anchor Books-Double Day, 1988) 173- 74.

to figuratively understand the prophecy which enabled him to propose a convincing

counter-interpretation that allowed the Athenians to successfully repel the Persian

invasion.[231]

A revised realist understanding of Themistocles' figurative interpretation of the

Delphic Oracle is not synonymous with Leo Strauss' faith in the ability of the

philosophically wise

> ...to look for a standard with reference to which we can judge the ideals of
> our own as well as of any other society. That standard cannot be found in
> the needs of various societies, for the societies and their parts have many
> needs that conflict with one another: this problem cannot be solved in a
> rational manner if we do not have a standard with reference to which we
> can distinguish between genuine needs and fancied needs and discern the
> hierarchy of the various types of genuine needs. The problem posed by the
> conflicting needs of society cannot be solved if we do not possess
> knowledge of the natural right.[232]

Whereas a figurative interpretation of the divine recognizes human finiteness, the

codification of the "natural right" overlooks the susceptibility of "the wise" to hubris and

corruption, exaggerating their ability to possess knowledge of the natural right.[233] When

the sense of religious awe and wonder is replaced by a self-assured knowledge, what is to

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[231] "The Athenians found Themistocles' explanation of the oracle preferable to that of the
professional interpreters, who had not only tried to dissuade them from preparing to fight
at sea but had been against offering opposition of any sort." Herodotus 7.143.

[232] Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953)
2-3.

[233] Leo Strauss, *Spinzoa's Critique of Religion,* trans. E. M. Sinclair (New York:
Schocken, 1965) 47.

prevent the wise from creating pernicious myths like the ones propagated through fascist

ideologies. The danger of placing too much faith in the ability of the wise to rule is

captured by the following assertion by Strauss.

> It would be absurd to hamper the free flow of wisdom by any regulations;
> hence the rule of the wise must be absolute rule. It would be equally
> absurd to hamper the free flow of wisdom by consideration of the unwise
> wishes of the unwise; hence the wise rulers ought not to be responsible to
> their unwise subjects.[234]

Thucydides' account of Hermocrates' respect for the Syracusan victory

celebration and religious observances is not indicative of how a leader absurdly succumbs

to the wishes of the unwise. Even though Hermocrates thought it best to immediately

pursue the retreating Athenians, he did not force his troops to give up their victory

celebrations and religious observances despite the military danger involved in postponing

the pursuit of the retreating Athenian army.[235] Hermocrates opted for an alternative course

of action that postponed the Athenian retreat by disguising the information which the

Athenian generals thought they were receiving from Syracusans loyal to Athens. In

contrast, Nicias' steadfast literal acceptance of the soothsayer's requirement of a 27-day

delay reflects a misplaced piety implying that the will of the gods can be known with

some precision.

> Yet throughout my life I have worshiped the gods as I ought, and my
> conduct towards men has been just and without reproach. Because of this I

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[234] Strauss, *Natural Right and History* 140.

[235] Thucydides 7.73.

> have strong hope for the future. and these disasters do not terrify me as they might well do....and, if any of the gods was angry with us at our setting out, by this time we have been sufficiently punished. Other men before us have attacked their neighbours, and, after doing what men will do, have suffered no more than men can bear. So it is now reasonable for us to hope that the gods will be kinder to us, since by now we deserve their pity rather than their jealousy.[236]

For Nicias to believe that the Athenians had been sufficiently punished reflects an excessive piety bordering on hubris. Nicias' plea that the gods should now substitute pity for their previous jealousy towards Athens' achievements is in accordance with the way in which the Athenians at Melos thought they should not fear to be at a disadvantage so far as the gods were concerned.[237] Both sentiments reflect the idea that Athens was on par with the gods. Nicias had brought ruin to himself but he had also brought collective ruin to the Athenian expedition.

Conclusion

The possibility of there being a divine dimension to human history is left open by Thucydides. To explain the Athenian defeat solely in terms of divine retribution is too simplistic, yet not recognizing the element of divine retribution in Thucydides' text is simplistic as well. Under the delusion of hubris. the Athenians failed to realize that power is not an absolute. The greater the increase in and exercise of power, the greater the increase in those resisting domination. Thucydides imparts the idea that humans are in

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[236] Thucydides 7.77.

[237] Thucydides 5.105.

control of themselves and morally aware but he also expresses that individuals and states are limited in their abilities to prevent the onset of hubris once success mounts. Hubris is bound to recur since human reasoning is just as capable of pursuing the malevolent and the unjust as it is of pursuing the benign and the just. During peacetime there is more opportunity for love, altruism and forgiveness to flourish but as Thucydides makes dishearteningly clear, wartime unleashes selfishness, greed and cruelty. Even though Thucydides doubts humanity's ability to act prudently in the absence of norms of moral conduct he also suggests that the basis for prudent conduct must transcend both philosophy and politics. When power becomes the only standard of appeal, justice can no longer moderate domestic and international relations on the basis of invoking a shared humanity. Instead of embracing the idea of inter-state relations as existing outside of the sphere of "true morality" to a greater extent than the "genuine morality and citizenship" that purportedly exists within city-states[238] as suggested by Johnson Bagby, Thucydides confronts the illusion that power offers freedom from moral restraint despite the borders which international relations scholars may impose. Thucydides conveys that the illusion of power can be mitigated by figuratively appealing to a divine truth.

The continuity that is the human condition allows Thucydides to claim that his account of the war will provide an understanding of how the past will at some time and in much the same way be repeated in the future. With human nature "being what it is", there

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[238] Laurie M. Johnson Bagby, "Thucydidean Realism: Between Athens and Melos," *Security Studies* 5 (1995-96): 190.

are changes in the expressed characteristics that comprise the human condition but not in its essence. An understanding of rather than solutions for the encountered themes surrounding issues of justice, the best form of government, the idea of historical progress, and divine intervention find no resolution in the text. No vaccinations for the Plague or infallible procedures to prevent the onset of civil war are given, only reminders of how the corrupting effects of power brought on by hubris eventually overtake the perpetrator from within. To moderate the corrupting effects of hubris, Thucydides provides a heightened awareness of how unpredictability and ungovernability define war, and most importantly, of how war affects human behavior when the constraints of political order are compromised. In an effort to further this awareness, Polybius' corresponding forewarning of how the pursuit of power eventually implodes back upon the perpetrator will also demonstrate that although the historical process allows for the influence of human agency, the recurrence of hubris speaks to the possibilities and limitations attainable by human beings in constructing political institutions.

CHAPTER 3

POLYBIUS AND THE CYCLE OF CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

When Scipio thought that a sufficient number of troops had entered he sent most of them, as is Roman custom, against the inhabitants of the city with orders to kill all they encountered, sparing none. and not to start pillaging until the signal was given. They do this. I think. to inspire terror, so that when towns are taken by the Romans one may often see not only the corpses of human beings, but dogs cut in half. and the dismembered limbs of other animals. and on this occasion such scenes were very many owing to the numbers of those in the place.

Polybius, Affairs in Spain[239]

Unlike Thucydides. Polybius' *Histories* have been almost completely neglected by the international relations field. This chapter aims to introduce Polybius to an international relations audience and address the limitations that the human character places on the ability of political institutions to mitigate intra- and inter-state conflict. Although Polybius did not intend to have his ideas apply to international relations theory, the neglect of the *Histories* is still puzzling. Polybius' explorations into the human character. his awareness of the corrupting effects of hubris on foreign policy decisions, and his invocation of Fortune are still pertinent inquires: they bring the dilemmas of power and morality back to the forefront of international relations theory, emphasizing the practical challenges involved in making prudent choices for which there are no perfect solutions.

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[239] Polybius, *The Histories,* trans. W.R.Paton (New York: G.P.Putnam's Sons,1922) 10.15.

In an effort to remind future generations of the disasters suffered by others[240],

Polybius invokes a heightened awareness of how issues of power and domination pervade

all human relationships despite ever-changing historical environments. That power

corrupts may appear to be a trite observation but it speaks to the enduring importance of

how its exercise and preservation hinges on the moral choices made by individuals and

their communities. The enduring practical lessons which Polybius sought to derive from

the Republic's conquests hinge on his observations of the human character and how these

characteristics shaped the institutional expression of state and empire. Descriptions of

Philip V. Hannibal and Scipio which stress the moral character of leadership convey how

successful conquest and hegemony should exhibit restraint and, as much as possible,

benevolence. Carthage's harsh treatment of its Spanish subjects and Rome's complete

destruction of Carthage during the Third Punic War illustrates the difficulties of restraint

and the susceptibility of the human character to the dangers of hubris. Individual

characteristics can be collectively tempered through leadership and the institution of the

state but no such institution has ever existed with the absolute authority to adjudicate

between states. Polybius' reflection on a dispute between Antiochus III and Ptolemy IV in

the absence of such an authority suggests that the state is not the highest authority to

which to defer.

Whereas Thucydides emphasizes the difficulty which institutions have in

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[240] Polybius 3.31.

restraining the malignant tendencies within the human condition, especially during war.

Polybius stresses how a state's constitution can markedly influence the success or failure

of political action within and between states. Polybius' cycle of constitutional change

which oscillates between six basic forms of state differing in terms of political

inclusiveness and degree of exploitation is indicative of the relationship between

recurring human character traits and constitutional change. Although Polybius believed

that the mixed constitution of the Roman Republic was the most capable institutional

form for maintaining domestic order and managing the empire. his aristocratic bias calls

into question the Republic's ability to check internal disorder and limit the cruelty

inflicted on foreign adversaries and subject states. Nevertheless, he does blur the

distinction between domestic and international relations by listing the threats posed by

barbarians, hired foreign mercenaries, the masses, young aristocrats and women. Like the

the cycle of constitutions, these threats emphasize how human characteristics ultimately

define political institutions and contest the belief in a common evolutionary pattern for all

human societies in the direction of liberal democracies and the eventual attainment of a

worldwide democratic peace.[241] A figurative understanding of Polybius' cycle of

constitutions and his invocation of Fortune suggests a more prudent way of grappling

with issues arising from the exercise of power in an international arena, issues whose

absolute resolution can only exist outside of the human experience.

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[241] Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1992) 47-48.

Purpose. Human Character and *The Histories*

Polybius was a Greek historian and statesman born towards the end of the third century in the city of Megalopolis. As the son of Lycortes, a prominent figure in the Achaean confederacy, he benefitted from a privileged upbringing providing him with the social background necessary to be commended to his Roman captors. Brought to Rome in 168 as a prisoner, his aristocratic birth and learning allowed him access to members of leading Roman families and later to become the mentor to the influential Publius Scipio. Thus, Polybius became privy to the details of various Roman campaigns, some of which he participated in. Access to information provided Polybius with the foundation to explain Rome's achievements and his insistence that history be based on true and accurate narration.[242] Thucydides' intention of writing a "useful" as opposed to "romantic" account of the Peloponnesian War was embraced by Polybius who was also wary of writing a history rife with sensationalized historical descriptions designed to "thrill and charm".[243] Just as Thucydides' text was designed to have lasting not just immediate value, Polybius also intended to provide his audience with an account of the Roman Republic that would have a "permanent, not temporary" effect on subsequent readers. To achieve enduring value for future generations by examining "actual facts",

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[242] *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* 1209-10.

[243] Polybius 10.15. The corresponding aims of Thucydides and Polybius are augmented by their shared Greekness, military experience as generals and time spent away from their home cities in exile. F.W. Walbank, *Polybius* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972) 40-41.

Polybius' history of Rome's ascendence was to be "at once an education in the truest sense and a training for a political career, and that the most infallible, indeed the only method of learning how to bear with dignity the vicissitudes of fortune is to be reminded of the disasters suffered by others."[244] To judge whether Roman rule was right and honorable, Polybius' *Histories* delve into the moral decisions faced by individuals and their communities providing contemporary readers with the ability to contemplate why an understanding of the human character, hubris and Fortune is pertinent for the study of international relations.

Polybius' description of Philip V exposes the malleability of the human character pointing to how the advice of friends and advisors often leads statespersons to speak and act in a manner contrary to their real intentions. Philip V is initially described as having been "richly endowed by nature" with good qualities for ruling given his intelligence, memory, charm and presence.[245] Yet, these qualities did not endure as Philip succumbs to a "total change" of character after his attack on the neighboring city-state of Messene. The bad counsel he received from advisors like Demetrius of Pharos spurred on the "evil" impulses within his character, earning him a reputation for cruelty and impiety.[246]

> Following the advice of Demetrius he was not only guilty of impiety to the
> gods by destroying the offerings consecrated to them, but he sinned against

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[244] Polybius 3.31.

[245] Polybius 4.77, 10.26.

[246] Polybius 7.13.

men by transgressing the laws of war, and spoilt his own projects by
showing himself the implacable and cruel foe of his adversaries.[247]

Exactly what these "laws of war" refer to may have been contained in the lost books of

the *Histories* but it is safe to assume that Polybius deemed cruelty towards an adversary

as being intolerable. regardless of whether one is young and susceptible to manipulation.

The susceptibility of leaders to manipulation brings up an issue that has resonance

for our contemporary world. If Polybius is correct in stressing the malleability of the

human character. could malign behavior not be corrected and ultimately eradicated

through reasoned education and counsel stressing the virtues of non-violence and benign

cooperation? It would appear then that the Pol Pots and Sadaam Husseins of the world

have been ill-educated -Pol Pot's studies at the Sorbonne notwithstanding- rather than

expressing deep-seated malign aspects of a human nature impervious to reason. Even the

Histories appear to affirm the progressive virtues of education and council when the

Cynaetheans. who, according to Polybius. consistently committed the greatest crimes in

Greece. were able to moderate their "savage" ways.[248]

Despite this glimmer of optimism, Polybius considered that over time the ability

of human behavior to attain and consistently maintain the expression of positive character

traits like loyalty, compassion and conscience was not sustainable. "Many men. it would

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[247] Polybius 7.14.

[248] In conjunction with Heaven granting them better fortune, Polybius held out the
possibility that the Cynaethans would be able to "humanize" themselves through
education and music. Polybius 9.21.

seem, are desirous of doing what is good, but few have the courage to attempt it, and very few indeed of these who do attempt it fully accomplish their duty in every respect."[249] Therefore, Polybius sets limits to the possibilities which education and training can have in facilitating self-improvement and civic virtue. He was not optimistic about the ability of global leaders to face moral challenges both personally and on behalf of their constituents given the ultimate weakness of the human character and an inherent proneness towards indolence, drunkenness, cowardice, stupidity, vanity, arrogance, and anger.[250] It is, therefore, not surprising that Polybius considers humans to be the cleverest yet least intelligent of all the animals, [251] a consideration that also extends to institutional construction.

<u>The Moral Challenges of Empire</u>

Polybius was not interested in why Rome sought an empire since it was obvious to him and to his Greek contemporaries that human beings were naturally inclined to extend their authority.[252] However, Polybius did not define domestic and inter-state

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[249] Polybius 27.20.

[250] Polybius 3.81.

[251] Polybius 6.9.18.15. The combination of avarice with a lust for power eventually degenerates into bestiality.

[252] Jacqueline de Romilly, *The Rise and Fall of States According to Greek Authors* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1977) 19.

relations solely from the point of view of power politics.[253] Not all forms of rule were

equally corrupting since the exercise of political power is not necessarily synonymous

with brute force. For both moral and practical reasons, successful conquest and hegemony

must exercise benevolence.[254] It is more prudent to rule by generosity and decency than by

cruelty and intimidation. In Polybius' words,

> ...it has been observed over and over again that men gain power by acting
> humanely towards their neighbors and by holding out the prospect of a
> better life for the future. But if they have achieved the desired supremacy,
> they then maltreat their subjects and govern them tyrannically, it is only
> natural that when the policy of the rulers has changed, the attitude of their
> subjects should follow suit.[255]

He advocated constraint on the part of states including the observance of treaties, formal

declarations of war, the sparing of property and the treatment of the weak with justice.[256]

To deprive an enemy of a year's harvest without any room for redress was considered by

Polybius to be a very serious mistake[257] as was the Carthagenian alienation of their

Spanish subjects. The Carthagenians, unable to restrain themselves from engaging in

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[253] Contrary to Donald Kagan, *The Great Dialogue: History of Greek Political Thought from Homer to Polybius* (New York: The Free Press, 1965) 259.

[254] This concurs with Diodotus' assertions in the Mytilinean debate that Athens employ good administration and, on occasion, voluntarily endure injustice. Thucydides 3.46-47.

[255] Polybius 10.36.

[256] Arthur M. Eckstein, *Moral Vision in The Histories of Polybius* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1995) 196.

[257] Polybius 23.15.

avarice and cruelty.[258] impart Polybius' message that the political challenges involved in acquiring and holding an empire are also moral challenges since the maintenance of rule depends on the moral fibre of individuals to resist the temptations of immoderate behavior that comes with success.

An added difficulty in preventing mistakes and promoting restraint in inter-state relations is that conflict can be managed more successfully within local, tradition-bound political communities than between diverse communities lacking an authority capable of enforcing compliance, a difficulty that persists to this day. The international relations field conventionally takes the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 as the benchmark for the onset of the modern state system but the *Histories* suggests that the mutual recognition of autonomy and non-interference were present much earlier. Polybius points to a dispute between Antiochus III and Ptolemy IV in 218 which could only be resolved through war since "there was no one to interpose between them with the power of preventing and restraining any disposition that displayed itself to transgress the bounds of justice."[259] The transgression of these boundaries was exacerbated by the aggrandizement practiced by larger states and the limitations placed on the options available to smaller states. Reminiscent of the Melian Dialogue as captured by Thucydides, the debate recorded between Aristaenus and Philopoemen on the matter of Achean policy towards Rome in

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[258] Polybius 9.11.

[259] Polybius 5.67.

