

REASON AND NECESSITY:¹ THUCYDIDES III 9–14, 37–48

I

THE speeches concerning the Mytilenean revolt in Thucydides III present three speakers trying to justify or commend a decision: they are, in Aristotelian terms, examples of *symbuleutic* oratory. The purpose of such oratory is naturally to identify the right course of action, to achieve *εὐβουλία*. But Thucydides is writing about facts; he is also intensely aware of human nature, a force more powerful than reason. So his characters cannot be simply models of wisdom. They are human beings, and they feel the pressure of war or empire. Thus the rhetoric which they employ to convince their hearers is for the historian a way of discovering to his readers the limits, or the failures, as well as the powers, of reasoning; and in this exposure of human weakness Thucydides' work is both rationalistic and tragic, an analysis of human error, be it corrigible or otherwise. If, then, he puts into his speakers' mouths the arguments he himself thought they should have used (i 22.1 τὰ δέοντα), he does so in the service of historical truth (i 22.4 τὸ σαφές). Reality is portrayed realistically, through a portrayal of the minds of those who were part of it; for all action must originate from beliefs and be contemplated through them. Further, the complex or problematical nature of reality is mirrored in his speakers' opposing interpretations of the issues at stake. It does not matter that their argumentation may be largely Thucydides' own; for what the speeches are designed to present, is not the words of an individual, but different levels of the thinking behind a political or military action. The analysis of such thinking is also the task of *symbuleutic* rhetoric, which thus helps the historian to represent men's deliberations; and it is a legitimate aid, if we assume, as Thucydides did, and as rhetoric does, a degree of consistency in human nature. Nor could faithful reporting have shown, as Thucydides' method has, the historically complementary in the rhetorically contradictory, how conflicts of thought between or within men may point to the same underlying facts and impulses. We need, then, to read his speeches in such a way as to appreciate both these aspects and the relation between them: how they seek to persuade and what they reveal in the attempt. What follows here is a reading of the Mytilenean speeches which tries to meet this requirement.²

II

The speech of the Mytilenean envoys at Sparta has a clear rhetorical structure. Chs. 9–12 seek to show that they were justified in revolting from Athens. Ch. 13 turns to arguments from expediency and illustrates the advantages to Sparta of coming to Mytilene's aid. Ch. 14 is a peroration which picks up some of their major themes.

The speech tallies, as a whole and in details, with the rhetorical prescriptions for recommending an alliance; an early version of these can be found in *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum* 1424b28 ff. and another speech which embodies them in Thucydides i 32–6. Thus the argument of chs. 9–12 corresponds to *Rh. ad Al.* 1424b37: *δεικνύναι τοὺς τὴν συμμαχίαν ποιουμένους μάλιστα μὲν δικαίους ὄντας* . . . The Mytileneans themselves identify the topic, the proof that the would-be ally is upright, in 10.1; cf. i 32.3–5. The topics of ch. 13 are also in accord with the same rhetorical model. 13.3 ('now is the moment') recalls i 33.3 and 36.1. 13.5, which attempts to overcome the difficulty that Lesbos is far away from Sparta, corresponds to i 36.2 or *Rh. ad Al.* 1424b40 ('show that the possible allies are close neighbours'). 13.7, an account of Mytilene's naval strength, is like i 36.3 or *Rh. ad Al.* 1424b39 ('show that their power is substantial').

How does the historian use this schema? Ch. 9 is in part an introduction to the rest; it paves the

¹ I use this word, or the word 'pressure', to translate the Greek *ἀνάγκη*, which need not imply predetermination or total lack of choice: cf. G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War* (London 1972) 61; K. J. Dover, *JHS* xciii (1973) 65 f.

² For much of this paragraph, cf. C. Schneider, *Information und Absicht bei Thukydides* (Göttingen 1974) 137–71, including a valuable account of Thuc. i 22.

way for some of the arguments of chs. 11–12 by putting a view of what is a proper alliance, and it makes a start on the topic of self-justification. But it also implies that to require such a justification is little more than hypocrisy. This is brought out by the speakers' use of the language of custom or convention. Their first phrase, stressed by the vocative interjected after it, refers to the νόμιμον of all the Greeks. The word is picked up by νομίζοντες in what follows, and it designates an accepted ethic; but in the same breath the speakers uncover the concern with expediency which that ethic conceals (καθ' ὅσον μὲν ὠφελούνται . . . ἐν ἡδονῇ ἔχουσι). This is effective, though disturbing, oratory. In sophistic style the Mytileneans undermine conventional opinions by reference to actual wishes and behaviour;³ and by making no mention of those who refuse an alliance or those who get no benefit from one they make acceptance of their own all the harder to avoid. This mode of reasoning also reminds us of a major theme of the historian's, again represented in the Plataean Debate or in iii 82.6–8: how traditional values and restraints collapse in war before the thought of immediate and material advantage, although—or indeed because—people profess to uphold them. For that same reason, despite 9.1, the Mytileneans in 9.2–12.2, go on to show themselves 'just', as convention demands. And this apologia is, as such, also historically illuminating in that it reveals the necessities governing Athens and her allies: in seeking sympathy for their past behaviour, they naturally represent it as caused by pressure from outside.