198 similarly reveals the predicaments faced by small states in balancing independence

with subjugation. Aristaenus advocated a policy of obedience towards Rome given

Achaea's relative weakness while Philopoemen advocated resistance against possible

enslavement since "a stronger power is always naturally disposed to press harder on those

who submit to it".[260] The Melians had been faced with the decision of whether to submit

or to resist but. whereas Thucydides refrains from passing explicit judgment on the

Melian resistance, Polybius is not so restrained. Polybius considers Aristaenus' position

as being plausible and Philopoemen's as being honorable. yet he was adamantly critical

of states opposing Rome militarily when they could have acted prudently and settled for

practical advantage.[261] Polybius does make an exception when the terms imposed are

unduly harsh. condoning Carthage's rejection of the harsh conditions of peace offered by

Rome during the First Punic War.[262]

Whether it was a small state deciding between practical advantage or honor, or a

larger state imposing its rule, the policy decisions taken were more than just political

challenges. The behavior of Scipio after his victory at Baecula in 208 over Hasdrubal's

Carthagenian-led army exemplifies the qualities of restraint required for subsuming one's

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[260] Polybius 14.13.

[261] Eckstein. *Moral Vision* 210.

[262] Polybius 1.31.

private interests to the more public interests of the state.[263] When Scipio was approached

and addressed in a regal manner by Spanish chieftains formerly allied with the

Carthagenians. Polybius praised Scipio's ability to resist the temptations of hubris when

he could have obtained royal power anywhere he chose.

> Such success indeed might have made not only a man, but if it is permitted
> to say so, even a god overweening. And yet Scipio so far excelled all other
> men in greatness of mind, that when kingship, the greatest blessing for
> which any man would dare to pray to the gods, was often offered to him by
> fortune, he refused it, and valued more highly his country and his own
> loyalty to her than the thing which is the object of universal admiration
> and envy.[264]

The restraint observed in Scipio's behavior was particularly noteworthy for Polybius

since empire-building and the influx of wealth could foster hubris and threaten a state's

ability to restrain political rivalries, corruption, idleness and demagoguery.

Polybius cautions that there is a strong tendency on the part of those with power

and wealth to become overbearing, ironically reducing one's power over others as

ambition begins to disregard prudence.[265] With prudence entailing an awareness that the

real source of power exists outside of oneself and hubris being the mistaken assumption

that power emanates from within oneself, the words attributed to Hannibal by Polybius

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[263] It must be remembered that Polybius' high regard of Scipio is not diminished by
Scipio's victory at New Carthage. The Roman custom of letting troops loose against the
inhabitants such that there was an extermination of every form of life including dogs
being cut into halves did not change Polybius' opinion. Polybius 10.15

[264] Polybius 10.40.

[265] Polybius 6.18.

are indicative of the dangers of overstepping one's boundaries.

> I am that Hannibal who after the battle of Cannae became master of almost the whole of Italy, who later advanced up to Rome itself, pitched camp within five miles of her walls, and there took thought as to how I should deal with you and your country. Today I am here in Africa, on the point of negotiating with you, a Roman, concerning my country's very existence and my own. Remember this change of Fortune, I beg you, and do not be over-proud, but keep your thoughts upon the human scale of things; in other words, follow that course which will produce the most good and the fewest evil consequences.[266]

Hannibal's admonition to focus on the "human-scale" recognizes the danger of hubris and

does so by enduing this danger with religious connotations. In the first volume of the

Histories Polybius observes that the Romans were in such high spirits over the capture of

Agrigentum in the First Punic War (264-241) that they aspired to much more than their

original objectives.[267] To simply ascribe these aspirations to material avarice neglects the

religious connotations embedded within the ancient Greek and Roman understanding of

hubris and its coupling with imperial aggrandizement. It also neglects the limitations that

Polybius associates with all constitutional forms of state regarding the ability to offer new

political initiatives, both domestic and international, capable of containing hubris.

Cyclical Change and Forms of State

The Roman Republic reflected a general process rooted in a "an inevitable law of

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[266] Polybius 15.7.

[267] Polybius 1.20.

nature", guiding the transition from kingship to mob rule along a repeating continuum.[268]

The transitions arising in Polybius' cyclical theory of constitutional change associates the

recurrence of hubris and generational change with six basic forms of state, including

kingship, aristocracy and democracy as well as the corresponding corruption of these

forms into tyranny, oligarchy and mob rule. Each constitution contains its own internal

vices with kingship's being tyranny or despotism, aristocracy's oligarchy, and

democracy's mob rule.[269] To establish the foundations on which this cycle rests, Polybius

posits that individuals first joined together to form communities out of weakness and the

needed protection provided by a strong leader rather than from a need for justice and

human happiness.[270] Over time, familial and social relationships developed to coincide

with a move away from the fear of violence operative under tyrannical rule to the

persuasive reasoning exercised by a king.[271] It was under a kingly rule that "notions of

goodness, justice, and their opposites" arose, implying that humankind's ability to acquire

moral understanding was simultaneously accompanied by an opposite trend towards

immorality.

The particular way in which the cycle of constitutions unfolds is contestable but

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[268] Polybius 6.10.

[269] Polybius 6.2-4.

[270] Polybius 6.5; Kurt von Fritz, *The Theory of the Mixed Constitution in Antiquity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954) 49-50.

[271] Polybius 6.6.

Polybius' attempt to relate constitutional change to recurring human character traits

speaks to what he deems to be an inherent need for communities to "find a master and

despot".[272] When rule is inherited and external invasion improbable, prosperity leads the

progeny of previous rulers into irresistible temptations including indulgences in food,

dress, drink and sexual relations at the expense of the ruled.[273] To counter these vices, a

king, aristocracy, or the general populace seeks to re-establish a moral form of

governance through revolution by reinstating a reverence for the gods, care for one's

parents, respect for the elderly and obedience of the laws.

To understand the rise and greatness of Rome, Polybius claimed that the Republic

was able to combine the merits of kinship, aristocracy and democracy into mixed

constitutional rule, checking the pretensions of one individual or group by acting as a

brake on politicians poised to inherit rule.[274] Polybius considers the Roman Republic at

the time of Cannae in 216 to be representative of a mixed form of state capable of halting

the monopolization of political power by balancing the power exerted by the consuls,

Senate and assemblies to indefinitely postpone the corruption of rule.[275] With moral

leaders like Scipio, the Republic's mixed constitution could help to forestall the natural

decay brought about by idleness and corruption to foster a Republic of extraordinary

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[272] Polybius 6.9.

[273] Polybius 6.8.

[274] Polybius 6.11.

[275] Polybius 6.9.

strength.[276] Polybius deemed the Republic's mixed constitution to have so successfully

delayed the onset of corruption that it had allowed the Romans "in a very short period of

time to bring the whole world under their rule".[277]

Polybius' emphasis on Rome's adeptness at political compromise neglects to

consider how the mixed constitution actually worked to ensure the aristocratic

domination of the state, thereby questioning the ability of the Republic to check its own

aristocratic pretensions. The mixed constitution of the Republic was biased towards the

aristocracy despite the balance of power alluded to by Polybius since it was the Senate

which exerted the most predominant influence. Polybius explains how the consuls were

kept in check by the Senate and the people, and how the people were kept in check by the

Senate and the consuls. Instead of being counterbalanced by the people and the consuls,

the Senate was only counterbalanced by the people who were proportionally under-

represented as a political force in the Republic. Most modern historians generally

acknowledge that the Senate was the predominant authority within the state during the

Second Punic War, supporting Polybius' own claim that the Senate's wise council was

the primary factor enabling Rome to avoid defeat by Carthage.[278]

Reaffirming Polybius' aristocratic bias and the inherent stability of the Republic's

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[276] Polybius 6.18.

[277] Polybius 6.50.

[278] von Fritz 159; G.W.Trompf, *The Idea of Historical Recurrence in Western Thought: From Antiquity to the Reformation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979) 55.

mixed constitution are the comparisons that he makes between Rome and the mixed

constitutions he observed at Carthage and Sparta. Carthage's constitution during the

Second Punic War is considered to have been mixed but weaker than Rome's because the

democratic element in Carthage had become predominant.[279] Sparta's mixed constitution,

on the other hand, was considered to be the artificial creation of one man, Lycurgus. A

naturally-occurring mixed constitution like Rome's was preferable since it would be

better able to weather unforeseen circumstances impinging on the state which were

beyond the abilities of one person, no matter how great, to manage. Even with almost

"divine wisdom", Polybius faults Lycurgus for not pursuing external expansion after

conquering Messina, a fault which was not shared by either Rome or Carthage.[280] The

limited but critical discussion of democratic forms of state in Athens and Thebes further

reinforces Polybius' argument that an aristocratically-dominated, mixed constitution was

the best form of state capable of maintaining internal stability relative to the vagarities of

inter-state relations. The grandeur of Athens and Thebes was not due to their constitutions

but due to chance and to the valor of a few great leaders. [281]

A democratically-inclined reader may disagree with Polybius yet recognize that

his elaboration on the importance of moral discipline on the part of the populace,

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[279] Polybius 6.51.

[280] Polybius 6.48.

[281] Polybius 6.44.

particularly the responsibilities entrusted to the political elite. links moral choices with

the repercussions arising from the external environment in which states participate.

Besides the ever-present threat of hubris and the readily-apparent external threats posed

by the Carthagenians and the Greeks. Polybius considers four other threats facing the

Roman Republic[282] that blur the distinction between the individual, state and systemic

levels of analysis in international relations. There were the external threats from

"uncivilized" and "lawless barbarians" who had an unpredictable and potentially

destabilizing effect on civilized society. There were foreign mercenaries who, upon hire,

could turn from a potential external threat into an internal one. Their lack of discipline

and proneness to arrogance easily inclined them to rebel and inflict the worst kinds of

savagery.[283] Threats directly emanating from within the state came from two sources with

the first coming from the masses. With the onset of moral decay and aristocratic

infighting. the latent desire of the masses for the property of the aristocracy would bring

about disorder culminating in civil war.[284] The land proposal measures introduced by

Gaius Flaminius to distribute land to the poor was considered by Polybius as being the

first step towards the demoralization of the Roman people. The source of the second

internal threat emanated from young aristocrats and women. The aristocratic young

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[282] Eckstein. *Moral Vision* 119.

[283] Eckstein, *Moral Vision* 126.

[284] Polybius 2.2.

having inherited rather than earned their authority were prone to abandoning their

responsibilities for immoral pursuits.

> But here again the next generation inherited the same position of authority
> as their fathers. They in turn had no experience of misfortunes and no
> tradition of civil equality and freedom of speech, since they had been
> reared from the cradle in an atmosphere of authority and privilege.[285]

Regarding the threat posed by women, Polybius does not elaborate in any detail since for

him the subject matter of war and politics were exclusively male domains but like men,

women are referred to as having a potentially destabilizing effect on society given their

ability to manipulate and engage in cruel acts.[286] Polybius' lessons for dealing with these

threats were as follows: the response to the barbarians was courage, to the mercenaries

exclusion, to the masses and aristocracy self-control, to the young the need for education,

training and discipline and to women a stable married life with self-discipline on the part

of the male.[287] Notwithstanding Polybias' prejudices, his overall message remains intact:

correct and honorable conduct including a respect for the gods, custom, and honoring

one's parents was and is vital for the maintenance of political order.

All political orders eventually give way as Polybius thought it "impossible" that a

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[285] Polybius 6.8.

[286] Polybius 14.7, 18.17.

[287] Eckstein. *Moral Vision* 159. Polybius' elitist and sexist views aside, his understanding of threat as having domestic as well as external origins speaks to the creation of an enemy or "other". Unity can and has been achieved at the expense of scapegoating a group or people who threaten a political order.

constitution could avoid degenerating into a debased form of itself and Rome, no matter

how grand, was like any other state in this regard. Rome's mixed constitution had a

beginning and an end that was inseparable from the constitutional forms preceding it and

those that would eventually succeed it.

The Political Cycle and International Relations

> Such is the cycle of political revolution, the law of nature according to
> which constitutions change, are transformed, and finally revert to their
> original form. Anyone who has a clear grasp of this process might perhaps
> go wrong, when he speaks of the future of the state, in his forecast of the
> time it will take for the process of change to take place, but so long as his
> judgement is not distorted by animosity or envy he will seldom be
> mistaken as to the stage of growth or decline which a given community
> has reached, or as to the form into which it will change.[288]

The way in which Polybius' passage on the political cycle is interpreted has

repercussions for determining whether the cycle of constitutions can be applied

practically to antiquity and also whether Polybius' ideas on constitutional change are

relevant to the study of international relations. A literal reading has suggested that

Polybius offers the most extreme claim for a scientific study of politics to be found in all

of Greek political thought.[289] Corresponding with a literal reading are neo-realist claims

that the study of international relations is amenable to scientific testing as a way of

discovering history's fixed constants.[290] The problem with associating Polybius' theory of

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[288] Polybius 6.9.

[289] Kagan, *The Great Dialogue* 260.

[290] Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* 66.

the cycle of constitutions with scientific testing is that even though Polybius held that

predictions could be made by applying his cycle theory, fixed principles were not

applicable to the study of international behavior. The fundamental difference between

internal and external relations was that while constitutional transformations were

predictable and cyclically recurring, the external environment in which states functioned

did not correspond to any certain pattern.

> The fact, then, that all existing things are subject to decay is a proposition
> which scarcely requires proof, since the inexorable course of nature is
> sufficient to impose it on us. Every kind of state, we may say is liable to
> decline from two sources, the one being external, and the other due to its
> own internal evolution. For the first we cannot lay down any fixed
> principle, but the second pursues a regular sequence.[291]

No definite pattern could be ascertained in inter-state relations and even the

regular sequence within the cycle of constitutions was not necessarily amenable to

scientific laws. Relying on a strict reading imposes a more literal rendering of Polybius'

theory than may have been intended. The aims of Polybius' teachings were not to deny

the uniqueness of events but to interpret the meaning of history in relation to how

individual actions can either postpone or hasten the inevitable degeneration and collapse

facing all forms of state. There is continuity amongst humans despite the immediacy of

their particular social context and it is the continuity between patterns of individual and

social conduct that allow Polybius' lessons on the dangers of hubris to be imparted and

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[291] Polybius 6.57.

understood by succeeding generations. A literal interpretation hampers his cycle theory by

rigidly confining it to a dependence on historical fact contrary to Polybius' criticism of

the "complexity" of detail contained in the theories of Plato and those of "certain other

philosophers" regarding how states naturally transform themselves.[292] It is perhaps for this

reason that Polybius' understanding of Roman and Greek constitutional history is not

altogether precise in its details. Polybius' knowledge of Greek history would have alerted

him to the discrepancy between the pattern of constitutional change suggested by his

cycle theory and the overthrow of monarchical rule in Athens.[293] He would have been

aware of how monarchical rule was not overthrown in Athens because kings had become

tyrannical but because aristocratic landowners had become increasingly powerful relative

to the kings. Since history did not literally follow the cycle of constitutions, Polybius

instead appeals to the "common intelligence of mankind", encapsulated in his basic

lesson that all constitutions eventually succumb to the temptations of power.

A figurative understanding of Polybius' cycle of constitutions challenges those

approaches to international relations seeking to impose law-like generalizations onto the

study of international relations.[294] This figurative understanding is also applicable to

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[292] Polybius 6.5.

[293] von Fritz 73.

[294] These approaches are identified in Robert Cox, "Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory," in *Neorealism and Its Critics*,ed. Robert Keohane (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

Polybius' insight into the options and limitations imposed by Fortune. The resonance for

contemporary international relations theory is that the idea of Fortune still speaks to the

dilemma of whether there exists, or needs to exist, a belief in a transcendent objective

moral standard to guide choice and mediate the differences of political belief.

The Deification of Fortune

Polybius is considered as having a political view of religion with the question

being not whether gods exist but that people believe that they should.[295]

> But as the masses are always fickle, filled with lawless desires,
> unreasoning anger and violent passions, they can only be restrained by
> mysterious terrors or other dramatizations of the subject. For this reason I
> believe that the ancients were by no means acting foolishly or haphazardly
> when they introduced to the people various notions concerning the gods
> and belief in the punishment of Hades, but rather that the moderns are
> foolish and take great risks in rejecting them.[296]

The masses and magistrates could be better trusted if they adhered to religious oaths with

the belief in an authority superseding human-made laws being needed by both rulers and

the ruled. Fortune could refer to natural occurrences like droughts or floods[297] but

Polybius also deifies Fortune, suggesting the possibility of a divine governance over

human affairs. Individuals or communities guilty of hubris for their godlessness and

lawlessness would not only suffer moral condemnation from intentionally dishonorable

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[295] Walbank, *Polybius* 59.

[296] Polybius 6.56.

[297] Polybius 36.17.

conduct which could afflict both the wise and "common person" alike, but they would

also suffer divine retribution.[298] Polybius' castigation of Philip V and Antiochus III for

their predatory, brutal and generally wicked secret treaty against Ptolemy V in 203

exemplifies Fortune's retributive justice.

> Who can look into this treaty as into a mirror without fancying that he sees
> reflected in it the image of all impiety towards God and all savagery, as
> well as of the unbounded covetousness of these two kings? But at the same
> time who among those who reasonably find fault with Fortune for her
> conduct of affairs, will not be reconciled to her when he learns how she
> afterwards made them pay due penalty.....she raised up against them the
> Romans, and very justly and properly visited them with the very evils
> which they had been contrary to all law designing to bring upon others.[299]

The moral challenges and possible consequences faced by individuals making choices on

behalf of their community in the context of Fortune's discourse are also evident in

Polybius' narrative of Rome's destruction of Carthage. Fortune dictates outcomes but

individuals are able to make choices within this discourse in much the same way that the

use of speeches and debates in the *Peloponnesian War* allows for the role of human

agency.[300] Interpreting the destruction of Carthage as a moral issue links the actions taken

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[298] Polybius 6.56. Polybius asserts that a state entirely composed of "wisemen" might not
need religion. This assumption rests on the premise that the wise would be able to control
their violent passions but such an ideal is contrary to humankind's inability to cultivate
moderation and restraint. In other words, to achieve an ideal state comprised of the wise
would require humankind to be transformed into something against its nature.

[299] Polybius 15.20.

[300] Supernatural control ultimately determines Rome's success but as pointed out by
Walbank, whether Philip V captures Melitaea depends on the length of his ladders. F.W.
Walbank, "Supernatural Paraphernalia in Polybius' 'Histories'," in *Ventures into Greek*

against Carthage with the possible repercussions affecting the future stability of the

Roman state. Fortune may have been more favorably disposed towards the Romans in

allowing them to become the "rulers and masters of the whole world"[301] but it is the

foreboding expressed by Scipio's deference to Fortune at the very moment of triumph

over Carthage that is of particular interest to students of international relations. According

to Polybius. Scipio was so moved by the destruction that he grasped Polybius' hand to

reflect on how one day a similar fate would befall Rome. Scipio's fear that Rome would

burn sometime in the future was the type of sober reasoning Polybius thought worthy of

the utmost praise:

> For at the moment of our greatest triumph and of disaster to our enemies to
> reflect on our own situation and on the possible reversal of circumstances,
> and generally to bear in mind at the season of success the mutability of
> Fortune, is like a great and perfect man, a man in short worthy to be
> remembered.[302]

Polybius presents basically three arguments regarding Rome's treatment of Carthage.[303]

The first praises the destruction of Carthage as a wise policy geared towards helping to

ensure Roman supremacy by eradicating the threat posed by a dangerous enemy. The

second is more apprehensive, claiming that the Romans had distinguished themselves

with virtue in past campaigns but by resorting to deceit and fraud when dealing with the

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History, ed. Ian Worthington (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) 32.

[301] Polybius 21.16.

[302] Polybius 38.21.

[303] Polybius 36.9.

Carthagenians, Rome's actions amounted to despotism, treachery and impiety. The final argument claims that the Roman conquest of Carthage was not unjust since no offense was committed against the gods, law or custom. According to this final argument, any moral charges against the Romans were groundless since the legal oaths and treaties imposed on Carthage permitted Rome the right of judgment.[304]

Of the three arguments Polybius' sympathies were with the second. The problem with the first argument was that by eliminating the Carthagenian threat, the onset of corruption and constitutional decline in Rome could actually be hastened. As Polybius mentions earlier in the text,

> The time then comes when the people are freed from these external threats
> and reap the good fortune and prosperity which their successes have
> earned them, and then as they enjoy this affluence they are corrupted by
> flattery and idleness and become insolent and overbearing.[305]

The third argument in which the Romans arrogantly give themselves *carte blanche* to do as they wish with the Carthagenians is contrary to Polybius' admonitions against hubris. It is the second argument that captures the foreboding expressed in Scipio's warning, echoing Polybius' own fear concerning the eventual onset of Rome's moral degradation. Polybius' aim of educating for the purpose of imparting the lessons of history would not have been undertaken if he did not believe that individuals and communities were

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[304] Polybius 36.9

[305] Polybius 6.18.

somewhat capable of controlling their own destiny within Fortune's discourse.[306] Yet,

virtue could only postpone the onset of moral corruption given the limited ability of

individuals to reason and guide their own conduct and that of their offspring. Conquests

contributed to social solidarity in the Republic by checking internal discord through the

unifying diversions provided by the Carthagenian and Greek threats but once these

external threats were eliminated. it was hubris, latent enemy from within. that Polybius

deemed to be the greatest threat to peace.

Conclusions

Polybius surmises that all things follow a simple rule: they have a beginning, rise,

apex. decline and end which mimics the biological growth and decay of organisms. The

Roman Republic was no different from any other state in this regard as it would also

"pass through a natural evolution to its decay."[307] Although Polybius' conception of

Fortune sets the discourse in which this natural evolution transpires. the ability to

postpone constitutional demise was within the realm of human agency. As a consequence,

the *Histories* primarily address the moral implications of individual and generational

behavior in affecting the rise and fall of forms of state serving as a loose guide for

grappling with the dynamic between power and morality. There are no objective laws of

political change that can be deciphered from the *Histories*. Courage, wisdom and self-

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[306] Polybius 6.6.

[307] Polybius 6.10.

control are integral for enhancing prosperity and maintaining stable forms of state for postponing the onset of corruption.

To affirm that which is good within humanity one must recognize that even though the way of acquiring and maintaining power in the twenty-first century may differ from the means pursued by the ancient Romans and Greeks, the continuity of material, political and spiritual exploitation remains. The human condition exhibits common physical attributes and faces comparable environmental challenges which transcend the context of antiquity. However, it is the ubiquity of violence throughout recorded human history that illustrates our inability to change and control the less desirable traits of the human character for an extended period of time. The inability to decipher fixed principles of international relations or predict constitutional changes in antiquity with law-like certainty is a humbling lesson for attempts aimed at predicting and controlling the course of domestic and international events. Thucydides and Polybius offer a way of understanding historical change that moves beyond restrictive modern concerns with the temporal and scientific. An appeal to the divine and a standard of morality existing beyond human comprehension is far from being inconsequential and superfluous. Such appeals are crucial for promoting moderation and morality in international relations by challenging the radical relativism espoused by the Athenians at Melos and the equation of justice with power as illustrated by Rome's eradication of Carthage. How Thucydides' and Polybius' insights into the human condition historically and materially coalesced with various forms of state and empire in Athens and Rome will help to further determine the

extent to which moral aspirations can be institutionalized to mediate inter-state relations.

CHAPTER 4

Revising Realism through the Political Economy of the State

Remove justice, and what are kingdoms but gangs of criminals on a large scale? What are criminal bands but petty kingdoms?

St. Augustine.[308]

Both Thucydides and Polybius provide poignant reminders of how adversity and prosperity elicit enduring behavioral traits within the human condition. However, absent from their writings is an examination of the material processes involved in the construction, perpetuation and overthrow of state formations. The 20th century classical realism of Niebuhr and Morgenthau also conveys this absence and in so doing, limits realism's ability to address how the conflictual relations surrounding land ownership rather than exchange relations shaped state construction in antiquity to determine the particular configurations of political struggle. The ability of individuals and groups within Athens and Rome to expropriate and exploit property and person was a function of the institutional organization of their states. The influence of the external environment on the initial construction of the Athenian and Roman states is crucial for recognizing how forms of exploitation differed between Athens and Rome and how these differences would extend to the way in which conquest was integrated within their respective empires. Comparing the cohesiveness of the Athenian and Roman aristocracies and peasantries in combination with the impact posed by the external environment and empire

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[308] St.Augustine, *City of God,* trans.Henry Bettenson (New York: Penguin Books, 1984) 4.4.

will help explain how it was only in the Roman Republic that peasant-citizens were systematically dispossessed from their land and replaced, to an extent, with slave labor. Despite differences of institutionalization, Athens' Panhellenic justification for empire and Rome's use of a "just war" doctrine similarly expressed a self-serving moral justification for aggrandizement. Combining the material processes of the non-market economies of ancient Athens and Rome with the effects of the external environment on state construction will better enable the realist approach to identify various contradictions and resistances in our modern, global economy.

The Ancient Economy: Exploitation or Efficiency?

How forms of state coalesce with historical circumstance to condition political choice requires an understanding of the economic foundations affecting the actions of individuals and institutions. But what does the term "economy" mean and why is it important in revising realist international relations theory? The few scholars within the international relations field, such as Robert Gilpin, Michael Doyle and Hendrik Spruyt, willing to consider pre-industrial societies have generally grafted a market-based conception of the modern economy back onto an ancient world where reciprocity and redistribution constituted the dominant forms of exchange. The continuity and primacy of market relations throughout history are assumed rather than explained, limiting our ability to assess how historical ruptures may have changed the link between forms of state and international relations. Whether the concern has been with the effects of trade on political-coalition building or with the commercially-driven expansion of empire, the

basis for theorizing about antiquity in international relations has rested on a spurious conception of the economy. I propose a different historical portrayal of the ancient economy recognizing the agricultural non-market basis of antiquity as part of an effort to explain how the Athenian and Roman forms of state owed their prosperity not to commercial or manufacturing capacity, but to military prowess. This portrayal provides a more comprehensive political-economic basis for situating the sources for change in antiquity. The bias of modern economic analysis towards market efficiency and productivity will be challenged to demonstrate how the expression of Athenian and Roman aggrandizement shaped, and was shaped by, changing material circumstances. The material basis of collectively-ascribed traits like Athenian daring or Roman innovativeness need to be examined in their historical context. The particular association between land-holding patterns and various forms of state and empire organized for the enrichment of those groups controlling the state starkly indicates how economic systems and markets are politically and not autonomously created. In order to challenge the historical inaccuracy of applying the primacy of market-exchange relations as an explanation for domestic and international change in antiquity, the way in which market-driven explanations of change have been applied to the study of pre-industrial international relations requires further elaboration.

Robert Gilpin's application of the market mechanism as an independent variable capable of initiating historical change in antiquity projects a modern, market-based conception of the economy back onto the ancient world. Classical and Hellenic Greece is

thought to have contained "a peculiar set of conditions" that allowed markets to break

free from overbearing social and political constraints.[309] These conditions effected a

"monetarization" of the ancient Greek economy and a transformation of the patterns of

international relations in that period. Even Thucydides is interpreted as providing an

examination of how a "profound commercial revolution" impacted on a "static

international system."[310] Changes to the patterns of relations among states are understood

by Gilpin as encompassing "the expansion of trade, the monetization of traditional

agrarian economies, and the rise of new commercial powers" such that trade, markets and

the economy act as independent variables.[311] A problem with Gilpin's interpretation for

conceptualizing change in international relations theory is that he neglects to examine the

peculiar conditions which he alludes to since the changes facilitated by the monetization

of the economy and the profound commercial revolution are assumed rather than

explained. Without such an assumed revolution, the causes of transformation in

international relations must be sought elsewhere.

Robert Gilpin is not alone among international relations theorists in basing his

conception of the ancient economy on the supposed primacy of trade and commerce.

Hendrik Spruyt more recently proposed a conception of the pre-industrial economy (albeit

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[309] Gilpin, *War and Change* 129.

[310] Gilpin, "The Richness of the Tradition" 308.

[311] Gilpin, "The Richness of the Tradition " 308.

still market driven) which attempts to explain how the elements which constitute an

international system change over time. Through case studies of medieval France, the

Italian city-states and the Hanseatic league, Spruyt contends that expanding trade acted as

an "exogenous" and "primary independent variable" in fostering the rise of new political

coalitions.[312] Gilpin's and Spruyt's conception of the economy is echoed in Michael

Doyle's analysis of the Athenian and Roman empires. Athens is considered to have been

a "commercial society" whose export of high-value added goods like olive oil, wine,

pottery and weaponry provided the citizenry with the leisure and relative social equality

necessary for political participation.[313] The empire served to further enhance the wealth of

the polis by safeguarding Athens' "commercial penetration" of the Aegean by breaking

rival shipping and raw material monopolies. So strong was this drive in Athens that

Doyle posits a correlation between democracy, trade and freer markets such that

oligarchies like Sparta avoided commercial contact altogether in order to prevent

"democratically inclined middle and lower classes" from mobilizing politically.[314] The

commercial drive also corresponds to Doyle's analysis of the Roman Republic. Senators

are considered to have embarked on "transmarine agricultural enterprises" and

"commercial companies". Tax collection partnerships were presumably formed by a

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[312] Hendrik Spruyt, *The Sovereign State and Its Competitors: An Analysis of Systems Change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) 184.

[313] Michael Doyle, *Empires* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986) 62.

[314] Doyle, *Empires* 68.

merchant class while "plebian small farmers" found themselves increasingly unable to

"efficiently compete" with the larger holdings of aristocratic landowners.[315]

The market-based assertions of Gilpin, Spruyt and Doyle exemplify a conception

of the economy that cannot be applied to Greece or Rome without seriously distorting

both the market's role in antiquity and how change is initiated in international relations.

The modern conception of the economy as consisting of a conglomeration of inter-

dependent markets integrating the production and exchange of material goods was

unknown to the ancient world. Working the land constituted the primary activity for most

members of a *polis* community with merchants and artisans comprising no more than 10

percent of the population of any city-state.[316] In Athens, peasant citizens with small land-

holdings remained at the heart of agricultural production and even though there were

estates with permanent stocks of farm slaves, most land-holdings were of modest size and

scattered into smaller properties.[317] Self-sufficiency rather than crop specialization for the

purpose of market exchange was the ideal which each city-state aspired to and often

achieved. Every farm, district, and region strove to provide for its own basic needs,

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[315] Doyle, *Empires* 86.

[316] Eli Sagan, *The Honey and the Hemlock: Democracy and Paranoia in Ancient Athens and Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) 38.

[317] Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 183.

consuming the bulk of its own produce in the process.[318] The majority of farmers grew a

wide variety of crops since a reliance on the market could jeopardize their independence

if the cash crops failed.[319] Local needs were met through *reciprocity*.[320]

Rome was no different from Athens with respect to the size of landholdings as the

bulk of agricultural land throughout the Republic was farmed by peasant smallholders.

Even during the late Republic when slaves were thought to comprise two-fifths of the

population in Italy, large estates manned by slaves and supervised by slave baliffs were

not the most common form of cultivation.[321] Slave-run estates were still dependent on the

prevalence of non-slave labour available throughout the Italian countryside, especially

during harvest time.[322] The predominance of small peasant landholdings in Athens and

Rome was associated with subsistence farming, not with the production of cash crops.

Larger plots of land did not necessarily translate into higher productivity since the idea of

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[318] Peter Garnsey, *Famine and Food Supply in the Graeco-Roman World: Responses to Risk and Crisis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 44.

[319] Robin Osborne, *Classical Landscape with Figures: The Ancient Greek City and its Countryside* (London: George Philip, 1987) 108.

[320] The stored harvest from those who had done well was lent with varying conditions to those less fortunate. Karl Polanyi, "The Economy as Instituted Process," in *Trade and Market in the Early Empires*, ed. Karl Polanyi, Conrad Arensberg and Harry Pearson. (New York: The Free Press, 1957) 243-69.

[321] Peter Garnsey, "Peasants in Ancient Roman Society," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 3 (1976): 224.

[322] Lin Foxhall, "The Dependent Tenant: Land Leasing and Labour in Italy and Greece," *Journal of Roman Studies* LXXX (1990): 102.

economies of scale is associated with modern, capital-intensive entrepreneurial farming.

Food production for subsistence rather than for export limited the amount of surplus

available for exchange. trade or redistribution.[323] In the words of Keith Hopkins,

> practically all wealthy Greeks and Romans we know about were above all
> else. owners of agricultural land. Admittedly, they sold the produce of
> their farms which they managed directly. but that did not make them
> traders. any more than leasing out clay-pits for brick-making made them
> building contractors.[324]

The cultural stigma associated with merchant activity also reaffirms the primacy

of agriculture over trade as a basis for understanding change in antiquity. Economic life

was organized around social relations of kinship. religion. community and politics, not

around the satisfaction of material wants such that there was an inherent propensity to

"truck. barter and exchange". Other than war and politics, the only activity deemed

worthy of a citizen was that of working on or owning land. With both the Roman and

Athenian elite deriving their income primarily from agricultural sources it is not

surprising that this led to a value system that demeaned commercial activities. The

salience of agricultural values can be illustrated in the case of the Athenian slave banker

Pasion who, when granted the rare privilege of Athenian citizenship, immediately used

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[323] The scale of inter-regional market trade was not only limited by the low percentage of the population engaged in merchant and artisan activity in relation to agriculture but also by the cost of overland transport which could not be offset by economies of scale or enhanced productive techniques. Keith Hopkins, "Introduction," in *Trade in the Ancient Economy*, ed. Peter Garnsey, Keith Hopkins and C.R. Whittaker (London: Chatto and Windus, 1983) xii.

[324] Hopkins, "Introduction" xi.

part of his fortune to acquire land.[325] The denigration of commerce continued on through

to the Roman Republic. Cicero deemed agriculture to be the only activity suitable for a

gentleman since, "Of all pursuits by which men gain their livelihood none is better than

agriculture. Farming is the most pleasant livelihood, the most fruitful, and the one most

worthy of a free man."[326] Agriculture was held in the highest regard with the ideal

represented by the independent citizen landowner capable of providing for his family and

bearing the costs associated with arming oneself.

Unlike our modern economy, the ancient Greeks and Romans did not live by

buying and selling, not because they were unacquainted with this but because market

exchange was not integrated with production to the extent that economies of scale could

be garnered from large, capital-intensive agricultural operations.[327] Agricultural

production was not subject to market imperatives since the low level of trade, the absence

of regional product specialization and an international division of labor are all indicative

of a non-market driven economy. The trade in "manufactured" goods was minimal since

craftsmen operated out of small family workshops and met local needs with the help of an

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[325] Claude Mosse, "The Economist," in *The Greeks* , ed. Jean-Pierre Vernant (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995) 24,26.

[326] Small scale merchant activity was considered vulgar but even the pursuit of large scale commerce was not beyond reproach unless retirement to a countryside estate was forthcoming. Cicero, *On Duties*, ed.M.T. Griffen and E.M. Atkins, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) I: 150-52..

[327]M.I. Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 2nd ed. (London: The Hogarth Press, 1985) 21-22.

apprentice and possibly a few slaves. The millions of pots that were made and exported

from Athens during the classical period does not translate into Athens being a

manufacturing centre since the number of potters at any one time in Athens was probably

never more than two hundred.[328] Similarly, small-scale handicraft production supplied the

needs of the city of Rome since no producer could depend on an expanding or even

steady non-local market.[329] Market exchange was not a "potentially powerful" social fact

since traders did not react to profit opportunities by extending "back upon the chain of

organization of production that originally spawned them."[330] Traders were more

concerned with distribution than production since larger-sized land-holdings and the

availability of technology did not necessarily translate into higher productivity or

efficiency.

War and Wealth

The prevailing mentality in antiquity was acquisitive, not productive.[331] Athens

and Rome owed their great prosperity not to commercial or industrial activity but to

military prowess. The Athenian silver mines, Rome's eventual control of mining districts

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[328] Osborne, *Classical Landscape with Figures* 109.

[329] While substantial profits could be made through the trade in luxury items, the quantity traded was marginal. The trade in luxury goods was restricted to the wealthy few able afford these goods. Peter Garnsey and Richard Saller, *The Roman Empire: Economy, Society and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) 44.

[330] Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power: A History of Power from the Beginning to A.D. 1760* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986) 24.