To understand the complexities of the Mytileneans' argument it will be useful to focus on its problems or contradictions. In 9.2 they claim that a proper alliance requires both a friendly disposition and equal strength on both sides. In 10.1 and 12.1 they stress the first requirement to the exclusion of the second; in 11.2, the second to the exclusion of the first.⁴ With this contrast goes another one: a double view of the Athenian empire. On the one hand they see Athens as tending to enlarge her rule because she is superior (10.6–11.8). This view they form from the example of what has happened before to the other allies, behind which lies the unstated principle that the stronger naturally dominates.⁵ (It remains unstated because it could seem to supply, as it does elsewhere, an excuse for the imperial power's behaviour.) Hence the Mytileneans' 'freedom'⁶ is to Athens not only an irritating anomaly in her empire, but also what makes them of necessity her enemies; this link between 'equality' and enmity finds expression in the neologism ἀντισουμένον (11.1). It makes a striking contrast to the conventional connection of equality or likeness with friendship,⁷ which they themselves assert (9.2, 10.1, 4; cf. 40.3); and it reveals, like the Melian Dialogue, the impossibility of real autonomy or fair dealing when there is an imbalance of power. On the other hand, now that there is war, Athens is afraid of the Mytileneans and needs to keep them sweet for her own safety (11.6, 12.1). The claim that Athens is inexorably widening her empire goes with the notion that an alliance must be based on an equipollence: the two imply that the Mytileneans had no choice but to revolt. The claim that Athens had to indulge Mytilene out of fear goes with the notion that an alliance is based on mutual goodwill: the two insinuate that the Mytileneans were right to revolt. These strands of thought are joined in 13.1, where εἰκότως is a moral justification and ἰκανὰς . . . τρέψαι the statement of a necessity; and this coupling of arguments is, as such, a rhetorical strength. But the historian has also deliberately pointed to a contradiction.

Again: in 13.3–7 the Mytileneans exploit Athens' weakness as a prudential argument to encourage Sparta to help them. But this, if true, weakens their justification for rebelling by contradicting the supposition that their power is unequal to Athens'. And ὁποτέρους θάσσοι παράσχοι ἀσφάλεια θάρσος, οὗτοι πρότεροί τι καὶ παραβήσεσθαι ἔμελλον (12.1) implies that they

³ Cf. Arist. *Rhet.* 1399a28 ff.; *Soph. El.* 172b36 ff.; Plat. *Gorg.* 483a, and Callicles' whole argument there.

⁴ Cf. Gomme on 11.2.

⁵ Cf. Thuc. i 76.2–3; iv 61.5; v 105.2; Democritus D.-K. B 267; Gorgias, *Helen* 6.

⁶ On the meaning of this, see de Ste. Croix, *Hist.* iii (1954/5) 16–21.

⁷ E.g. Plat. *Gorg.* 507e–508a; *Lysis* 214 a–b; Arist. *EN* 1158b1, 1161b8–10; *EE* 1241b12 f. Note also the irony that the Mytileneans' being ἰσόψηφοι (11.3) supplied Athens with a justification of her empire; but they were all the weaker διὰ πολυψηφίαν (10.5). On the meaning of

ἰσόψηφοι see de Ste. Croix, *op. cit.* 305–7. He comments on the Mytileneans' argument: 'Their main excuse . . . is not a convincing one. Athens could hardly have coerced a coalition of Samos, Chios and Mytilene, had these states cared to offer real opposition'. Thucydides himself suggests this criticism in the words διὰ πολυψηφίαν; and his narrative (2.3) has already revealed disunity among the allies. He also indicates the reason for it: so long as Athens displays her power and her subjects their weakness, they are understandably afraid to support revolt and feel obliged to join in crushing it. This is implied by 11.4 and illustrated in 6.1; cf. in general terms v 96–7.

are the ones who have confidence, and so become the aggressors, because of the war. The speakers try to sweep away this troublesome implication by the words *διὰ τὴν ἐκείνων μέλλῃσιν τῶν ἐς ἡμᾶς δεινῶν* (12.2) and *ἐπ' ἐκείνοις δὲ ὄντος αἰεὶ τοῦ ἐπιχειρεῖν* (12.3):⁸ Athens, they argue, is still always stronger than they are and so always a threat to them; and in 13.1 *ἀσφάλεια* becomes what they are seeking, not what they have. But the difficulty makes itself felt through these rhetorical manoeuvres.

In short, Thucydides deliberately presents his speakers getting entangled in their own arguments. The main cause of their entanglement is that, like Cleon later on, they try to maintain that their action is both just and expedient. This is rhetorically effective in so far as the confusion can be presented as a combination of arguments. But more important to the reader is the necessity that the historian reveals by the very defects of their reasoning. Right or wrong, weaker or less weak, the Mytileneans feel they must revolt; for men want security, and superior power threatens it. But because that want undermines trust between men or states, it endangers the very security which it is the end of human action to gain. Thus the Athenians no less than their allies are subject to a necessity. Their empire naturally grows—and the motive for this is elsewhere thought to be a concern for safety (i 75.3–4; v 97; vi 18.2–4, 83.2–4); but such growth also threatens its safety, because its victims are then naturally driven to resist.

With this goes another historical recognition: the predominance of fear. The ruled are naturally afraid of their rulers; but no less are the rulers of the ruled: their chief source of power (ii 13.2, 62.1) is also their chief danger. A similar fear is involved at Melos and before the Sicilian expedition as a motive for Athens' aggression.⁹ It moves, moreover, in a vicious spiral: each side's fear intensifies the other's. Such a process has already been presented in the Corcyrean–Corinthian Debate as a cause for the whole war: compare in particular i 33.3, 36.1, and 42.2–4, which vainly attempts to undo it by an appeal to trust and morality. Here (12.2–3, 13.1 *fin.*), as there (i 33.3–4), it is verbally represented in the play on compound verbs with *προ-* and *ἀντι-*. The Mytileneans are trying to show that what seems to be an anticipation is to all intents and purposes a retaliation. For them that justifies what they are doing; but again, historically speaking, it shows that imperial power cannot but be oppressive. It thus also reveals the hollowness of conventional morality when there is a struggle for survival: as before with 'equality', so here with 'self-defence'.

13.1 sums up chs. 10–12; the speakers' point is then reinforced: 'we would have revolted before', they claim, 'if your unwillingness to help had not stopped us'. This argument answers the charge envisaged in 9.3, that they have defected only when the war was on; and it picks up the point (10.8) that the war is Mytilene's one real source of strength. Here, however, they put it in a more blandishing way: 'we only wanted to follow a lead from you' (*ὁ μὲν οὐ προσδεξαμένων . . . ἐπειδὴ Βοιωτοὶ προκαλέσαντο*), which develops into: 'our motive for revolting was not just survival, but desire to join in the glorious war of liberation'. They stress their altruism by the pun on *ἀπόστασις* which means not only, as usual, 'defection' from the oppressor, but also 'withdrawal' from the wrong-doing she imposes. Likewise they claim that they became Athens' ally in the first place to liberate the Greeks (10.3)—this time from the Persians, whose place Athens has now taken.

Their antithesis is significantly complex. A simpler formulation would have been (A): 'we seceded from the Greeks, in order not to endure wrong with them at Athens' hands; and from Athens, in order not to do wrong with her to the Greeks'. What we get is (B): 'we seceded (1) from the Greeks, in order not to do wrong to them with Athens, but to join in freeing them; and

⁸ In the words that precede these *ἐπ' ἐκείνοις εἶναι* should not be emended. The sentence means: 'why should we ever, from a position of equality, have been in their power/at their mercy?' (for the use of *ἐπί*, cf. vi 22; Antiphon v 3; Xen. *HG* vi 3.11). It is echoed by *ἐπ' ἐκείνοις δὲ ὄντος*, where *ἐπί*+dat. is used in a slightly different way, of an action, not a person, being in someone's power. This repetition with a change of sense or nuance can be paralleled in Thucydides and contemporaries: cf. ii 61.2 (*μεταβάλλετε . . . μεταβολῆς*); iv 92, 4; Hdt. i 45.3; Antiphon *Tetral.* iii γ 1; Isoc. iv 119; Plat. *Grg.* 472e7; *Legg.* 909b2–3; for Sophoclean examples, and a

valuable discussion of the phenomenon, see P. E. Easterling, *Hermes* ci (1973) 19, 21, 24–5, 28–9. It is significant here because it implies a necessary connection that features the Athenians' power and the allies' helplessness, i.e. the law that the stronger cannot but dominate (cf. n. 5 above). *ἐκ τοῦ ὁμοίου* is used in the same sense as *ἐκ τοῦ ἴσου* which it reinforces; the *variatio* (the same idea in different words) in these two phrases counterpoints the *paronomasia* (the same words expressing a different idea) in the double *ἐπ' ἐκείνοις*.

⁹ Cf. *Hist.* xxiii (1974) 391–2.

(2) from Athens, in order not to endure wrong at her hands, but to do wrong to her first.' What emerges from B which would not from A is this. First, that Athens makes the Greeks their own enemies, so that, by a striking paradox, the Mytileneans have to 'secede' from the Greeks in order not to harm them and to join in freeing them. This picks up the whole tendency of chs. 10–11—their interest and the Greeks' are indissolubly connected—and it is an attractive argument to offer the Spartans, the self-appointed 'liberators' of the Greek world. It also brings home (*cf.* ii 8.4) the natural oppressiveness of the Athenians' empire; for it sets them against all the other 'Greeks', a term which includes both their allies and their enemies. Second, that revolt from Athens is for survival, but survival requires aggression. This reinforces the argument at 12.2–3 and its awkward implications; it is also picked up by the hostile words of Cleon (39.3 *ἐν ᾧ γὰρ ᾤθησαν περιέσεσθαι, ἐπέθεντο ἡμῖν οὐκ ἀδικούμενοι*). The point emerges through the antithesis in (2) between *διαφθαρῆναι* and *προποιεῖσθαι*. It also depends on linking *ἀπ'* 'Ἀθηναίων with the notion 'not suffering ourselves' and allowing *ἀπόστασιν* to carry its more aggressive sense 'revolt' as well as the more pacific 'withdrawal', which would not be the case in A.

In 13.2–7 the Mytileneans move to purely prudential arguments.

13.2. The secession was hasty, as emerged from the narrative in 2.1 and 4.2. This lends urgency to their appeal for help. But it also weakens the subsequent argument that they have sea-power to offer the Spartans (13.7); for one result of this haste was that their ship-building was not completed when they began their revolt (2.1). And in general, the more they stress their need for help (and so also justify their rebellion), the more doubtful it becomes whether such help will be of use. What is more, the Mytilenean navy has achieved nothing. The Athenians have controlled the sea from the start and the only naval engagement was a fiasco for their enemies (4.2). It is also ironic that the Spartans' response to this argument is, though they accept the alliance, to delay (25.1, 27.1, 29.1).

13.3–4. This is a favourable moment to attack Athens because the plague and the expenses of war have worn her down; and the strain she feels is clear in the narrative (3.1, and 19, which ominously recalls i 141.5). Again there is an irony in that precisely this recognition on the Peloponnesians' part prompts Athens to prove it false in Attica (16.1); and in Lesbos, it is precisely because the Mytileneans achieve domination on land that the Athenians at last steel themselves and send in enough troops to crush their allies' resistance (18.3–5). Thus the speakers underrate Athenian strength and resilience.¹⁰ Here, as often in life and in Thucydides (e.g. i 121–2; vi 17.2–4, 18.4, 36.3–4), such miscalculation rests on an argument from what is reasonable or probable (*εἰκός*). Rhetorical theorists had pointed out that since the improbable often happens, it could be said to be as probable as the probable (Arist. *Rhet.* 1402a3–28; *cf.* *Poet.* 1461b14 f.);¹¹ thereby they present, in pointed and paradoxical form, a commonplace of Greek wisdom, that deliberation is no guarantee of success.¹² Thucydides blends the same idea with his more sombre account of human fallibility: it is made explicit by Pericles when he observes that events can be as ill-behaved or irrational as men and their plans (i 140.1).