[331] Finley, *The Ancient Economy* 144.

in Spain, the booty captured in victory and the imperial tribute collected from empire

generated vast quantities of material wealth. Successful campaigns produced booty and

those in positions of political authority, be they a politically-involved citizenry, an

aristocracy or a monarchy, were aware of the fact that imperial expansion brought

territory, tribute and slaves. The centrality of war in antiquity has been examined by the

historian Moses Finley who, in agreement with Marx, stressed that war was the basic

factor in economic growth and consequently in the transformation of social structure and

should therefore not be considered as an intrusive external impediment to economic

growth but as a respectable means of acquisition in antiquity.[332] Xenophon recognized

this when he stated that, "It is a law established for all time among all men that when a

city is taken in war, the persons and the property of its inhabitants belong to the

captors."[333] The lure of booty was also noted by the modern historian William Harris who

considered the desire for economic gain to be the most important factor in predisposing

the Roman aristocracy towards an aggressive foreign policy.[334] Writers in antiquity did

not consider war to be an aberration or an autonomous variable intruding on peace but

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[332] Finley, *Ancient History: Evidence and Models* 74.

[333] Austin, "Greek Trade, Industry, and Labor" in *Civilization of the Ancient Mediterranean* 729.

[334] William V. Harris, *War and Imperialism in Republican Rome 327 -70 BC* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979) 93.

simply a fact of life.[335]

Slavery was also a fact of life but to suggest that antiquity experienced an "overall

technical stagnation" as a result of the presence of slave labor fails to recognize that

enhancing productive efficiency through technological progress was not a means towards

increasing the amount of agricultural surplus. [336] For some Marxists like Perry Anderson,

the differentiation between citizen and slave in antiquity is best understood in terms of the

slave mode of production since "the community of the polis, no matter how internally

class-divided, was erected above an enslaved work-force which underlay its whole shape

and substance."[337] Anderson's "slave mode of production" rests on the ability of citizens

to acquire slaves, whether through trade or military campaigns, for the purpose of

working the land on rural estates. However, given historical evidence to the contrary, the

Greco-Roman economy is best represented as being sustained by the labor of peasant

small-holders.[338] While groups come into conflict primarily because of their material

interests, these interests are advanced or repressed as a function of the position which

individuals occupy in political life rather than that which they occupy in the process of

production. Those without land in Athens, including slaves, freemen and a minority of the

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[335] Graham Shipley, "Introduction: The Limits of War" in *War and Society in the Greek World,* ed. John Rich and Graham Shipley (New York: Routledge, 1993) 18.

[336] Finley, *The Ancient Economy* 147.

[337] Perry Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* (London: Verso, 1974) 37.

[238] Garnsey, *Famine and the Food Supply* 43.

citizenry, were not differentiated from one another on the basis of their place in

production since all could work at the same site with the same remuneration.[339] In Rome,

slaves and citizens were not in competition with each other for wages or conditions of

employment. It was the ability to directly participate in political life and to acquire land

that distinguished residents from one another. This is not to minimize the role of slavery

in antiquity; it was important to the Athenian and Roman citizenry as an exploitable

resource but this does not mean that their form of democratic or republican rule was

based on a slave economy with the liberty of citizens "entrained by the systematic

institution of slavery".[340] Instead of emphasizing slavery, market relations or trade as an

external catalyst for change within and between states, the presence or absence of external

pressure in conjunction with the solidarity of the aristocracy and the political influence of

the peasantry will be emphasized to determine the relationship between the construction

of state and empire in Athens and Rome.

Forms of State: Land, Order and Resistance

Although the state plays an integrative function in holding together disparate

groups within a polity, it is not a neutral arbitrator. The institutionalization of political

practices to maintain a socio-economic hierarchy revolves around the question of order

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[339] M.M. Austin and P. Vidal-Naquet, Economic and Social History of Ancient Greece: An Introduction (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977) 22. In Athens, most slave labour was found in the silver mines or in domestic service.

[340] Anderson, Passages from Antiquity 36.

and in whose interest this imposition of order will be. Because the state is an expression

of organized power, every society with a state has been associated with systematic social

inequality. This is not to say that there is always a dominant group in society since hunter-

gatherers do not appear to have *institutionalized* inequality through stratification. While

no group can be assumed a priori to control the state, there is and always has been a group

which has left other groups oppressed - women, slaves, non-human animals -leaving a

dominant group with a degree of collective control over the state. The vast majority of

Roman citizens were only able to define citizenship in terms of protections and minor

privileges while Athenians were able to resist having their land dispossessed and enhance

popular participation to an unprecedented degree. For Athenian democracy, the question

of political order will be addressed with regards to how a democratic form of state

ultimately came to be based on the ability of armed peasants to retain modest-sized land

holdings that effectively forced aristocratic landholders to accept a more inclusive form of

state. For the Republic, the inability of Roman peasants to construct a more inclusive

form of state that would resolve the plight of land-poor citizens will beg the question of

why democracy in Athens and not in Rome? Examining the dynamic relationship

between external pressure, internal stability and imperial aggrandizement will better

enable realism to explain just who benefits or suffers from state construction.

Cohesion, Conflict and External Effects

Common to the early histories of Athens and Rome was the overthrow and

replacement of an earlier monarchy with tyrannical and aristocratic forms of state. The

impact of an immediate external threat on the process of state construction is crucial in

distinguishing the divergent forms of state and empire taken. The reforms of Solon and

Servius Tullius are indicative of how dissimilar external environments conditioned the

institutions of patronage and debt bondage which, in turn, conditioned the expression of

state and empire in Athens and Rome. The lack of an immediate external threat to the

Greek world combined with the strength of the Athenian peasant village communities and

the divisiveness plaguing the aristocracy will help to explain why an elite group of

wealthy landowners in Athens was unable to prevent democratic reforms.[341]

Athenian state construction and the eventual institution of citizen democracy can

be traced to the Mycenaean period. From the sixteenth to twelfth centuries, political order

in Athens was organized around a centralized system of monarchical rule with authority

delegated to a tier of subordinate officials. With the twelfth century collapse of

Mycenaean Greece, the centralized authority of the monarchs was challenged by

aristocrats openly competing over territorial jurisdiction.[342] The resulting decentralization

of power amongst the nobility produced an atmosphere rife with internal conflict such

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[341] Kurt A. Raaflaub, "Equalities and Inequalities in Athenian Democracy", in
Demokratia: A Conversation on Democracies, Ancient and Modern, ed.Josiah Ober and
Charles Hendrik (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) 152-53.

[342] M.T.W. Arnheim, *Aristocracy in Greek Society* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977)
33-34. Thucydides writes that the early constitution of Athens was one in which Attica
had originally been divided into autonomous towns. These towns were under the
suzerainty of the king of Athens but had from time to time made war on him. Thucydides
2.15.

that by the seventh century, aristocratic infighting had become commonplace throughout

the Greek city-states. It was in this atmosphere that the Athenian peasantry would

effectively breech the barrier between state and village.[343]

From the collapse of the Mycenaean kingdoms to Cleisthenes' reforms in 508, the

principal form of rule in Athens was aristocratic. Political constitutions were based on a

hereditary council whose membership was restricted to those of breeding and wealth. The

decentralized nature of aristocratic rule provided the peasant village communities with

the opportunity to enhance jurisdiction over their localities. These communities were able

to devise their own charters and even select magistrates to replace officials previously

imposed upon them by regents. Most important was the ability of the peasants to retain

possession of the land which they worked. By retaining the agricultural surplus necessary

to arm themselves, the peasantry was more able to restrict their juridical and political

dependence on aristocratic landlords. Armed village citizens could now court aristocratic

support from a position of strength that was not necessarily undermined by patronage

obligations. The high degree of solidarity demanded for organizing a phalanx formation

was indicative of the social bond amongst villages which further enhanced their political

influence. It is the presence of this organized and armed peasantry that helps to explain

why an elite group of wealthy landowners was unable to establish themselves as a

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[343] Ellen Meiksins Wood, "Democracy: An Idea of Ambiguous Ancestry" in *Athenian Political Thought and the Reconstruction of American Democracy*,ed. Peter Euben, John Wallach, and Josiah Ober (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994) 72.

"sharply defined aristocracy, separated by effective class barriers from the rest of the population."[344] The corresponding inability of the Athenian aristocracy to form a cohesive front against the peasantry and the possibility of civil war led to the compromises embedded in Solon's reforms.

The poetry of Solon suggests that the primary conflict in early sixth century Athens existed between the aristocracy and the people, with the underlying cause attributed to the "greed and plundering of the rich".[345] Solon's reforms were undertaken to address the avarice and the abuse of power by aristocrats. The infighting amongst groups of aristocratic families bent on extending their influence had encouraged the exploitation of the peasantry to the extent that debt-bondage amongst the poor had reached revolutionary implications.[346] To curb the self-interests of the aristocracy and avert civil war, Solon initiated the key reform of extending the governance of the city-state from a small hereditary aristocracy to a wider citizenry where the eligibility for political office came to be based on wealth rather than birth.[347] He transferred the political functions of the preceding categorization of the Athenian citizenry from aristocrats, farmers and

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[344] Raaflaub, "Equalities and Inequalities in Athenian Democracy"152-53.

[345] Lintott, *Violence, Civil Strife and Revolution in the Classical City* 40.

[346] Kurt A. Raaflaub,"From Protection and Defense to Offense and Participation: Stages in the Conflict of Orders" in *Social Struggles in Archaic Rome: New Perspectives on the Conflict of Orders*, ed. Kurt A. Raaflaub (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986) 215.

[347] Arnheim, *Aristocracy in Greek Society* 48.

artisans into a new classification which now permitted wealthy peasants to seek certain

political positions from which they had been previously excluded given their non-

aristocratic birth.[348] Not only did Solon replace an aristocratic form of state with a more

oligarchically-inclined one, but he also took the unprecedented step of extending full

political rights to Athenian citizens without property.[349] As a consequence of these

reforms, a direct link between the growth of Athenian slavery and the inclusion of

landless Thetes into the political life of the polis can be made. The implication of this link

for Athenian aggrandizement is that since wealthy Athenians could no longer obtain

servile labor from within the citizen community, they were compelled to search for

sources of servile labor from outside of the citizen body and therefore, outside of Athens.

Servius' reforms

The ability of landless Athenians and peasant small-holders to resist exploitation

by a wealthy minority[350] when contrasted with the inability of Roman peasants to provide

similar resistance requires a comparison of the political conflicts and external

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[348] Ellen Meiksins Wood and Neal Wood, *Class Ideology and Ancient Political Theory: Socrates, Plato and Aristotle in Social Context* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978) 22.

[349] Luciano Canfora, "The Citizen" in *The Greeks* 124.

[350] Wood and Wood, *Class Ideology and Ancient Political Theory* 36. The implications of the Woods' argument regarding the expansion of Athenian empire coincide with this paper's non-market conception of the ancient economy. Slave labour was important for domestic service and for work in the mines but as will be clarified section in the final section, the Athenian empire was not premised on nor driven by the commercial need for cheap slave labour. Slavery was only one but not the only form of exploitation employed by the Athenians.

environments conditioning these states. Rome's conquests would also divert internal

tensions within the Republic onto an external enemy but the way conquest was integrated

with the Republic would have dramatically different results. The spoils of war and empire

helped perpetuate the democratic form of state in Athens while war and conquest in the

Republic initially tempered, and later exacerbated, social conflicts to the point of civil

war. Like Athens, it appears that the early social and political organization of Rome

consisted of a loose federation of villages, but unlike Athens, the patronage obligations of

the Roman peasants overwhelmed their relative ability to organize themselves against an

aristocracy of clan leaders.[351] The institutional measures implemented by Servius Tullus

were similar to Solon's in expanding the political rights of the citizenry but differed in

terms of the impact which peasant citizens would have in constructing the state, a

difference which can be attributed to dissimilar external environments.

Servius Tullius, a noble turned tyrant, ruled Rome from 578 to 535. The historical

record regarding the early origins of Rome is limited but suggests that monarchs were

chosen by a group of nobles who functioned as kingmakers.[352] Servius Tullius dispensed

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[351] Archaeological evidence indicates an increase in hoplite military equipment found in Italian tombs supporting the impression that it was not uncommon in the seventh century for the Italian countryside to have been subjected to the competing jurisdictions of monarchs, aristocratic warlords, and their respective roving bands of armed clients. Richard E. Mitchell, *Patricians and Plebians: The Origin of the Roman State* (London: Cornell University Press, 1990) 35.

[352] T.J. Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome: Italy and Rome from the Bronze Age to the Punic Wars (c1000-264 BC)* (London: Routledge, 1995) 141-43.

with this procedure by usurping power with the military backing of a force of armed personal dependents. To re-establish political order he engaged in booty raids, the patronization of the arts and grandiose building projects. These measures, designed to legitimize his authority, also included redistributing the wealth of defeated opponents to supporters and the extension of minimal political concessions to a wider society beyond the confines of the aristocracy.[353] Since tyrants emerged from within the aristocracy, they were inevitably portrayed as self-serving aristocratic opponents who monopolized authority at the expense of their peers.[354] To check his former peers, Servius Tullius is believed to have restrained aristocratic clan leaders and their supporters by undertaking two initiatives that can be considered as laying the political and military foundations for the Roman Republic.

Rather than basing citizenship on the three previous Romulean tribes which had the effect of amounting to a federation of armed groups dependent on aristocratic clan heads, Servius redefined the basis for Roman citizenship by instituting "centuries". These groupings replaced the old tripartite division with a more diverse community of local tribes as the basis for citizenship.[355] Although this may have increased the diversity of citizenship, it must be remembered that Roman assemblies under the Republic would at

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[353] Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome* 146.

[354] Mitchell, *Patricians and Plebians* 39.

[355] Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome* 90.

no time be based on the principle of one vote for each citizen since voting was organized

on a group basis. With the assembly only meeting when convened by a higher magistrate,

there were no fixed meeting dates in the Republic and once convened, citizens did not

have the right to debate or amend proposals unless their concerns were advanced in

collusion with a magistrate.[356] The voting units of the centuriate assembly were

distributed amongst five defined property classes which were based on agricultural

holdings. The voting bias was inversely skewed towards the wealthy with the wealthiest

classification being relatively small in terms of citizens but large in terms of the number

of centuries held, giving the "propertied classes" the most political influence.[357]

Therefore, whether under tyrant or republican rule the system of voting was heavily

skewed in favor of the aristocracy even though the non-aristocratic plebians comprised

the majority of the combatants on which Rome's security and ability to project its

influence rested.[358]

    Nevertheless, the plebians were cognizant of their subservient position within the

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[356] The difficulty of advancing the interests of the poor is reflected into the second century when Tiberius Gracchus in 133 promoted the interests of the poor against the aristocracy sparking violence and the onset of the Roman revolution.

[357] Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome* 380.

[358] The division of society into two orders: patricians and plebians was a central theme of the early republic. The conflict between the patricians and plebians can be represented as a conflict between a group of powerful and wealthy clans with their dependents and with a non-aristocratic peasantry. In essence, this basic division between wealthy and poor would extend itself throughout the life of the republic. Finley, *The Ancient Economy* 45.

Republic and took measures to counter the extent of their exploitation by increasing

access to and influence over the governing process. The initiative for plebian resistance

was, like that of the Athenian peasants, primarily a response to issues of debt-bondage

and an increasing disparity in the size of land holdings between the wealthy and poor.

Given the military importance of the plebians, they too were able to press for concessions

but in contrast with Athenian peasants, a disastrous series of military reversals suffered by

Rome in the late 490s limited the extent and scope of plebian reform. The military

reversals and the fear generated amongst all Romans instilled a recognition between the

patricians and plebians that they would either have to rely on one another or face defeat

by an external enemy.[359] Consequently, the political aims of the plebians were placated

(for fear of threatening the existence of the state as a whole) as they focused their initial

efforts on protecting themselves from the arbitrary judgement of the patrician magistrates

and increasing instances of debt bondage.

By 494 the plebians had established an alternate assembly complete with elected

officials (tribunes) whose original mandate was to protect the plebians against the

arbitrary power of the patricians and to remind the patrician aristocracy that the plebians

could not be neglected without endangering the entire Roman community.[360] The plebian

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[359] Cornell, *Beginnings of Rome* 266.

[360] A tribune's authority was formalized by a collective resolution taken by the plebian assembly who, under solemn oath, were committed to obey their tribunes and defend their person to the death. Walter Eder, "Republicans and Sinners: The Decline of the Roman Republic and the End of a Provisional Arrangement" in *Transitions to Empire: Essays in*

assembly was open to all citizens other than patricians and, in effect, a quasi-independent

political community was created within the Roman state.[361] More than just representing

the emerging political empowerment of the peasantry, the institutionalization of the

plebian assembly alongside the patrician-dominated centuriate assembly provides an early

example of the Roman aristocracy's ability to adapt by making minor concessions to the

masses. Not only was Roman civil war averted until the first century, but the minor

concessions made did not fundamentally alter the aristocratic form of state on which the

Republic would be based.

The cohesiveness of the Roman aristocracy after the overthrow of monarchy and

tyranny starkly contrasts with the overthrow of tyranny in Athens. A more inclusive form

of state arose in Athens and not in Rome, which is attributable to the impact that the

external environment had on shaping political relationships within these states. Athens

was not forced to fight for its very existence as an independent state. Up until the Persian

Wars, the Greek *poleis* were not forced to defend their independence against threats from

the civilizations of the Near East.[362] The Athenian aristocracy could not justify the

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Greco-Roman History, 360-146 B.C., in honor of E. Badian,ed. Robert W. Wallace and
Edward M. Harris (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996) 451.

[361] D. Brendan Nagle, *The Ancient World: A Social and Cultural History* (Toronto:
Prentice-Hall, 1979) 262.

[362] The Medes, Babylonians, Lydians, and Persians were preoccupied with their own
survival and aggrandizement relative to one another rather than to the Greeks. Raphael
Sealy, *A History of the Greek City States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976)
169.

suppression of political reforms and the need for order by claiming that an invasion of the island was imminent whereas Rome's geographic position embroiled the Republic in a war of survival against Etruscan and Latin neighbours from the very beginning. Military success in these wars enabled the Roman aristocracy to strengthen its position of leadership and placate intercine strife given the community's willingness to subordinate itself in the face of possible defeat.

The quest for booty, slaves and land was part of an annual rhythm of warfare that was reflected in the character and function of Rome's institutions. Each spring and autumn, special rituals marked the beginning of the campaigning season.[363] By the fifth and early fourth centuries as intense and frequent fighting continued to rage just outside of Rome, the threat to the very survival of the Roman state culminated in a treaty between Rome and the Latin League in 493. From the alliance's beginnings, Rome, the largest and most populous of the Latin communities, assumed a leading role within the League.[364] The treaty was not only designed to prevent Rome and the Latin League from fighting against each other but it was also initiated to repel the intrusions of the Volsci and Aequi.[365] Accompanying the devastation wrought by war during this period were the

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[363] Stephen Oakley, "The Roman conquest of Italy" in *War and Society in the Roman World* 16.