13.5–6. Athens will be damaged even if the war takes place far from Attica. True enough. Pericles stresses that her strength in war comes from her money (i 141.2–5); Cleon and Diodotus both dwell on how her allies' revolts endanger her income (39.8, 46.3). The irony is that what the Mytileneans fear will happen if Sparta does not help them is what comes about because of her inertia, although she does: they provoke the Athenians' anger (36.2) and so suffer harsher domination than before, the loss of their walls and ships, and the imposition of a cleruchy (50.2); and in fact there are no further revolts by island allies till 411 B.C.

13.7. Mytilenean sea-power: see above on 13.2. By contrast and complement to 13.5–6 the Mytileneans go on to describe what will happen if Sparta does help and they succeed: the Athenian allies will be emboldened to join the Peloponnesians, thus further clipping the Athenians' resources. This possibility is still alive in 31.3, even after Spartan dilatoriness had let Mytilene fall. In fact, the Spartans are not only still slothful but also brutal, and simply harm their reputation with their potential helpers, Athens' subjects (32.2).

Here again there is a contradiction in the Mytileneans' rhetoric (see on 13.2); but more

¹⁰ *Cf.* Gomme on 13.4.

¹¹ *Cf.* *Artium Scriptores*, ed. L. Radermacher, *SÖAW* 227.3 (1951) B II 20; Antiphon, *Tetral.* iii δ 2; *Rh. ad Al.*

1429a28–30.

¹² *Cf.* esp. Solon *fr.* 13.65–70 West. Also Hdt. vii 10.δ.2 (ironic in a passage recommending *εὐβουλία*).

prominent are ironies, plausible arguments which are belied by events. These ironies help to show the character of Sparta (*cf.* i 69; v 105–9) and Athens (*cf.* i 70). They also uncover the factors, not necessarily calculable in advance, which make practical reasoning difficult in war; and that serves Thucydides' purposes both as a didactic and a tragic historian.

III

Cleon's speech has a clearly recognizable structure. Chs. 37–8 are an introduction which attacks the whole notion of voting again on the punishment of Mytilene. They consist largely of a reproach to the audience, what in later rhetoricians' language would be called *παρηγορία* or *licentia*.¹³ Chs. 39–40 are his advice (*συμβουλία*), which consists also in an accusation (*κατηγορία*) of the Mytileneans' wrong-doing. 40.4 sums up the whole line of argument: the course of action he advocates is both just and expedient.

His opening 'I have often observed . . .' is conventional,¹⁴ and has here, as usual, two rhetorical functions: to imply that the speaker is a wise man and that the substance of his reflections has repeatedly been confirmed by experience. This gives further weight to an already striking thought; for in claiming that democracy and empire are incompatible Cleon is setting against each other two Periclean principles, which are also two essential parts of Athens' self-image. In speaking of the Athenians' sense of security among themselves (*τὸ καθ' ἡμέραν ἀδελῆς καὶ ἀνεπιβούλευτον πρὸς ἀλλήλους*) he reminds us of what Pericles praises in them, their constitutional freedom and private tolerance of each other (ii 37.2 *ἐλευθέρως δὲ τὰ τε πρὸς τὸ κοινὸν πολιτεύομεν καὶ ἐς τὴν πρὸς ἀλλήλους τῶν καθ' ἡμέραν ἐπιτηδευμάτων ὑποψίαν*). In saying that Athens' empire is a tyranny (*τυραννίδα ἔχετε τὴν ἀρχήν*) he repeats Pericles' words at ii 63.2: *ὡς τυραννίδα γὰρ ἦδη ἔχετε αὐτήν* (*sc. τὴν ἀρχήν*); and he later (40.4) echoes the same context in condemning those who wish to abandon the empire and play the 'gentlemen' (*ἀνδραγαθίζεσθαι*). Now there is a further echo, of the Mytileneans' speech, at the end of 37.2, as Gomme observes. They imply and Cleon asserts that there can be no goodwill between Athens and her allies (the word *εὐνοια* is used, as here, in 9.2, 12.1) because she is an empire; and both suggest that Athens is—or should be—afraid of her allies for the same reason. For Cleon that implies a policy of force; for Diodotus one of indulgence. These two opinions recall the Mytileneans' double view of the Athenian empire. We now see that the inexorably expanding and the anxiously pandering empire correspond to two policies within Athens, which alike have implications for Athens' character as a city. Can she be both the democracy and the tyranny? And how can her concern for the safety of her empire be squared with Pericles' ideal image of a city which 'helps others without fear, not from the calculation of expediency, but from the confidence of freedom' (ii 40.5)?

In 37.3–5 Cleon rises to a climax. The extreme of democracy, and the worst thing for Athens, is when the laws (*νόμοι*) are at the mercy of the assembly's decisions. Cleon blames partly those who claim to be 'cleverer than the laws' (37.4), but also the Athenians themselves, who take a pride in their reputation for wit (*σοφία*),¹⁵ who offer a home from home to sophists,¹⁶ and even prizes for rhetorical displays.¹⁷ This theme persists in what follows: the language of contest and display runs right through 37.4–38.6. What the Athenians have done is to make a time and place for a *βουλή* one for an epideictic *ἀγών*.¹⁸

¹³ Cf. [Cic.] *Ad Her.* iv 48 and Caplan *ad loc.*; K. J. Dover, *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford 1974) 24–5. On 38.4 (*αἰτιοὶ δ' ὑμεῖς*) see A. Burckhardt, *Spuren der attischen Volksrede in der alten Komödie* (Diss. Basel 1924) 57 f.

¹⁴ Cf. Thuc. vi 38.2; Eur. *Med.* 446; Ar. *Vesp.* 1265 f.; Isoc. iv 1; Alcidas, *Odysseus* 1.

¹⁵ Cf. Hdt. i 60.3 (and implicitly vii 102.1); Plat. *Apol.* 29d; *Prot.* 319b.

¹⁶ Cf. Plat. *Prot.* 337d; Eur. *Med.* 829.

¹⁷ Cf. Isoc. iv 45–6; xv 295. It is contests such as these which Thucydides spurns in denying that his work is an

ἀγώνισμα ἐς τὸ παραχρήμα (i 22.4); for history at this time could easily be considered a branch of epideictic oratory (*cf.* Plat. *Hipp. Maj.* 285d–e; Isoc. iv 82; xii 1), especially since recording the past (including the *μυθῶδες* of Thuc. i 22.4) was normal practice in funeral-speeches and panegyrics; and Herodotus probably gave recitations: see F. Jacoby, *RE Supp.* i 242; also L. Canfora, *Belfagor* xxvi (1971) 657–60.

¹⁸ For a similar contrast of epideictic and symbuleptic, *cf.* v 101; Isoc. v 12–13; Dem. xiv 1–2. *κριταί* (37.4) is used of those who decide on policy: *cf.* Thuc. ii 40.2; iii 43.5; v 85; vi 39.1.

All this stands again in contrast with the Funeral Speech, the bright ideal of Athens against which Thucydides time and time again sets the gloomier reality.¹⁹ There Pericles had claimed that Athens respects the laws, written or unwritten (ii 37.3), that her love of speculation leads to no loss of energy (ii 40.1), that she can be enlightened by debate without weakening her resolve (ii 40.2–3). Now Cleon's speech began by stating a conflict between Athens as democracy and as empire. Pericles had avoided confronting these two aspects with each other: in effect the Funeral Speech presented Athens to the Athenians principally as the democracy and ii 60–4 as the empire, in both places to demonstrate her own strength to her. Cleon now uncovers a conflict and also a weakness in the city. If there is one, it is partly because Cleon is not Pericles.²⁰ Only the older man's unobtrusive rule could restrain the self-destructive tendencies of a democracy, unreason in the people (ii 65.9), irresponsibility and dissension among the leaders (ii 65.8, 10–12). But the conflict was there *in posse* even in his day; and to control it Pericles' authority had to be in effect a monarchy (ii 65.9). At all events, we now see an ugly split. On the one side is Cleon who derives from the fact that Athens' empire is a tyranny and the principle that the laws should be respected, both of which Pericles asserted, a merely brutal and rigid policy; on the other are the Athenians who, unlike their better selves as portrayed by Pericles, turn rational discussion into an idle entertainment. It is true that Diodotus reaffirms the notion that words are the teachers of deeds (42.2, *cf.* ii 40.2). But Diodotus no less than Cleon, as we shall see, falls short of the best as presented or embodied by Pericles.

Indeed, Cleon's legalism is not even sound on its own terms. In 37.4 he appeals to a principle of Athenian democracy which he sees threatened, the stability of its laws.²¹ In order to do this he has to present the decree (*ψήφισμα*) concerning Mytilene as 'the laws' (*νόμοι*).²² Now it is true that there was no formal procedure for distinguishing the two things till 403/2 B.C. and that they are sometimes identified. Nonetheless, the distinction was recognized earlier, and in official or public contexts (*cf.* Ar. *Thes.* 361 f.). So Cleon's standing as the champion of the laws rests on an equivocation, though he genuinely reveals a possible weakness in Athenian democracy.²³ Further discredit falls on him from his assertion in 38.1, that the wronged party should take vengeance as soon as he can in order to get proper satisfaction (*cf.* 40.5). In his one-sided glorification of the anger proper to a judge,²⁴ in his blindness to the rational reflection which a sound judgement requires, he as good as puts a case for summary and retaliatory, not legal, justice; and this contrasts strongly with his vaunted respect for the laws. It is true, again, that Cleon represents not only an individual's distortion of democratic ideology, but also a real defect in Athens: the balance Pericles maintained between freedom at home and domination abroad was always an uneasy one. But it is a characteristic virtue of Thucydides to present a historical truth only in its historical context, in the minds of the agents who interpret or enact it; and that implies that any particular formulation of it includes a critical view of men. Conversely, though Cleon is seen to be at fault, his view of the assembly, like Thersites' of Agamemnon, is allowed to contain some truth.

In ch. 38 Cleon tries to head off possible counter-arguments. In rhetorical language this is a *προκατάληψις*; more specifically it consists in blackening the character of any opponent (*διαβολή*). Such in-fighting reveals, like the exchange between Nicias and Alcibiades in Book VI (12.2, 16–17.1), the pernicious growth of faction in post-Periclean Athens, which Thucydides himself dwells on in ii 65.7, 10–12. But the denigration here is not of a directly personal kind; the emphasis is not on feuding between particular orators but on their relation to the assembly and its consequences for policy.

38.2–7 is based on an almost bewildering series of antitheses which may conveniently be classified, after Classen-Steup, under three headings.

¹⁹ *Cf.* H. Gundert, *Die Antike* xvi (1940) 104–14 = *Wege der Forschung* xcvi (1968) 122–34; H. Flashar, *SHAW* 1969 (1).

²⁰ Thus Cleon's echo of the Periclean *ἐγὼ δ' αὐτός εἰμι* (ii 61.2 ~ iii 38.1) serves to contrast his pig-headedness with Pericles' firmness.

²¹ *Cf.* Thuc. vi 18.7; Dem. xxiv 24; Aeschin. i 6, iii 6.