[364] Kurt A. Raaflaub, "Born to be Wolves? Origins of Roman Imperialism" in *Transitions to Empire: Essays in Greco-Roman History, 360-146 B.C.* 286.

[365] Kurt A. Raaflaub, "Born to be Wolves?" 283.

economic repercussions affecting political relations within Rome. Food shortages,

widespread debt, arbitrary jurisdiction and a general abuse of power worked to exacerbate

social tensions between the patricians and plebians. Given the grave military threats to

Rome, a united patrician aristocracy was able to resist plebian demands for land re-

distribution. In Athens there was no such need for a unified leadership thus enabling

armed citizen-peasants to challenge successive aristocratic and tyrannical political orders

without an overriding concern for the independent survival of the polis.[366] While the

Roman patrician aristocracy could not do without the plebians, the cohesiveness of the

aristocracy rarely gave the plebians a chance to exploit internal dissension. The plebians

were not completely powerless but, when compared to the Athenian peasants, they were

not able to directly participate in determining the direction which the Roman form of state

would take. In marked contrast to Athens, it was the Roman aristocracy that possessed the

overwhelming means to shape political order.[367]

The external circumstances faced by early Rome and Athens had consequences for

subsequent state construction as reflected in the dissimilar ability of their respective

peasantries to acquire and retain land and in how patronage relations were either repealed

or incorporated within the state. It was Athenian peasant pressure along with Cleisthenes'

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[366] Kurt A. Raaflaub, "The Conflict of the Orders in Archaic Rome: A Comprehensive and Comparative Approach"in *Social Struggles in Archaic Rome: New Perspectives on the Conflict of Orders*, ed. Kurt A. Raaflaub (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986) 31-32.

[367] Raaflaub,"From Protection and Defense to Offense and Participation" 226-27.

constitutional reorganisation that provided catalysts for the institutionalization of citizen democracy.

Cleisthenes' Constitutional Reorganization

Solon's reforms failed to put an end to party strife in Athens. Unrest exacerbated by aristocratic infighting continued to plague Athens, eventually resulting in the aristocrat Pisistratus firmly entrenching himself as tyrant of Athens from 546 to 527.[368] Athenian tyrants were usually of aristocratic origins themselves and attracted other disaffected nobles including wealthy non-nobles and peasant farmers who felt that their growing military importance should give them a larger say in the governance of the polis.[369] Once in control of Athens, Pisistratus basically left the Solonian classification system intact with a crucial difference being that the Assembly and the Council would remain subservient to his authority. Pisistratus had been adept at maintaining order and control over Athens but his sons were less capable.

Pisistratus' son, Hippias, was expelled by a combination of Athenian aristocrats, peasant arms and Spartan armed forces in 510 thereby ending a 33-year tyranny. Spartan troops had been brought in to topple Hippias with the intent of re-establishing an aristocracy friendly to Sparta but after the Spartan withdrawal, Athens again found itself

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[368] In 561 Pisistratus had established a tyranny in Athens to be expelled only five years later. Sagan, *The Honey and the Hemlock* 8.

[369] Michael Grant, "Alternative Paths: Greek Monarchy and Federalism" in *Civilization of the Ancient Mediterranean: Greece and Rome*, 3 vols., ed. Michael Grant and Rachel Kitzinger (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1988) I: 488.

embroiled in political strife.[370] After two years of conflict, a struggle for power was

discernable between two Athenian factions represented by Isagoras and Cleisthenes.

Isagoras sought to reverse the changes implemented during the years of tyranny and with

Spartan assistance, proceeded to curtail the influence extended to the citizenry by

Solon.[371] At first Cleisthenes was unable to gain the political leadership of the polis but

with the backing of peasant farmers, landless citizens and those aristocrats leery of

Spartan intervention, he was able to prevent Isagoras' attempt at re-establishing the

traditional system where those of "noble" birth dominated the political and religious

organizations of the polis. To replace this traditional system, a political transformation

was engineered that would impact the institution of Athenian democracy as well as that of

the succeeding empire.

Cleisthenes organized the Athenian citizen-body into a territorial system based on

demes (parishes) which was instrumental in breaking down the traditional basis for

aristocratic power and prestige.[372] Leaving Solon's four wealth classifications intact,

Cleisthenes geographically fragmented the four old tribes of Attica by creating ten new

tribes which would assume the political functions of the previous four tribes. Each new

tribe would be made up of all citizens residing in three separate geographical areas called

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[370] Arnheim, *Aristocracy in Greek Society* 183.

[371] Starr, *The Birth of Athenian Democracy* 13.

[372] Finley, "Revolution in Antiquity" 52.

'trittyes' (thirds) with one-third representing the city of Athens itself, one-third the coast

and the remaining third the inland area. The trittyes themselves were further divided into

smaller parts called 'demes' with neighbourhood villages providing the needed cohesion

to function as religious centres, administrative districts and voting wards. Political

participation was also made more accessible with the establishment of the Council of

Five Hundred. Members were chosen by lot from the demes as fifty men from each tribe

were involved in preparing the business for the citizen assembly providing a counter to

the remaining aristocratic Council of the Areopagus. Consequently, the bonds amongst

citizens and to their locality were strengthened relative to the bonds of kinship and

patronage.[373]

Solon's legislation which made it illegal for a citizen to use his own person as

security and Cleisthenes' abolition of traditional tribal divisions were measures designed

to weaken the patronage base of the aristocracy. Patronage is an asymmetrical

relationship between a patron and client whereby a client is bound to a patron in an

inequitable social relationship involving a *personal* as opposed to a market exchange of

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[373] Cleisthenes' family benefitted from the reforms relative to more established families as they were comparative newcomers to the Athenian aristocracy. As such, Cleisthenes' family did not have its regional power base compromised whereas established families were no longer able to control local religious cults . In Arnheims words, "Cleisthenes' reforms could do nothing but good to the interests of his family".Arnheim, *Aristocracy in Greek Society* 139.

services.[374] Patronage can easily lead to exploitation because it involves unequal

bargaining positions between two parties. When peasants were faced with a subsistence

crisis, their first inclination was not to turn to "the market" or to a patron but to their

kinsmen, neighbours and friends, requesting aid from a patron was often an option of last

resort.[375] Patrons had the means to offer loans of food, money, and farming equipment in

addition to providing legal assistance and protection from brigands. In return, clients were

expected to provide labor services or a proportion of their harvest in addition to offering

political support and social prestige to their patron.[376] When a client became obliged to a

wealthy patron and found it increasingly difficult to meet his obligations, the patron

creditor might not foreclose but might continue to exploit the debtor. This situation helps

explain how the status of *hektemoros* arose in Athens before Solon's reforms. Defaulted

debtors were required to repay a sixth of their produce while the patron creditor retained

the possibility of acquiring all of the debtor's land or his labor as a slave.[377] As long as the

debtor remained a citizen, a patron could also have a dependent with political value but as

the burden of debt increased amongst the peasantry, the strength of the peasant village

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[374] Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, "Introduction" in *Patronage in Ancient Society*, ed. Andrew Wallace-Hadrill (New York: Routledge, 1989) 3.

[375] If self-sufficiency could not be obtained, reciprocity was the desired form of exchange with networks reaching beyond the extended family to include other locals. Garnsey, *Famine and Food Supply* 57.

[376] Garnsey, *Famine and Food Supply* 58.

[377] Lintott, *Violence, Civil Strife and Revolution in the Classical City* 45.

communities was such that the aristocracy was forced to accept Solon's reforms. The implications of Cleisthenes' reforms for Athenian democracy were that distinctions among citizens would not depend on their bloodlines. Loyalty was to the polis rather than to a clan or lineage, speaking to the demise of institutionalized patronage relations in Athens and effectively quelling the establishment of private armies.[378] It was through association with a deme that one came to have citizenship, not by being a member of the traditional kin grouping.

Despite Cleisthenes' constitutional reorganization and the enhancement of political equality for all citizens, Athens was not yet a democracy but more of a "republic of hoplites and farmers". Property qualifications still had to be satisfied for the highest offices of the ten generals elected from each of the tribes. While the thetes were not excluded from voting they were still considered to be "second class citizens". It was not until the thetes were able to actively participate in defending Athens and empire that their status and influence would rise.[379] Under Pericles, the relationship between military service, the expansion of empire and democratic participation would become synonymous with one another, revealing the reciprocal relationship between domestic and international politics.

Pericles and Public Patronage

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[378] Wood and Wood, *Class Ideology and Ancient Political Theory* 24.

[379] Raaflaub, "Equalities and Inequalities in Athenian Democracy" 147.

The external catalyst for the creation of a full citizen democracy in Athens was facilitated by at least two external events.[380] The first was triggered by the Persian invasion of Greece in 490. When this campaign was thwarted at Marathon by a force of 9000 Athenian and 1000 Platean Hoplites, the Persian defeat was interpreted as a vindication of the Athenian decision to adopt a more democratic form of state. The victory at Marathon led to a crucial modification in the election of magistrates in 487. The magisterial position of archon had been restricted to the wealthier propertied classes but with the modification the stipulation was that archons could be selected by lot from a much larger group of candidates who were to be directly nominated by the *demes*.[381] Archonship still remained the legal preserve of the wealthy but selection by lot limited the ability of the aristocracy to secure positions based solely on family background or wealth.[382]

The second event was an earthquake occurring within Spartan territory in 464 which had encouraged Sparta's subjected population of helots to revolt, prompting Sparta to seek Athens' help in 462 to subdue them. Athens offered assistance but when the

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[380] Athenian democracy rested on the extension of political participation to all of its citizenry but it was still far from egalitarian as women, foreigners and slaves were excluded. When Athens is placed within its historical context, the institutionalization of democracy was truly remarkable.

[381] Nagle, *The Ancient World* 10-11.

[382] Josiah Ober, *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens: Rhetoric, Ideology, and the Power of the People* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989) 76-77.

expeditionary force sent to help was abruptly ordered to return to Athens, the Athenians

felt insulted and interpreted their dismissal as a sign of Spartan hostility.[383] This hostility

also extended to wealthy landowners within Athens, one of whom was the anti-democrat

Cimon who had pursued a policy of closer ties to the Spartan aristocracy. When news of

the dismissal reached Athens, Cimon's main opponent Ephialtes carried out a

constitutional coup and immediately passed a proposal which deprived the aristocratic

Council of the Areopagus of its traditional powers. While the historical record does not

specify the composition of these extra powers, the Areopagus probably had its legal

powers restricted including the authority to review what it perceived to be

"unconstitutional" decisions taken by the assembly.[384] The Areopagus' activities were

thereby restricted to conducting trials "for homicide, poison, arson, and minor matters"[385]

such that decisions made through the Assembly could no longer be vetoed by a wealthy

elite. Removing the restraints placed by the Areopagus on the sovereignty of the whole

citizenry placed supreme political authority in the hands of the Assembly of Athenian

citizens. Cimon's Spartan associations had hindered the aristocracy's ability to prevent

the restrictions placed on the Areopagus but Cimon's associations also indicate how

changing state forms cannot be separated from external entanglements.

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[383] Donald Kagan, *Pericles of Athens and the Birth of Democracy* (New York: Touchstone, 1991) 41.

[384] Ober, *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens* 77.

[385] Starr, *The Birth of Athenian Democracy* 25.

Civil War had been avoided in the aftermath of Ephialtes' constitutional coup, and

despite Ephialtes' assassination shortly thereafter, his successor, Pericles, was able to

pass additional laws in the 450s that further entrenched the institutionalization of

democracy. The introduction of pay for public service, the reduction of property

qualifications for office and direct elections for special offices extended the citizenry's

almost complete control over polis politics.[386] For direct democracy to function, the

majority of citizens had to take part in decision- making and since the poor found it

difficult to do without pay to attend the assembly, Pericles authorized a law implementing

payment for attendance, a measure taken to further curtail patronage which can be

contrasted with Cimon's counter- attempt to secure political support through his personal

fortune.[387] Like Pisistratus and Cleisthenes, Pericles was recognized the threat posed by a

resurgence of patronage relationships in the country-side. Even though a maritime empire

and the establishment of democracy had transpired since the time of Pisistratus and

Cleisthenes, rural poverty and a succession of poor harvests could easily lead to a

resurgence in aristocratic patronage networks.[388] Pericles was aware of how patronage

tended to perpetuate rather than diminish social and economic inequality. Poorer

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[386] Raaflaub, "Equalities and Inequalities in Athenian Democracy" 148.

[387] Payments were also extended to those citizens serving on the Council of Five Hundred archons, all public officials chosen by lot, as well as to soldiers and sailors on duty. Kagan, *Pericles of Athens and the Birth of Democracy* 47-48.

[388] Finley, *Politics in the Ancient World* 47.

Athenians must have also been aware that Cimon's patronage was personal and regional

while Pericles' was public since the ability of Cimon to maintain a vertical patronage

network to rival the horizontal principles of democratic solidarity was ineffectual.[389] It

was public patronage carried out through the state and funded by the trappings of empire

that aided the Athenian citizenry's efforts to collectively unite to maintain and press for

more effective representation.

The Athenian Empire and Democratic Participation

Whether the Athenian empire should be classified as a tribute or a territorial

empire, it was an empire nonetheless.[390] Athenian imperial decrees demonstrate the

exploitative and repressive consolidation of Athenian rule as expressed through military

colonization, the confiscation of land, the imposition of standardized coins, weights and

measures, the order requiring all major court cases to be tried in Athens, the transfer of

the League treasury from Delos to Athens in 454/3, and Athenian pressure on Delian

League states to substitute Athena for Apollo as the major deity of their city-state.[391]

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[389] Patronage compels clients to look upwards to patrons rather than sideways to those of similar status and class for assistance.

[390] The democratic form of the Athenian state with its principle of direct participation by the citizenry was not compatible with the creation of a bureaucracy capable of ruling an extended territorial empire. As well, there were no separate state agencies, either military or civilian, as there was no division of state and society. Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* 43.

[391] Timothy J. Galpin, "The Democratic Roots of Athenian Imperialism in the Fifth Century B.C.," *The Classical Journal* 79 no.2 (1983-84): 104.

Independent city-states were denied their sovereign rights as free states with Athens' assessment and collection of tribute being repressive enough to cause several states to revolt. The motivation behind this revolt is evident in Pericles' account of the Athenian empire: "it means enslavement just the same when either the greatest or the least claim is imposed by equals upon their neighbours, not by appeal to justice but by dictation."[392] Athens did not hesitate to use military force on recalcitrant "allies".

For the first time in antiquity, rule was not facilitated by a monarchy or aristocracy but by a democratic polis in which citizens actively ruled within their own community and abroad.[393] The Athenian assembly was in continuous control of war-making as it was with all other public affairs. The empire provided the citizenry with a substantial increase in the amount of surplus available for the wealthy and less prosperous alike. Victory produced tribute, booty and new land reducing the potential for internal conflict by projecting the tensions between rich and poor beyond the confines of the city-state. Since Solon's reforms averted the revolutionary measure of land redistribution, the only way small-holders and landless citizens could improve their economic position was through seasonal farm work, building projects, becoming rowers in the imperial fleet, or colonization.[394] The majority of farms in Attica were considered to have been too small to

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[392] Galpin, "The Democratic Roots of Athenian Imperialism" 105.

[393] Canfora, "The Citizen" in *The Greeks* 125-26.

[394] Sagan, *The Honey and the Hemlock* 200.

have supported a peasant family so access to uncultivated land or other employment was imperative.[395] Successful conquest offered access to both land and employment. The empire provided up to 10 000 citizens primarily from the predominantly landless thetic class with confiscated land. Wealthy Athenians also benefited but apart from acquiring some property outside of Athens, it appears from the historical record that the empire more directly benefited less prosperous citizens.[396] A substantial proportion of the cost of waging war seems to have fallen directly on the elite whose contributions came from three primary sources: straightforward donations, the expenditures made by wealthy citizens from the Peloponnesian War onwards who equipped triremes and their crews, and the "emergency tax" levied on the property of wealthier citizens when funds ran short for the waging of war. Even booty taken from campaigning was given to the polis. Military commanders had to provide an account of their expenditures and gains to appointed treasurers.[397]

Tribute contributed greatly to Athenian wealth in the fifth century but when imperial revenue could no longer be collected in the fourth century, payments for political participation initiated by Pericles continued. The implication is that the right of non-

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[395] Garnsey, *Famine and the Food Supply* 46.

[396] M.I. Finley, "The Athenian Empire: A Balance Sheet" in *Economy and Society in Ancient Greece*, ed. Brent D. Shaw. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1981) 51,59.

[397] Paul Millet, "Warfare, economy and democracy in classical Athens" in *War and Society in the Greek World* 186, 190.

property owners to retain their citizenship and political participation was stronger and

more lasting than the link between democracy and sea power.[398] However, the empire did

strengthen democratic institutions since the influx of wealth not only helped to sustain the

fleet but also elevated the status and influence of the thetes in pressing for a more

inclusive democracy. The strategic role of the Athenian navy generated political

repercussions with the fleet providing the landless poor with military status and a sense of

direct contribution to the projection of Athenian power. The connection between

democracy and naval power was noted by oligarchs who preferred that military power

remain under the control of wealthy landholders. Indeed, at the end of the Peloponnesian

War there were plans among some wealthy Athenians to orient Athens back to the land.[399]

At the start of the Peloponnesian War, the emergence of leaders like Cleon whose

fortunes were not primarily based on landed property was exerting a more direct influence

on political decision-making. Population increases and trade had led to the growth of

wealthy individuals whose money was earned from sources outside of the land but the

rise of "demagogues" did not radically change Athenian policy by creating a merchant

class or an incipient bourgeoise.[400] A proposal initiated through an aristocratic coup and

aided by Spartan assistance in 403 sought to limit political rights only to those who

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[398] Canfora, "The Citizen" in *The Greeks* 129.

[399] Peter Krentz, *The Thirty at Athens* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982) 66.