²² *Cf.* Gomme on 37.3; Dover on Thuc. vi 14 (points (i) and (iii) on p. 239). There is similar equivocation in Sophocles' *Antigone*. For Creon, his decree, ratified by the

chorus of *γέροντες* (211–14, *cf.* 576 f.), is *νόμοι* (191, 449, 481); for Antigone, merely *κηρύγμα(τα)* (8, 454). In the end Creon has to admit that the true *νόμοι* are not his (1113). Cleon's whole argument, and the situation, recall Soph. *Aj.* 1246–52, a passage which has the flavour of contemporary political oratory.

²³ *Cf.* Arist. *Pol.* 1292a4–7, with A. H. M. Jones, *Athenian Democracy* (Oxford 1957) 50–4.

²⁴ *Cf.* *Maia* xxv (1973) 274.

(i) Facts are preferred to words. There is much play on the contrast of *λόγος* with *ἔργον*, and related terms. The boldest version of this contrast is stated in §2: anyone who opposes Cleon will be trying to demonstrate an absurdity—that the assembly never resolved what it did resolve. Cleon intentionally confuses deliberation with the establishment of a fact. So words are not merely set against deeds but linked with falsehood. What Cleon has in mind is one practice of the sophists': dazzling proofs or refutations leading to paradoxical conclusions.²⁵ This allusion reinforces his appeal to anti-intellectual feeling; it also strengthens his connection of subtlety with greed, since the sophists displayed their arts for money. He stresses his point by the strikingly lop-sided antithesis *ἢ τῷ λέγειν πιστεύσας . . . ἢ κέρδει ἐπαιρόμενος τὸ εὐπρεπὲς τοῦ λόγου ἐκπονήσας*. What we might have had is an alternative like Demosthenes viii 71: *οὐθ' ὑπὸ κέρδους οὐθ' ὑπὸ φιλοτιμίας* (cf. Thuc. ii 65.7) and a reference to ambition would be quite conventional in such a context.²⁶ But Cleon's bugbear is here, as throughout the speech, cleverness as such, because his aim is to discredit any re-thinking or thinking about the decree;²⁷ indeed, it haunts even the side of the antithesis which does not properly belong to it, in the words *τὸ εὐπρεπὲς τοῦ λόγου ἐκπονήσας*.²⁸

(ii) The present is preferred to the future, or facts to speculation. *τῶν παρόντων* (§7) and related terms are particularly pregnant because they evoke the theme of Near and Far, desire for 'what is not there' being a vice castigated by popular ethics.²⁹ The future, moreover, is for Cleon the domain of hope (cf. 39.3), and so also delusion; and this assumption finds some support in the fact that decisions must be discussed on the basis of the present state of affairs.³⁰ At the same time, Cleon himself admits by the word *προνοῆσαι* (§6) that if the basis of deliberation is *τὰ παρόντα*, its subject is the future. This thought is developed by Diodotus (44.1–3).

(iii) The old is preferred to the new. The proposed change of decision is associated with another sort of novelty, *καινότης λόγου* (§5), which is the medium of deceit, and with contempt for established custom. Such novelty of speech is again the sophist's or rhetorician's concern (e.g. Isocrates iv 7 ff.; xiii 12 f.); and Cleon's antithesis is particularly forceful because of the bad associations of 'novelty' enshrined in the Greek language by the word *νεωτερίζειν*. Further, the old is 'well-tryed' (§5 *δεδοκιμασμένου*) and linked by a kind of pun to the 'decision' taken by the assembly on the previous day (§2 *τὸ πᾶν δοκοῦν*); whereas the new is 'outlandish' (§5 *ἀτόπων*), because contrary to habit. This line of suggestion converges with the confusion of decree and law discussed above: what the Athenians resolved yesterday has become a tradition.

In chs. 37–8, then, Cleon effectively criticizes tendencies in the Athenian assembly which hinder practical thinking. These are a debased version of those Athenian qualities against which the Corinthians warn the Spartans in i 70.³¹ For the Corinthians, the Athenians think quickly in order to act quickly (i 70.2, 7); for Cleon, in order to show their alertness to what orators say (iii 38.6). For the Corinthians, they entertain hopes in order to achieve by daring (i 70.3, 7); for Cleon, they let words conceal from them facts and delude them about possibilities (iii 38.4, 7). For the Corinthians, their love of novelty leads them to self-aggrandizement (i 70.2, 71.2–3); for Cleon, it causes them to be deceived by fine words (iii 38.5). This reveals another dangerous conflict between Athens as a democracy and as an empire: the characteristics which gave her power abroad, when displayed in her assembly, are ruinous. Nonetheless, Cleon's attack on his opponents overreaches itself: by condemning whatever smacks of sophistry he as good as destroys the possibility of any deliberation at all, even though he himself will go on to consider the future consequences of repealing the Mytilenean decree. So his own view is as paradoxical and equivocal as the windmill he tilts at, the attempt to prove that the decree was never passed at all; and as the

²⁵ Cf. Gorg. *Hel.* 13, exemplified in his 'On Not Being' or Plato's *Euthydemus*.

²⁶ Cf. Ar. *Thes.* 383; Dem. viii 1. Lys. xxxi 2 and *Rh. ad Al.* 1436b34–6 are close to Cleon's words.

²⁷ The claim that the opponent is merely a clever speaker is common in the orators: cf. Dover, *Greek Popular Morality* 25 f. Characteristically, Thucydides makes out of the rhetorical commonplace a historical theme, i.e. the place of rational argument in Athenian political deliberation.

²⁸ For similar pseudo-antitheses, where the two sides of

a disjunction are meant to be combined rather than opposed, cf. [Cic.] *ad Her.* iv 40 and Caplan *ad loc.*; Gorg. *Palam.* 3; Cat. lxvii 25–8; Hor. *Ep.* ii 1.83–5.