[400] Astin and Vidal-Naquet, *Economic and Social History of Ancient Greece* 97-98.

owned land. It was defeated and democracy was restored shortly thereafter; had it been

accepted, approximately 5000 Athenians would have lost their civic rights. If one accepts

this figure and takes into account losses from the Peloponnesian War, only about a

quarter of the citizens did not own any land, reaffirming the assertion that, "Every Greek

community in the classical period was in the first instance a community of landowners,

even though fortunes not in land might subsequently develop side by side with landed

ones."[401] It is through this orientation towards the land that an interaction between the

ancient economy, empire and a democratic form of state can be established to explain

how the conflictual relations driving internal change in Athens affected the inter-state

rules governing warfare in ancient Greece.

Land and Rules

During the archaic and early classical period of Greek history international rules

tended to reinforce the decentralized nature of interactions amongst the Greek city-

states.[402] They pertained primarily to intra-Greek conflicts whose battles were fought with

heavily armed hoplite phalanx formations. The stipulations for war were that non-

combatants should not be involved, that battles should be fought during the usual summer

campaigning season and that the use of non-hoplite arms like those of *peltasts* should be

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[401] Astin and Vidal-Naquet, *Economic and Social History of Ancient Greece* 96.

[402] Given prevailing military siege techniques, city centers were much easier to defend than capture helping to reinforce, in conjunction with the geography of the region, a decentralized grouping of poleis. Mann, *The Sources of Social Power* 202.

limited. These rules became increasingly ineffectual in the period from 450 to 300 as a

direct result of Athenian naval expansion which had begun in the mid 480s.[403] When

Athens turned from land-based to sea-based warfare, the rules of warfare between the

city-states also changed. War became more totalizing as the generally lenient treatment of

defeated enemies, the ransoming of prisoners of war, and the lack of determined pursuit

of retreating soldiers to keep casualties within an acceptable range was no longer

followed. According to Ober, the principal cause behind changes to the rules was the

"social and political displacement of the Athenian hoplites."[404]

The extent to which the hoplites were displaced is arguable but the rules certainly

did change. Hoplite warfare reinforced the traditional association between fighting and

tilling the land as the only occupation truly worthy of the free and noble man but as

Aristotle was to recognize, the value of a citizen was also linked to his role in defending

the state.[405] Warfare had not previously provided the thetes who owned little or no land

with the opportunity to directly participate in the defence of Athens. As far as their

military role was concerned, they could not be considered equals in arms.[406] With

successful conquest based on naval rather than land warfare, the thetes were able to

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[403] Josiah Ober, *The Athenian Revolution: Essays on Ancient Greek Democracy and Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) 56-57.

[404] Ober, *The Athenian Revolution* 65.

[405] Ober, *The Athenian Revolution* 64.

[406] Kurt A. Raaflaub, "Democracy, Power and Imperialism in Fifth-Century Athens" in *Athenian Political Thought and the Reconstruction of American Democracy* 142.

establish an identity and influence that legitimized their ability to participate politically. Thetes could participate in the defence of Athens without necessarily having to own hoplite armor, instilling within them a confidence to actively pursue their interests in the Assembly. In contrast to those Greek city-states where the hoplites were predominantly involved in defending the polis, the military participation of the thetes helped to ensure the democratic breadth of the Athenian polity. Like the hoplite solidarity fostered through phalanx training, naval training also fostered a solidarity amongst the thetes since the ability to efficiently manoeuvre a trireme required teamwork and egalitarian effort which, when combined with the navy's integral role in the maintenance and expansion of the Athenian empire, helps to explain the politicization of the Athenian thete.[407] The contrast with the Republic is especially striking when one considers how the Roman peasant smallholders' gradual detachment from the land was the primary variable bringing about the demise of the Republic.

Land, Patronage and Polarization in the Republic

With the immediate security of Rome threatened by land and sea invasions, the impetus for the agrarian reform needed to stop the polarization of property was missing and with it, a chance for the emergence of a more inclusive democratic form of state such as that of Athens. Debt-bondage had been abolished in Athens with Solon's reforms but it

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[407] Barry S. Strauss, "The Athenian Trireme, School of Democracy"in *Demokratia: A Conversation on Democracies, Ancient and Modern*, ed.Josiah Ober and Charles Hendrik (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) 317-20.

would not be until 326 that it would be abolished in Rome, more than 150 years after the

institution of the centuriate assembly.[408] Even with the institution of the plebian assembly

and the abolition of debt bondage, the number of peasant landholders would continue to

decline during the Republic's duration. By the late third century, half of the Roman

citizenry did not own any land.[409] Whereas Solon's settlement had checked the call for

land redistribution, the Roman peasantry had to continuously press for newly conquered

lands to be distributed to individual citizens which is especially puzzling given the

Republic's success in appropriating land through conquest.

The conflict over land ownership in Italy was a "major axis of political activity" in

the Republic as manifested in the debates over whether public land should be

redistributed to soldiers.[410] Private land ownership accounted for only a part of Roman

land holdings. Lands acquired by Rome through conquest or by confiscation from

rebellious allies were deemed to be public. The contention of the plebians was that public

land was being encroached upon and concentrated in the hands of the wealthy instead of

remaining the property of the state and all Roman citizens.[411] Without the ability to access

public land for their own benefit and working instead for much wealthier patrons under

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[408] Sagan, *The Honey and the Hemlock* 39.

[409] P.A. Brunt, *Social Conflicts in the Roman Republic* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1971) 65.

[410] Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves* 50.

[411] Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome* 269-70.

constraint, increasing incidences of debt and debt-bondage were inevitable.[412] Since the

aristocracy relied on the peasantry for stocking Rome's legions, the plebians were able to

press for the implementation of Licinio-Sextian laws in 367, which aimed to limit the

amount of public land that could be held by any one citizen and by any one family,

allowing the poor at least some access to public land.[413] However, a problem regarding

access was that it was circumscribed with the integration of leading plebian families into

an expanded aristocracy. It would not be until 172 that both consuls would for the first

time be plebians[414] and since magistrates were expected to comply with the dictates of the

Senate, the inclusive measures of the Licinio-Sextian laws were practically ignored.[415] As

a result, the Roman peasantry as a collective could not reverse the decline in their

agricultural holdings which became especially critical once conquest subsided and

colonization was curtailed.

The reforms of Tiberius Gracchus in 133 attempted to halt the economic and

political decline of Roman peasant small holders by providing them with the means to

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[412] Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome* 330.

[413] John Patterson, "Military organization and social change in the later Roman republic" in *War and Society in the Roman World*, ed. John Rich and Graham Shipley (London: Routledge, 1993) 106-7.

[414] Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* 52.

[415] Neal Wood, *Cicero's Social and Political Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) 27.

continue their reproduction.[416] Gracchus was appalled by the proliferating number of large

slave-worked estates and sought to redistribute land to the peasants and soldiers returning

from overseas campaigns.[417] With more than ten percent of the estimated adult population

serving in the army for prolonged periods of time during the last two centuries the ability

of the peasantry to generate agricultural surpluses was jeopardized. While military service

along with the destruction of property and loss of life wrought by war were having an

adverse effect on the peasantry, their plight was compounded by the actions of the

wealthy. The obligations of military service had plunged peasant small-holders into debt.

Military service acted as a form of emigration which took peasants off the land but no

such fate befell wealthy landlords who were able to establish "large estates in Italy only

by the wholesale eviction of Italian peasants from their farms."[418]

Peasant land holdings were being taken over by wealthier landlords and

amalgamated into much larger farms tended to by slaves causing a precipitous decline in

the size and numbers of farms owned by the peasantry.[419] Although some public land had

been redistributed to the poor, the reforms themselves reflected the power of the

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[416] Tiberius Gracchus' attempt to reverse the accumulation of property by the patricians was one of at least twenty attempts over the course of the next hundred years to redistribute the land to peasants. Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves* 59.

[417] Finley, *The Ancient Economy* 80.

[418] Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves* 4.

[419] Even during the late republic when political conflicts and slavery were as at their peak, free peasants constituted the majority of the population outside Rome although their influence had been severely curtailed. Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves* 7-9.

aristocracy since the Gracchian reforms never fundamentally addressed the process by which the peasant soldiers were being dispossessed from the land or why the spoils of war continued to go to a privileged few whose monopoly over the spoils of conquest included the properties of some of Rome's own citizens.[420] Evicted peasants had nowhere to go except to Rome where wheat was made available to them at subsidized rates and later as a "free" offering. They were essentially turned into "state pensioners" dependent on the individual senators who courted their favor by fulfilling their material needs in return for political support.[421] The aristocracy feared that the Gracchi plan, giving peasants inalienable rights to a plot of land, would leave a mass of peasants and their descendants politically obliged to the Gracchi for the original land grant.[422] The Gracchian call for land redistributions to the peasantry was resisted by the Senate partly because of the reduction in the size of their individual land holdings and partly because of the aristocracy's fear that one of their colleagues would associate the distribution of public land with his own private patronage. By 119, the Gracchian reforms were abandoned. The re-settlement of ex-soldiers in Italy did not change the overall pattern of property accumulation by the aristocracy; it had merely postponed it.[423]

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[420] Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves* 39.

[421] Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves* 14.

[422] To administer the agrarian reforms, Tiberius, his brother Gaius, and his father in law would head the commission. Nagle, *The Ancient World* 318.

[423] Mann, *The Sources of Social Power* 257.

Booty and land confiscations had ameliorated internal conflicts within Rome but

by the second century, conquest had slowed such that land re-settlement had all but

ceased. According to P. A. Brunt, Rome's military victories had left it in a position of

such overwhelming strength that, "the old methods of sustaining it were allowed to fall

into disuse" including the process of colonization which was halted around 173.[424]

Colonial settlements were both militarily and politically useful as they allowed for some

measure of social mobility, albeit in distant regions of Italy, but the cessation of colonial

activity removed this safety valve particularly for those peasants who were being evicted

from their land holdings.[425] The benefits of war and empire were becoming less equitably

diffused just as the competition amongst the aristocracy intensified.

Roman Conquest, Partial Citizenship and the Demise of the Peasant Citizen

The dwindling number of Roman peasant land holdings and war casualties

brought about a fundamental change in the army. Military service led to the

impoverishment of the Roman peasantry. The plight of Roman peasant citizens can be

contrasted with Athenian peasants and landless citizens who had access to public funds

and whose service enhanced political participation. For the Roman Republic, there was

no analogous politicization of the landless citizen or the peasant smallholder and even if a

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[424] P.A. Brunt, *The Fall of the Roman Republic and Related Essays* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988) 71.

[425] John Patterson, "Military organization and social change in the later Roman Republic" in *War and Society in the Roman World* 106-7.

peasant could secure a lease on public land, military duty or death hastened debt-poverty for peasant families. Access to public land was blocked by wealthy landowners who were either directly involved in governance or had connections to those who were. Successful conquest helped to alleviate the tensions arising from the struggle between the wealthy and poor but the way in which conquest was integrated within the Republic depended on the institution of partial citizenship, allowing Rome to pursue territorial conquest without making radical changes to its political structure. In contrast to Athens' inability to integrate defeated peoples into the localized form of political participation that was Athenian democracy, political stratification in the Republic extended to Roman foreign policy with the dissolution of the Latin League instigating the institution of partial citizenship.

The Latin League's ability to persevere despite threats of imminent invasion and to garner the benefits of conquest was not enough to prevent the dissolution of the Roman and Latin alliance in 340. The Latin allies united in revolt against Rome, resentful of being treated as subjects rather than as allies, and were convinced that Rome sought to dominate all of Latium. The ensuing Roman-Latin War from 340 to 338 ended with Rome's victory over the Latin allies which is notable not so much for Rome's triumph but for the way in which it devised the post-war settlement that would fundamentally determine the basis on which further Roman expansion would proceed in Italy.[426] Upon

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[426] The defeated communities were divided into juridical categories defined by specific rights and obligations owed to Rome. Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome* 348.

the dissolution of the Latin League, Rome dealt with defeated communities on an

individual basis rather than as a group.[427] Former alliances were rescinded and replaced

by separate types of juridical categories which were attached with specific rights and

obligations resulting in a Roman Commonwealth based on a hierarchy of statuses among

its various members.[428] Technically, the Roman "allies" were independent communities

but because the overwhelming majority did not have equal treaties with Rome, the allies

were not permitted to independently pursue their own foreign policies or to go to war

with each other.[429]

The basic provision common to all allies was the obligation to supply military aid

to Rome regardless of their relative status to Rome. The most important Roman

innovation concerning these statuses was the institution of partial citizenship. Athenian

patronage relations were undermined by the construction of a citizen democracy but

Rome's ability to incorporate neighbouring communities into a hierarchy of relationships

speaks to the perseverance of Roman patronage and to the way in which the empire was

institutionalized. The control exerted over "allies" and "friends" mirrored the internal

asymmetrical exchange of services defining client-patron relations within Rome.[430] Partial

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[427] Salmon, *The Making of Roman Italy* 40.

[428] Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome* 348.

[429] Salmon, *The Making of Roman Italy* 67.

[430] The weaker party was pressured to look to the stronger for protection and, in turn, was required to show the stronger party loyalty and respect. John Rich, "Patronage and International Relations in the Roman Republic" in *Patronage in Ancient Society* 120.

citizenship made an integral contribution to Roman expansion by providing Rome with the institutional ability to expand beyond its immediate locality in a way Athenian democracy could not. Defeated states were permitted to retain governance over their own municipalities but were obligated to provide military service to Rome when called upon without having the right to participate in the Roman assemblies. As a result, every army that took the field after 338 was comprised of both citizen troops and allies, allowing Rome to absorb heavy losses with minimum risk to the state itself.[431]

The ability to extend patronage links outside the confines of Rome preserved and extended republican rule. Whether there was full or partial enfranchisement, the treaties and contracts binding cities and peoples were part of a network of social loyalties and personal power linking Italian aristocrats with the Roman aristocracy. By 264, Rome had permanent treaties with over 150 Italian communities which had previously been defeated in war or had "voluntarily" agreed to be allies.[432] Such a conception of the Roman commonwealth as consisting of client states bound by varying degrees of dependence to Rome also coincides with Rome's conception of states as peoples or groups rather than as abstract entities.[433] Because the commonwealth was of use to Rome only in times of war, Rome had to engage in continuous warfare to keep the alliance system operating.

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[431] Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome* 351, 367.

[432] Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome* 366.

[433] Rich, *Patronage in Ancient Society* 124.

The dynamic and aggrandizing effect which the Roman commonwealth had in perpetuating conquest was reflected in Rome's ability to exploit the alliance, not through taxation, but through an ability to demand troops. With the use of partial citizenship, Rome was able to increase the available number of legions by using Latin troops who, while substantially contributing to Rome's victories, received a disproportionately smaller share of the spoils.[434] Thus Rome was able to actively express its leadership while at the same time channelling the bellicosity already existing in the Latin communities onto a common enemy.[435] The commonwealth also allowed Rome to extend its territory and rule to newly-incorporated communities.[436] In contrast to Athens where citizenship was primarily based on descent, Rome was relatively open in terms of assimilating conquered peoples, allowing the Republic to vastly increase its population and military resources.[437] Rome was exceptional among ancient empire-builders for the longevity of

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[434] P.A. Brunt, *Social Conflicts in the Roman Republic* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1971) 5.

[435] John Rich, "Fear, Greed and Glory: the Causes of Roman War-Making in the Middle Republic" in *War and Society in the Roman World* 43.

[436] Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome* 351.

[437] Rome's willingness to grant citizenship was a function of the political insignificance of Roman citizenship since the legal status of citizenship did not necessarily mean possessing the same political rights and opportunities as Athenian citizenship did. Walter Eder, "Who Rules? Power and Participation in Athens and Rome" in *City States in Classical Antiquity and Medieval Italy* 173.

sustaining a massive political and military effort over the centuries.[438] After the Roman

victory over the Italian allies in 367, Latium and then the rest of Italy would be integrated

into the Roman empire by the mid-third century.[439] Every year the two Roman consuls

would conduct a levy and direct Rome's legions and allied armies on campaigns which by

268 had resulted in the conquest of the entire peninsula.[440] When Rome's theatre of

campaigning was confined to Italy, warfare had an annual pattern that was primarily

restricted to the summer campaigning system.[441] While war was continuous, the character

of warfare changed with the onset of the Punic Wars. The ability to withstand the

widespread allied revolts which Hannibal had expected to transpire but which never

materialized is a testament to the military and political organization Rome was able to

exercise over its allies.[442] Just as the thetes changed the inter-state rules governing warfare

in Greece, the Punic wars set in motion the process which would eventually undermine

both the peasant citizen basis of the army and the Republic where response to an external

crisis transformed political conflicts within the Roman Republic.

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[438] Throughout the history of the Republic the closing of the Temple of Janus which was marked by peace with all neighboring peoples only occurred twice. Finley, *Ancient History: Evidence and Models* 67.

[439] M.I. Finley, "Empire in the Greco-Roman World," *Greece and Rome* 25 (1978): 8.

[440] Tim Cornell, "The End of Roman Imperialism" in *War and Society in the Roman World* 155.

[441] John Rich, "Fear, greed and glory: the causes of Roman war-making in the middle Republic"in *War and Society in the Roman World* 44.

[442] Salmon, *The Making of Roman Italy* 79.

The First Punic War (264-241) changed the annual character of warfare to a more permanent pattern as Rome was strategically required to maintain a year-round military presence to counter the Carthaginian threat. With the Second Punic War (218-201), the scale of military commitments considerably increased as the theatre of war would come to include Spain, Illyria, Greece and eventually Africa.[443] With overseas warfare and campaigns lasting for years, the army's character had also changed. The last two centuries BC witnessed a shift in military service from peasant citizens to professional soldiers who were predominantly poor and landless.[444] The conduct of war was no longer limited to a farmer's attachment to the land and the seasons. The continued successes of the Roman legions helped foster a strong bond of comradery between a commander and his troops. Instead of the army becoming autonomous,[445] this bond was turning the Republican army into a number of private armies. The attachment between soldiers and commanders resembled that of the relationship between patron and client in civilian life, with soldiers seeking material benefits and commanders utilizing soldiers to pursue political advancement.[446] In his study of war and imperialism in Republican Rome, Harris ends his analysis in 70 BC, recognizing a shift away from imperial expansion as a uniting force

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[443] Rich, "Fear, greed and glory"in *War and Society in the Roman World* 45.