²⁹ E.g. Pind. *Pyth.* iii 20 ff.; This quality of the Athenians is also castigated by Nicias (Thuc. vi 10–11, 13.1).

³⁰ Cf. v 87; Isoc. xiii 7–8; further, *Hist.* xxiii (1974) 391 and below on ch. 42.

³¹ Cf. F. M. Wassermann, *TAPA* lxxxvii (1956) 31–2 = *Wege der Forschung* xcvi (1968) 483–4, who also comments usefully on Cleon in relation to Pericles.

champion of law and custom he is a fraud. It is therefore appropriate that his style in these chapters should represent Thucydides at his most modernistic or Gorgianic and pander to those very tastes of the audience which he repudiates.³²

Ch. 39 moves on to condemn the Mytileneans and dissuade the Athenians. Cleon's account of the allies' behaviour goes closely with their own speech.³³ What they presented as part of an apologia now appears as part of an accusation; and the contrasting rhetorical positions allow the reader to examine critically each side's argument and tentatively define a historical situation.

(1) 39.2 mentions, as the Mytileneans did (10.3, 11.3), their privileged position of 'autonomy' in the alliance. For them, it was a hollow pretence. Cleon naturally differs; he does allow, however, that those allies who 'could not endure' the empire may be pardoned for revolting. But the burden of the Mytileneans' whole argument was that that was, in effect, their condition, and the condition of all Athens' allies as such. So since Cleon asserts another version of the same point, that the subjects of the tyrant empire naturally hate and try to harm it (37.2, 40.3), he himself nullifies his request for punishment. Indeed, how can there be any justice or fairness at all when there is not real equality?—a question insistently posed by the Mytileneans (see also i 76.3–77.4). At the same time, the Mytileneans, even if their autonomy, being a sham, does not make their revolt morally reprehensible, failed to see that since they enjoyed it, such as it was, because Athens was afraid of them (11.8–12.1), they might have been wiser to stick to the quiet life; Thucydides himself praises the Chians (viii 24.4–5) for such prudence, and for choosing, unlike the Mytileneans, the best moment to defect from Athens.³⁴

(2) The antithesis *ἐπανεστῆσαν μᾶλλον ἢ ἀπέστησαν* in 39.2 recalls the play on *προ-* and *ἀντι-* compounds in 12.2–3. Cleon tries to show that secession is really gratuitous attack: the Mytileneans that anticipation is really self-defence. They have also tried to ennoble the term *ἀπόστασις* in 13.1. The figure of speech in all these contexts goes by the same rhetorical name, *παρονομασία*. Now it is true that the Mytileneans start hostilities and aim to damage Athens: to this extent Cleon is right. But they are doing so because they belong with 'those who are goaded on by the pressure of empire' (v 99), a class which includes, as Cleon admits, all Athens' allies. This he quite ignores, even if the Mytileneans overstate it.

(3) In 39.3 Cleon invokes, like the Mytileneans themselves (10.6, 11.8), the 'example' (*παράδειγμα*) of the other allies: both are using the notion with a deliberative purpose.³⁵ He justly makes a point which the Mytileneans passed over, that the other allies were often subdued because they revolted. So revolt is risky—given, at least, that Spartan aid makes little difference. But equally Cleon is mistaken if he thinks that the Mytileneans can be morally condemned for what they did; for the example of their peers naturally makes the Mytileneans afraid, and so prone to defect. The concept of *παράδειγμα* recurs in 39.7–8 (*cf.* 40.7). There Cleon, now in forensic style,³⁶ proposes to 'make an example' of Mytilene. But the case of Mytilene herself has just shown the futility of such examples. Thus not only the judicial, but also the prudential force of Cleon's argument is nullified. For if Athens metes out justice, that will never lead to wiser counsels those whom her power oppresses.

(4) 39.3–4 also recalls the Mytileneans' speech, in particular the phrase *τῶν πολέων αἷς ἂν μάλιστα καὶ δι' ἐλαχίστου ἀπροσδόκητος εὐπραγία ἔλθῃ*, which alludes to the advantages that first the war in general, and then the situation of 428 B.C., produced for them. They made both points themselves, in 12.1 and 13.3. Again, Cleon's words show up an error of theirs, how they underrated the Athenians' resilience. At the same time, in dwelling lovingly on their immediate motives, he conceals the fact that the prime mover of their error is the Athenian empire.³⁷ Moreover, Cleon himself rejects the same arguments as those of 39.3–4 after the unexpected success of Pylos (iv 17.4–18.4).

³² Cf. H. G. Saar, *Die Reden des Kleon und Diodotus und ihre Stellung im Gesamtwerk des Thukydides* (Diss. Hamburg 1953) 41. I owe my knowledge of this work, perhaps the most helpful study there is of the Mytilenean Debate, to the kindness of the Librarian of the Seminar für klassische Philologie in Hamburg University.

³³ Cf. Saar, *op. cit.*, 10 f.

³⁴ In 425/4 B.C. the Chians were compelled to pull

down their walls by Athens, because of a suspicion of disloyalty (Thuc. iv 51). But that was much less than Mytilene had to endure (iii 50.1–2). Note too vi 85.2.

³⁵ Cf. *Artium Scriptores* C 53; Isoc. ii 35, iv 9; Arist. *Rhet.* 1359b30–3.

³⁶ Cf. O. Navarre, *Essai sur la rhétorique grecque* (Paris 1900) 305 f.

³⁷ For the arguments of 39.5–8, see below on chs. 45–7.

Ch. 40 is a common topic of forensic oratory: the appeal to the judges not to give in to pity (ἐλέου ἐκβολή).³⁸ It is also a peroration, and a recapitulation (ἀνακεφαλαίωσις) of much of what went before.