[444] Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves* 29.

[445] Contrary to the argument posed by Mann in *The Sources of Social Power* 257.

[446] Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* 67.

amongst the aristocracy towards more charismatic military leaders and their followers.[447]

When factional rivalry within the aristocracy is combined with the ability of some

aristocrats to command and sustain the loyalty of their own armies, political order is

compromised to the point of fragmentation.

A heavily-skewed distribution of wealth amongst the citizenry, military

commanders serving as political leaders, and the wide discretion which Roman

commanders had in the field regarding issues of war and peace were primary reasons for

why civil war broke out in Rome. The Republic did not possess the administrative control

that the Athenian assembly had over its military commanders. Almost all the booty taken

in an Athenian campaign became the property of Athens whereas it was a normal and

legitimate practice for Roman commanders to retain a substantial share of the booty for

themselves.[448] The danger of a commander retaining the spoils of war and distributing

booty at his discretion rather than that of the aristocracy as a whole increased the risk of

armies becoming attached to a commander rather than to the Republic. Compounding this

attachment was the discretionary power exercised by a commander in declaring war. The

commander in the field had wide leeway in deciding whether to destroy a community,

accept its surrender, admit a neutral community to friendship with Rome, or construe an

attack on an ally or friend as an attack on Rome's own interests. There were

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[447] Harris, *War and Imperialism* 5.

[448] Paul Millet, "Warfare, Economy and Democracy in Classical Athens" in *War and Society in the Greek World* 190.

disagreements about strategy but not regarding the legitimacy of empire and conquest.[449]

At the commander's discretion, most wars fought by Rome were undeclared and resulted

from what a commander interpreted to be an act of aggression.[450] The commander's

discretion was not only an indication of the marginalization of the Roman citizen

assembly, but it also reflected a general willingness to go to war. A soldier, if successful,

could acquire substantial amounts of booty even though the length of time spent away

from his land could force him to buy land to replace his original property. Overall, and in

contrast to Athens, the Roman aristocracy was unwilling to share the spoils of victory

through a generalized system of redistribution. As a result, soldiers were generally poorly

paid, often lost their property, and, given the Republic's failure to provide immediate

remuneration upon discharge, legionnaires had no recourse but to become the clients of

their commander. When patronage was combined with the Republic's policy of vesting

civilian and military authority in the same person, the seeds for civil war were sown.

<u>Private Interests and Public Consequences</u>

The civil wars of the late Republic invoke the question of how a state should be

organized so that it protects property without becoming an instrument of appropriation for

those who wish to confiscate the land holdings of their peers. The senators of the late

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[449] M.I. Finley, "Empire in the Greco-Roman World" 5.

[450] In theory, Rome could only be at war if authorized by the assembly of the people but in practice, proposals for war were put to the assembly only after they had been approved by the senate. Brunt, *The Fall of the Roman Republic* 17-18.

Republic were not able to organize around a state which could continue to reproduce their rule as a group. As long as the empire was expanding and landowners were able to increase their holdings absolutely, the underlying tensions within the Roman state were placated. With Rome almost continuously at war with external enemies, the combination between military and civil power proved effective but as this immediate threat abated and conquest slowed, the consensus within the state was threatened.[451] With conquest essentially completed and the peasantry no longer a threat, aristocratic unity became unglued as private armies directed their violence against Rome itself.

The subjugation of the Mediterranean alleviated an immediate external threat to Rome while an emaciated peasantry diminished an internal threat to aristocratic rule. Ironically, the absence of these threats would undermine the unity of the aristocracy. The self-interested pursuit of wealth and power splintered the aristocracy into divisive factions undermining the patronage networks that had previously facilitated integration and order.[452] The Senate had been a site where formal institution and convention met but with the entrenchment of private interests, the aristocracy lost its flexibility and sense of unity by the end of the second century.[453] This breakdown was severe enough for citizens to

[451] Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* 55.

[452] Neal Wood, *Cicero's Social and Political Thought* 28.

[453] Walter Eder, "Republicans and Sinners: The Decline of the Roman Republic and the End of a Provisional Arrangement" in *Transitions to Empire: Essays in Greco-Roman History, 360-146 B.C.* 447-48.

orient themselves more towards the authority of persons than to that of the laws of the

Republic. Peasants and landless citizens turned to charismatic generals like Sulla.

Pompey, Caesar, Antony and Augustus who, unlike the state, promised to enrich

followers with promises of land grants and pay. The interlocking networks of dependence

tied people to the favors of their superiors, further limiting the extent to which the

peasantry could influence policy decisions.[454] In times of overt crisis private militias were

summoned as a pretext for marching on the Republic in order to save it. Yet, Michael

Mann suggests that factional struggles amongst the aristocracy, "could, doubtless, have

been contained within traditional political structures but for the changed nature of the

army."[455] Although it is accurate to suggest that the creation of a professional army

undermined the connection to republican participatory citizenship, it is quite another

thing to suggest that the changed nature of the army was the precipitating factor in

bringing down the republic. Contrary to Mann, the assumed autonomy of the Roman

army was compromised because the army and its legions were, in effect, private armies

dependent on the resources possessed by the generals who were themselves members of

the aristocracy.

The civil wars of the first century could have resulted in either the fragmentation

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[454] Wallace-Hadrill, "Patronage in Roman society" 74. There was some flexibility, depending on a client's status, in choosing a patron with competition between a multiplicity of patrons and clients postponing the possibility of one patron obtaining a monopoly over the distributive control over resources.

[455] Mann, *The Sources of Social Power* 285.

of the Republic into a number of smaller states or the ascent of one aristocrat to the

position of absolute rule. The civil wars had temporarily exhausted the wealth of the

aristocracy as a whole but they also provided Augustus with an opportunity to secure a

dominant position of wealth and power over his rivals.[456] In 27 Augustus became emperor

and immediately took measures to ensure that no one senator or any group of senators

could acquire the means to overthrow his rule. To prevent a coup, Augustus took the key

step of placing the army under his direct control, undertaking a number of initiatives

designed to suppress the aristocracy's ability to command private armies and exploit the

provinces. By maintaining the doubling of active pay established under Caesar, Augustus

was further able to guarantee the loyalty of the army by providing soldiers with allotments

of land financed mainly out of his personal fortunes.[457] As a result, Augustus was able to

solidify his rule commanding the loyalty of his troops not only through victory but also

through the material benefits he was able to offer to the demobilized legionaries after the

civil war. The bonds of patronage were strengthened as he established himself as the

patron of the whole empire uniting the public and the private in his person.

The anonymous author of the "Constitution of the Athenians", a bitter critic of

democracy, divided states into two categories: those that wage war by sea and those that

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[456] Augustus acquired an enormous estate by confiscating land including Egypt, the most wealthy of the provinces. By the time of his death, his personal income was approximately one-quarter of the annual income of the entire empire. Mann, *The Sources of Social Power* 180.

[457] Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* 71.

wage war on land.[458] The shift in Athenian military strategy from land-based warfare to

the pursuit of naval hegemony without territorial absorption and the Republic's shift from

a citizen militia drawn from peasant farmers to a recruited army of professionals helps

distinguish Athenian democracy and the Roman Republic. Not only did the influx of

wealth help define institutional changes within Athens and Rome but, as indicated by

Thucydides and Polybius, conquest also triggered delusions of righteousness.

Justifying Empire

The Athenian invocation of Panhellenism and the Roman use of the "just war"

doctrine affirm realism's caution of how idealistic proclamations can and have been used

to exploit others. Like all belligerents, ancient and modern, the Romans and Athenians

needed to convince themselves that they were in the right. To the Romans, victory in

itself was the justification to rule the defeated. In Cicero's words, "it was by our

scrupulous attention to religion and by our wise grasp of a single truth, that all things are

ruled and directed by the will of the gods, that we have overcome all peoples and

nations."[459] The Romans believed that they had acquired their empire justly by fighting

for their security or for the protection of their allies thereby raising the question as to

whether Rome's application of the "just war" doctrine actually inhibited Roman

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[458] Luciano Canfora, "The Citizen" in *The Greeks*, ed. Jean-Pierre Vernant (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995) 125.

[459] Quote taken from P.A. Brunt, "Laus Imperii" in *Imperialism in the Ancient World*, ed. P.D.A. Garnsey and C.R. Whittaker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978) 165.

aggressiveness in practice. The idea that Rome's chief aim in expanding was not

deliberate but a defensive reaction to a series of incidental responses to aggression taken

against Rome and Rome's allies is not tenable.[460]

> When all such justifications have been swept away, it is laus imperii. the
> doctrine of power, which remains. And this is simply the ancient belief,
> expressed by Thucydides and implicit in the works of Polybius, that it is
> natural for the stronger to dominate the weaker."[461]

Roman imperialism can hardly be regarded as being defensive with a more accurate view

depicting Rome as having a strategic policy consistent with aggrandizement. The

institutionalization of Roman imperialism corresponded with the pattern of Roman

office- holding where the eligibility to hold political office in the Republic depended on

having completed ten annual military campaigns.[462] A military ethos prevailed as the

rising politician would have had to experience war in order to advance his fortunes. War

offered the possibility of both personal distinction and enrichment so it is hardly

surprising that the opportunities provided by warfare required that conquest should be

made readily available. Even when the Roman state was not externally threatened, it had

an interest in allowing conflicts between Rome and other states to fester into war for

reasons of personal distinction and self-enrichment.[463] By "protecting" their friends and

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[460] P.D.A. Garnsey and C.R. Whittaker, "Introduction" in *Imperialism in the Ancient World* 2-5.

[461] Garnsey and Whittaker, "Introduction" 5.

[462] Harris, *War and Imperialism* 11.

[463] Harris, *War and Imperialism* 41.

allies. Rome could become involved in wars with peoples they had only minimal contact with. Protection under the guise of providing assistance could be used as a pretext for a just intervention.

Rome's use of the "just war" doctrine to make conquest more conscionable is analogous to Athens' invocation of Panhellenism as a means of justifying the promotion of its foreign policy. In an assertion equally applicable to Rome, Sarah Pomeroy claims that within the Athenian citizenry, "the will to dominate was such that they then had to separate themselves as a group and claim to be superior to all non-members: foreigners, slaves, and women."[464] This will also extended beyond Athens' borders as the distinction between Greek and non-Greek became especially pronounced. Non-Greeks were distinguished from Greeks on the basis that they were not free citizens but were to be ruled as subjects.[465] In practice, the Athenians believed that as free people they should have the right to govern others, including fellow Greeks, and derive advantage from their liberty and military prowess.[466] The impetus for Panhellenism with its idea of Greece as an ethnic and cultural unity had developed during the Persian Wars but its actual

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[464] Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Schocken Books, 1975) 78.

[465] Donald Kagan, *Pericles of Athens and the Birth of Democracy* 97.

[466] Timothy J. Galpin, "The Democratic Roots of Athenian Imperialism in the Fifth Century B.C" 108.

application by Athens was far more narrow in its scope.[467] Athenian hegemony over the

Delian League had both the professed Panhellenic aim of providing a united front against

the Persian barbarians and the actual aim of justifying Athenian rule in the Aegean.[468]

Panhellenism was not only limited to promoting Athenian foreign policy since Pericles is

thought to have shrouded Athenian imperial policy under the guise of Panhellenism in an

attempt to direct his own domestic policy interests.[469]

The idea of applying a unitary conception of the state to explain Athenian and

Roman external relations is problematic since foreign intervention into the internal affairs

of another state was often instrumental in initiating conflict or temporarily resolving a

conflict in favor of one faction over another. The Republic's support for aristocracies was

a consistent foreign policy feature as illustrated by Rome's direct involvement in the

affairs of the Greek cities of southern Italy in 282.[470] In order to propagate political

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[467] In spite of sharing a similar mythology of common origins, religion, language and culture, the Greek city-states never aspired to political unity. There were also as many dialects of the Greek language as there were communities and even though there was a shared Greek religion, each city had its own particular deity. J.K Davies, *Democracy and Classical Greece* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1978) 23-24.

[468] M.I. Finley, "The Athenian Empire: A Balance Sheet" in *Economy and Society in Ancient Greece*, ed. Brent D. Shaw (London: Chatto and Windus, 1981) 44. One may also question Sparta's commitment to the Panhellenic unity when, after Athens' disastrous defeat in Sicily, Sparta undertook the construction of a large naval fleet heavily subsidized by Persia.

[469]
S. Perlman, "Panhellenism, the Polis and Imperialism," *Historia* Band XXV/1 (1976): 17.

[470] Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome* 363.

arrangements suited to their interests. Athens also intervened in the affairs of city-states,

exacerbating tensions and igniting civil wars.[471] The internal structures of states do matter

in determining the outward projection of a state's behaviour and for *some of* Athens'

subjects, democracy backed by Athenian power was preferred to oligarchic rule and the

loss of political autonomy. However. the apparent eagerness to be converted into a

dependent should not deter one from recognizing that the Athenian empire was still a

"tyranny" with approximately 700 officials entrusted to facilitate the institutionalization

of the payment of tribute and the maintenance of empire.[472] Given the bitterness that

people under Athenian rule harbored and given how the Greeks generally favoured the

Spartans throughout the Peloponnesian War, the manipulation of internal factions by

Athens and Sparta led Thucydides to generally conclude that "...practically the whole of

the Hellenic world was convulsed with rival parties in every state- democratic leaders

trying to bring in the Athenians. and oligarchs trying to bring in the Spartans."[473]

Therefore, the effects of foreign intervention are not to be treated as being separable from

the internal relations within a city-state. The war between city-states was a predominant

stimulus to fighting within cities such that conflict, whether in its civil or inter-state

manifestations. must be considered as the primary impetus for initiating political change

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[471] Andrew Lintott. *Violence. Civil Strife and Revolution in the Classical City* (London: Croom Helm, 1982) 63.

[472] Finley. *The Athenian Empire* 46,60.

[473] Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* 2.8, 3.82.

in the ancient world, challenging those explanations based on trade, technological

innovation or a balancing of power.

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CONCLUSION

The questions which the ancient Greeks and Hebrews asked are still asked by us, and every new achievement of science, far from bringing us closer to the answer, emphatically poses the ancient questions ever again.[474]

Hans Morgenthau

Why the recurrence of violence and destruction throughout human history? Why

has human agency been unable to choose a lasting peace over war or design institutions

capable of eliminating the recurrence of violence? Although the study of the past cannot

provide ready-made solutions for the present or the future, reviving the classical realism

of Reinhold Niebuhr and Hans Morgenthau through the texts of Thucydides and Polybius

challenges the belief that humankind has somehow progressed beyond the destructive

concerns of antiquity. Despite the differences between our market-based economy and the

ancient economy of Greece and Rome, an understanding of the empirical processes on

which the political economy of the past rested has contemporary relevance for studying

international relations. Situating political action and institutions within the historical

context of the ancient political economy suggests that even though the expression of

human characteristics *does change* as a result of historical and material circumstances,

humankind's predilection for violence and exploitation remains.

Reappraising the texts of Thucydides and Polybius in conjunction with the

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[474] Morgenthau, *Scientific Man versus Power Politics* 123.

normative approach to international relations theory as suggested by Niebuhr and

Morgenthau distinguishes realism's critical approach as a caution against regarding the

whole of reality as being self-explanatory and self-fulfilling. The writings of these authors

illuminate the complexities of political choice and the way in which self-righteousness

fueled by hubris makes the process of moral reasoning more difficult. Thucydides'

presentation of the Mytilenian debate, the Melian dialogue and the Sicilian expedition

along with Polybius' reflections on Scipio's character and the destruction of Carthage

starkly remind scholars and practitioners of the dangers brought about by hubris. To

cultivate prudence, Morgenthau and Niebuhr held that *all* states and the ideologies upon

which they are based should be subject to universal moral principles despite the inability

to concretely apply these principles. A transcendent appeal which aspires to approximate

these principles while explicitly recognizing that these principles can never be fully

comprehended can help to moderate hubris so long as the metaphor of the appeal is not

literally reduced to theological or political codification.

The idea of invoking the transcendent is more than just an abstract concept. If

there are no general laws or standards on which to judge political choices, the question of

what is just becomes open to interpretation, potentially leading to disastrous political

implications fostered by a radical approach to moral relativism or the assumed moral

superiority of ideological absolutism. If international relations can be defined as a

struggle for power, a corresponding struggle that underlies human relations is the struggle

to define figuratively the transcendent. There is no way of avoiding interpretation,

especially given the dangers of how easily a transcendent appeal can become a literal

truth pursued with zealous devotion. The contemporary relevance of a transcendent

appeal for modern. secular times is expressed by Hans Morgenthau who equates a

religious conception of the transcendent with the "secular religion" of pursuing

democratic ideals. For Morgenthau, the secular and religious are not that different ,

> It is on this absolute and transcendent foundation that the foundation of
> genuine democracy rests. and it is within this immutable framework that
> the process of genuine democracy take place. The pluralism of these
> processes is subordinated, and orientated toward, those absolute and
> transcendent truths. It is this subordination and this orientation which
> distinguishes the pluralism of the genuine type of democracy from the
> relativism of its corrupted types....Out of this relativism that makes
> political truth a function of political power develops, as we have seen, first
> the tyranny, and then the totalitarianism of the majority. Thus, the
> relativism of majority rule. denying the existence of absolute, transcendent
> truth independent of the majority will, tends toward the immanent
> absolutism of tyrannical or totalitarian majority, while the pluralism of
> genuine democracy assumes as its corollary the existence of such truth
> limiting the will of the majority.[475]

In other words. democratic forms of political order must defer to a transcendent

truth to avoid equating what is right with majority opinion or other standards such as

prosperity. The institutional medium of democracy can help "minimize the extent to

which life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness of the individual members of society are

locked in the struggle for power"[476] but. unlike a transcendent appeal which defers to a

higher authority. democratic ideals are defined by the preferences of a society and defers

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[475] Morgenthau. *The Purpose of American Politics* 252-53.

[476] Morgenthau. *Politics Among Nations* 235.

only to itself. Morgenthau feared that American democracy in the 1960s was embracing

an unrestricted relativism that was defined by majority opinion without a grounding in a

"higher law".[477] Instead, what is needed is a tolerant and prudent relativism such that the

democratic pursuit of equality and freedom must rest on a pluralistic diffusion of power

based on a conception of the existence of an objective order.

> What is essential, then, is the existence of substantive, transcendent
> purposes, derived from what is believed to be an objective order, and an
> environment of equality in freedom within which the realization of that
> purpose is sought. The assumption of such a substantive, transcendent, and
> objective order, however conceived, gives meaning to the American
> experience of equality in freedom."[478]

What a realist approach offers to the study of international relations theory is a

research project premised on integrating a transcendent appeal's ability to moderate

hubris with a commitment to democratic order based on the diffusion of power. This

project could examine the emphasis Thucydides and Polybius placed on the degree to

which leaders were capable of moderating the extremes collective behavior in

conjunction with a revised realist conception of the state. How the struggle for power

becomes manifest through the reciprocal relationship between domination and resistance,

ideationally through rhetoric and representation and materially by incorporating economic

processes, can be more easily linked to considering political choice as an exercise of

power.

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[477] Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations* 224.

[478] Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations* 22.

The Athenian actions at Melos and the Roman destruction of Carthage starkly

illustrate the dangers of moving from a deferential belief in the transcendent to the belief

that one's political choice is synonymous with what is right. More recently, the belief in a

common evolutionary pattern for all human societies in the direction of liberal democracy

and market economies with the eventual attainment of worldwide democratic peace

places too much faith in our ability to create lasting political institutions based on

freedom, equality, and justice.[479] David Rothkopf, a former senior official in the U.S.

Department of Commerce under the Clinton administration, exemplifies such faith by

assuming that American values and interests are also in the world's best interests.

> American culture is an amalgam of influences and approaches from
> around the world. It is melded--consciously in many cases--into a social
> medium that allows individual freedoms and cultures to thrive.
> Recognizing this, Americans should not shy away from doing that which
> is so clearly in their economic, political, and security interests-and so
> clearly in the interests of the world at large. The United States should not
> hesitate to promote its values. In an effort to be polite or politic,
> Americans should not deny the fact that of all the nations in the history of
> the world, theirs is the most just, the most tolerant, the most willing to
> constantly reassess and improve itself, and the best model for the future.[480]

The American values which Rothkopf seeks to promote are not universal despite

his overriding faith in American democracy. A danger in the assumed absolute superiority

of political, moral or religious visions was vividly expressed by the Athenians at Melos

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[479] Francis Fukuyama. *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1992) 47-48.

[480] David Rothkopf, "In Praise of Cultural Imperialism?," *Foreign Policy* 107 no.2 (1997) 45.

whose political vision was rationalized to the extent that they justified their

aggrandizement as an irrefutable demonstration of the application of transcendent laws.

Such rationalization is contrary to revised realism's premise that these standards can

never be known and its recommendation that policy makers take special care to navigate

between the extremes of absolutism and the relativity of thought. Preventing these

rationalizations from emerging lies less in our ability to devise more perfect constitutions;

instead, what needs to be emphasized is an understanding of the human condition and the

limitations that hubris poses to political choice and stability.

The relevance of emphasizing the human condition and the necessity of a

transcendent appeal is more than just philosophical speculation without practical

application. Practitioners like President Vaclav Havel of the Czech Republic advocate a

responsibility to a higher order of being where all actions are indelibly recorded and

properly judged.[481] Havel's efforts at promoting democratic values within a global

civilization that is tolerant of different cultures contrasts with the assumed superiority of

the American values that Rothkopf believes to be in the world's best interests. For Havel,

subordinating political behavior to the imperative that there is something higher and

infinitely more sophisticated than human intellect may relieve humanity of having to "go

through many more Rwandas and Chernobyls before it understands how unbelievably

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[481] Vaclav Havel, *The Art of the Impossible: Politics as Morality in Practice* (New York: Fromm International Publishing, 1998) 19.

shortsighted a human being can be who has forgotten that he is not God."[482]

A danger pertaining to realism's emphasis on the human condition is that by accepting hubris as being an innate part of human nature, individuals and collectives may be dehumanized, naively simplifying politics to the extent of providing yet another example of the malign side of our nature. An excessive focus on hubris offers little in the way of preventing future atrocities, which is contrary to understanding realism as "a subversive revolutionary force" whose aspirations are for more inclusive, humane and stable institutions. That democratic institutions are not sufficient for preventing expressions of hubris does not detract from Niebuhr's assertion that people should aspire to establish higher standards of justice through political institutions premised on majority ascent in order to confront these expressions.[483] Even though the dangers of emphasizing hubris and the need for the moderation provided by transcendent appeals are decidedly pessimistic in tone, it does not necessarily detract from their merit.

The texts of Thucydides and Polybius not only recognize the dangers of emphasizing hubris and appeals to the transcendent but they also illustrate the shortcomings contained within any political project, including democracies. Contrary to Polybius' aristocratic leanings and Thucydides' vagueness regarding the rule of the Five Thousand, realism's emphasis on resistance disposes it to favor a more democratic form

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[482] Havel 182.

[483] Niebuhr, "Structures of Power" 107,110.

of state where the impetus for revolutionary change is tempered through the material and

political empowerment of the majority. Realism shares with the texts of Thucydides and

Polybius the fact that democracy is not immune from the destructive effects of hubris

especially since greater political inclusiveness did not limit the aggrandizing efforts of

Athenian democracy or Roman republicanism.

Ancient Implications for Modern Processes

The hazards of promoting the institution of democracy in Rwanda and the laissez-

faire market ideology that facilitated the East Asian financial crisis are relatively recent

illustrations of the continuing inability of institutions to contain individual and collective

expressions of hubris. Like the Athenian use of Panhellenism and the Roman use of the

"just war" doctrine, the globalizing mission of the economically-advanced democratic

states was promoted as being in the collective interests of all states when it actually

served their self-interests. Foreign intervention in Rwanda to promote democratic reforms

abetted the precipitation of civil war and genocide by aggravating the fragility of the

Rwandan state while the vulnerability of the economies of Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia,

South Korea and the Philippines to transnational networks of finance and production

precipitated the near financial collapse of East Asia. In both instances, an appeal to a

transcendent standard could have tempered the extremes of violence and avarice to limit

the absolute convictions upon which the political actions taken were based.

In the early 1990s, the then US Secretary of State Warren Christopher asserted

that the promotion of democracy would be a pillar of US foreign policy, forming "the

basis for a substantially new American relationship" where America would assist

Africans in their efforts to democratic institutions and facilitate economic growth.[484]

Rwanda was in dire need of assistance given that it plays an exceptionally marginal and

subordinate role in the global economy. Ninety-nine percent of its exports consist of the

primary commodities of tin and coffee which precariously exposes its economy to world

commodity price fluctuations. A general fall in commodity prices in the 1980s so

adversely affected Rwanda's farmers that survival became a preoccupation in the face of

increasing famine.[485] Without the ability to generate their own subsistence much less a

surplus. Rwanda's farmers desperately sought assistance from the one-party Rwandan

state dictatorship administered by then President Habyarimana and his Hutu backers. The

majority of Hutu farmers sought a protectorate much like the Roman peasantry who were

alienated from their land and increasingly subjected to the patronage of their military

commanders.

Rwanda was particularly vulnerable to outside intervention, receiving more

income from aid than from export-generated revenue, but it was the political legacy of

Belgian colonial rule that served to institute inequality in Rwanda by fracturing society

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[484] John Pender, "The end of the Cold War: the global context".
http://www.udayton.edu/~rwanda/articles/genocide/understanding.html. London,
conference papers and transcriptions, July 27, 1997.

[485] John Pender, "Modern Rwanda: one of the poorest and weakest countries in the
world", http://www.udayton.edu/~rwanda/articles/genocide/understanding.html. London,
conference papers and transcriptions, July 27, 1997.

between ethnic Tutsi and Hutu. The Belgians used the Tutsi. Rwanda's aristocracy, to maintain colonial rule over the Hutu majority who were mostly poor farmers. To this end the Belgians issued ethnic identity cards demarcating Tutsi and Hutu, privileging the Tutsi in a system similar to apartheid in South Africa.[486] With Rwandan independence beginning in the late 1950s, the Hutu seizure of power imposed an apartheid-like system in reverse that bitterly oppressed the Tutsi in the name of majority rule. The increasing violence and discrimination directed against the Tutsi by the Hutu led to migrations of the Tutsi population to neighboring states, leading to the formation of an insurgent army known as the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF).

The RPF's invasion of Rwanda in 1990 revitalized foreign intervention into Rwanda's affairs culminating with a peace treaty brokered primarily by the United States and France that forced the Hutu-led regime to share power with the Tutsis.[487] After the RPF invasion France and the United States took a more active role in brokering the reorganization of power in Rwanda which differed, particularly in the case of the United States, from Cold War policies. During the Cold War the primary foreign policy issue was whether one was ultimately aligned with the former Soviet Union or the United States. With the end of the Cold War the advanced industrialized states, international

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[486] Philip Gourevitch interview in "The Triumph of Evil",
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/evil/etc/script.html. Frontline air date, January 26, 1999.

[487] Philip Gourevitch interview.

institutions and non-governmental organizations were pressing for the promotion of

democratic institutional reforms and freer markets around the globe. In June 1990, future

French aid was tied to Rwanda becoming a multi-party democracy with added pressure

coming from the United States. Belgium, the United Nations, the European Union and

the Organization of African Unity.

Thucydides' description of the civil war that engulfed Corcyra, complete with the

intervention of outside powers as instigators, would confirm his admonition that

vengeance and profit would again be placed above innocence and justice given our

human nature. The competition for power within Rwanda, as in Corcyra, did not take

place in a vacuum. The Hutu government and the RPF each received military backing

with the Rwandanese government forces benefitting from French reorganization and the

RPF receiving significant backing from the United States. The assassination of Hutu

president Juvenal Habyarimana and the seizure of power by Hutu extremists in 1994 in

conjunction with the imposition of democratic reforms on an unstable Rwandan state

served to exacerbate the genocidal atrocities committed against the Tutsi in April 1994. In

terms of how external pressures to expedite democratization impacted Rwanda, "Western

pressures to democratize undermined the existing form of government, sparked a

competition for power (in particular encouraging the RPF to invade) and decisively

shaped the new form that politics would take."[488] In their efforts to transpose democratic

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[488] John Pender, "The impact of democratisation on Rwanda"
http://www.udayton.edu/~rwanda/articles/genocide/understanding.html. London,

institutions on Rwanda, the United States, France and the United Nations had indeed

forgotten or chose to ignore Thucydides' and Polybius' caution regarding the ability of

states to contain hubris, regardless of whether rule was democratic or despotic. Whether

the zeal to democratize was in Rwanda's best interests at that time or in the interests of

the United Nations, the United States and France is a question that could benefit from a

revised realist understanding of how material processes coalesced to explain who benefits

or suffers from state construction. Rather than simply blaming the legacy of colonialism

or a world capitalist system perpetuating the dependency of the South, the texts of

Thucydides and Polybius along with a renewed and revised realist approach recognizes

that the genocidal atrocities committed were fundamentally rooted within the human

condition and not in the institutions themselves.

Even a global financial system instituted under the direction of and for the benefit

of the world's most economically-advanced and democratic states could not prevent the

hubris that enveloped the East Asian financial crisis which nearly brought about the

collapse of global finance altogether. The East Asian financial crisis is of interest to

international relations scholars and practitioners given the way in which greed, bad

governance and an "irrational exuberance" nearly brought down world financial

markets.[489] Approaching this crisis from a revised realist perspective suggests that efforts

conference papers and transcriptions, July 27, 1997.

[489] Robert Shiller, *Irrational Exuberance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

should not only focus on institutionally managing the financial panics that follow

financial manias but on why these crises recur in the first place. Billionaire financier

George Soros grapples with this question, essentially echoing realism's position on the

relationship between the limitations of human understanding and our ability to devise

better institutions. "Our understanding is inherently imperfect; the ultimate truth, the

perfect design for society is beyond our reach. We must therefore content ourselves with

the next best thing -a form of social organization that falls short of perfection but holds

itself open to improvement."[490] The East Asian financial crisis speaks to the Anglo-

American economic belief that unimpeded competition is best for everyone and that

protection and interference are inherently wrong.[491] Soros' reflection was initiated in

response to the idea that self-regulating markets are *the* most efficient way of optimally

allocating resources. When a *laissez-faire* way of defining world financial markets is not

thought of as the best or most preferable way of thinking, but the only possible way of

thinking, the dangers of hubris become manifest.

Massive credit inflows to Thailand, Malaysia, South Korea, Indonesia and the

Phillipines spurred on by soaring growth rates at three to five times that of most advanced

industrial economies during the early 1990s created a "bubble effect" in real estate prices

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[490] George Soros, "The Capitalist Threat," *The Atlantic Monthly* 279 no.2 (1997): 54.

[491] James Fallows, "How the World Works," *The Atlantic Monthly* 272 no.6 (1993): 61-87.

and in non-traded goods and services.[492] These diverse states were linked through a

shared market mechanism that promoted and reinforced the excessive confidence and

speculation that underpinned the profits to be made by borrowing in the United States at

low interest rates and re-lending them in Asia for higher rates of return. Factory

construction, the implementation of new technologies, the explosive growth in the

construction of highways, airports, and buildings helped sustain the inflow of money

while deluding creditors into believing that rising currency appreciations were due to

economic liberalization and not capital inflows chasing higher rates of return. According

to the economist Jeffery Sachs, the impetus behind the monetary inflow was spurred on

by individuals who were,

> "...addicted to the easy money. They think they're all super-geniuses,
> masters of the universe. And they're going to lend, and when they get the
> money out, they put it back in one more time. That greater fool is going to
> come, or the IMF is going to come, and get us out. It's what economists
> call, in essence, a Ponzi scheme."[493]

Obviously, the motivation for monetary profit existed, but what Sachs' observation

alludes to is how this irrational exuberance was predicated on an unyielding belief in the

merits of *laissez-faire* capitalism and the mastery that one could have by accurately

predicting market outcomes. These market investors neglected to consider that since

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[492] William Tabb, "The East Asian Financial Crisis," *Monthly Review* 50 no.3 (1998): 25.

[493] Jeffery Sachs interview in "The Triumph of Evil",
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/evil/etc/script.html. Frontline air date,
January 26, 1999.

markets are created and not autonomously-functioning entities, markets are not immune

from the effects of hubris nor do they benefit all participants, willing or unwilling,

equally.

The ensuing financial crisis of 1997 exposed the fiction that the pursuit of

globalization through free markets was based on absolute gains for all participants such

that the most pressing concerns were no longer financial but social and political. The

contraction of growth potential provoked escalating alarm amongst creditors who

abruptly began converting their investments back into US dollars, leading to the

plummeting of regional currencies starting with the Thai Baht. Since assets had been

purchased with borrowed funds under the presumption that the value of these assets

would increase, when values fell, debt could no longer be serviced, setting off a sale in

stock and property to cover debts. The result was a mutually destructive cycle of

competitive devaluations in the region with consequences that went beyond shifts in trade

and investment figures. In Indonesia annual per capita income for 1997 plummeted from

1200 to 300 with the Indonesian president calling on his people to fast twice a week. In

Thailand the price of rice jumped by almost 50 percent spelling disaster for the very

poor.[494] The response of the advanced democratic states to the rapid currency declines in

the region underscores realism's efforts to strip away the self-professed claims of

international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund(IMF) to underscore

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[494] David McNally, "Globalization on Trial: Crisis and Class Struggle in East Asia," *Monthly Review* 50 no.4 (1998): 7.

how power inundates all human relationships, benefitting some and burdening others.

According to Jeffrey Garten. US Undersecretary of Commerce (1993-95), the IMF

measures sought for the "wholesale restructuring of the economies themselves" through

the privatization of enterprise, balanced budgets, lowered tariff rates and the promotion of

free trade but neglected the sheer human misery that is created."[495] To secure emergency

credit from the IMF to halt the currency devaluations. the Asian governments had to agree

to economic remedies that placed the burden of adjustment on them. A plan for a special

regional bailout fund was proposed by the Japanese in January of 1998 only to be blocked

by the US treasury board. What was significant about the Japanese plan was that it would

have imposed a gentler form of adjustment in the region but the United States sought to

prevent an intra-regional solution to the crisis in order to make sure the American-led

IMF bailouts were congruent with US interests.[496]

That globalization is less a matter of choice than a struggle for and resistance to

power is most vehemently captured by Prime Minister Mahathir who at the annual

IMF/World Bank in September 1997 denounced Jews and Western financiers for the

problems facing his country. warning that the people of the developing world may lead a

kind of guerilla warfare against Western corporations buying Asian assets at firesale

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[495] Jeffery Garten interview in "The Triumph of Evil",
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/evil/etc/script.html. Frontline air date.
January 26. 1999.

[496] Stephen Gill. "The Geopolitics of the Asian Crisis." *Monthly Review* 50 no.10 (1999)
13.

prices.[497] The rapid economic distress which enveloped Indonesia shows just how virulent the upheavals were and the religious and ethnic violence they incited. When the Indonesian government signed a final pact with the IMF on May 14th 1998 regarding the structural adjustments to be implemented, the "Jakarta riots" ensued. Indonesia's ethnic Chinese, blamed for rising prices and mass unemployment who had their businesses and homes looted earlier, were now being openly murdered and raped by mobs.

These contemporary examples suggest that the forced implementation of democratic reform in Rwanda and the exuberance with which free market liberalization was pursued in Asia helped spark the ensuing violence and avarice. These events were not simply matters of institutional error. Realism offers a reminder that regardless of the specific forms of political order that may emerge from conflict, humankind's inability to change and control its more malign tendencies over an extended period of time points to an incorrigibility. The Hutu-led genocide in Rwanda and the mutation of violence in Indonesia incited by global financial markets are also reminders of the continuity of deeply-rooted patterns of iniquity and hierarchy that persist despite intentions or claims made to the contrary. Although the current process of globalization may be historically unprecedented in terms of technological scope, material progression is not synonymous with moral and institutional progress. The particular way of acquiring and maintaining power in our modern world may differ from the means pursued by the Greeks and

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[497] Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl Wudunn, "The Worlds Ills May Be Obvious, But Their Cure is Not," *New York Times*, 18 February 1999, late ed.: C3.

Romans but the moderation required to help restrain the severity of individual and

collective expressions of hubris through a figurative appeal to the transcendent remains.

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225

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