In 40.1 Cleon anticipates the defence that the Mytileneans could not help doing what they did; in a sense that is Diodotus' argument in ch. 45 (the whole question may conveniently be left to the discussion of that richly elaborate chapter). In 40.2–3 Cleon produces one of his most striking *tour de force*, the account of the three motives which might lead Athens to let off the Mytileneans and which he roundly condemns as harmful to an empire. This is a form of amplification which is mentioned by Aristotle (*Rhet.* 1365a10) and can be found elsewhere in Thucydides (i 74.1, 76.2, 122.3; iii 66.3; cf. Antiphon *Tetral.* I γ 11): it consists in dividing a phenomenon into parts, so as to lend it greater rhetorical weight. Cleon's application of this figure is contrived in that the distinction between pity (ἐλεος) and clemency (ἐπιείκεια) is thin; he ingeniously covers his hair-splitting by having a clearly distinct notion, ἡδονῇ λόγων, separate the two related terms.³⁹

The effect of this is that a particular emphasis falls on pity and clemency; and that has a historical point. Partly it reveals again how undemocratic the demagogue Cleon is; for pity and clemency are among the leading ideals of Athenian democracy,⁴⁰ obliquely reflected in the Funeral Speech (ii 40.4), and the contemptuous 'pleasure in words' recalls his un-Athenian dislike of speech and reasoning. But his treatment of 'pity' and 'clemency' are also revealing about the Athenian empire. Both notions occur in the context of a plea for total punishment: we should not show pity πρὸς τοὺς οὐτ' ἀντοικτιούντας ἐξ ἀνάγκης τε καθεστῶτας αἰεὶ πολεμίους or clemency πρὸς τοὺς ὁμοίους τε καὶ οὐδὲν ἦσσαν πολεμίους ὑπολειπομένους. What emerges from the quoted phrases—and the more forcefully because of their verbal and conceptual similarity—is, yet again, that the allies cannot but be enemies of Athens, indeed, not merely her enemies but positively at war with her (πολεμίους). In the light of this, it is disingenuous of Cleon to claim, as he does in 39.8 and 40.7, that it is an absurdity for Athens to be fighting her own allies or, as in 40.1, that the Mytileneans must be punished because they acted voluntarily. The last ironic twist of the knife is the repetition of τοὺς ὁμοίους; for these words refer in 40.3 first to notional friends and equals, who would be worthy of pity, but then to the unchanging hostility of Athens' actual subjects.

40.4 in summing up Cleon's argument shows its basic self-contradiction: while arguing that to punish Mytilene is both just and expedient he has to admit that the Athenian empire is unjust. Thus the punishment he proposes is at best only expedient; and Diodotus is to question that too. A similar point emerges from 40.5–6, where the argument is again self-defeating. Gratuitous aggressors, he says, seek to exterminate their enemies because they see the danger of their surviving; and there is such danger, because the latter are incensed by the gratuitousness of the aggression. As has been pointed out, this amounts to saying: 'Be beastly to the Mytileneans? Why? Because they would have been beastly to you? Why? Because you would have been beastly to them.'⁴¹ This is as repugnant logically as it is morally. Further: to assert that the Mytileneans are gratuitous aggressors is another piece of disingenuousness. They and Cleon have both indicated how the pressure of empire leads Athens' allies to rebel; and the vicious circle of vindictiveness in this passage recalls the vicious spiral of fear in 12.2–3, especially since fear and vindictiveness are two names for the same attitude and reactions to the same facts. Both speakers' distorted argumentation is an all-too-human response, the one in the form of a defence, the other in the form of an accusation, to the brute force of realities; and the rhetorical forms they work with thus serve to show not only how men actually tend to argue, but also how their moral presuppositions are drained of meaning when used to obscure a necessity.

IV

The structure of Diodotus' speech is analogous to that of Cleon's. Chs. 42–3 answer 37–8; chs. 44–7 answer 39–40. There is a wealth of verbal echoes,⁴² beginning with δύο τὰ ἐναντιώτατα τῆ

³⁸ Cf. E. B. Stevens, *AJP* lxx (1944) 1–25, which is based on a discussion of 40.2–3.

³⁹ On the style and force of this passage, cf. D. Ebener, *WZ Halle* v (1956) 1110–12; cf. above on 38.2 and Ebener, *art. cit.* 1097.

⁴⁰ Cf. Plat. *Menex.* 244c; *Dem.* xxiv 170–1.

⁴¹ R. P. Winnington-Ingram, *BICS* xii (1965) 77; cf. Saar, *op. cit.* 57.

⁴² See further on these L. Bodin, *RÉA* xlii (1940) 36–52.

εὐβουλία, τάχος τε καὶ ὀργήν (42.1), which counters *τρῖσι τοῖς ἀξυμφορωτάτοις τῇ ἀρχῇ, οἴκτω καὶ ἡδονῇ λόγων καὶ ἐπιεικεία* (40.2) and at once sets in relief the theme-word of the whole speech: *εὐβουλία* (cf. 44.1). Moreover, good counsel depends on words, the ‘teachers of deeds’ (42.2). So Cleon’s attack on subtle speech forgets what any deliberation needs. In this respect Diodotus is a true heir of Pericles (cf. ii 22.1, 40.2).⁴³ But even at this stage Thucydides begins to give his readers pause in the paradoxical *εἰ ἄλλω τινι ἡγείται περὶ τοῦ μέλλοντος δυνατόν εἶναι καὶ μὴ ἐμφανοῦς φράσαι* (the simple word-order is twisted so that the oxymoron *περὶ τοῦ μὴ ἐμφανοῦς φράσαι* emphatically concludes the phrase). Obviously it is true that deliberation must be about the future (cf. 44.3, with Arist. *Rhet.* 1358b 13–15); but the startling phraseology invites the reader to ask: ‘is deliberation as such a contradiction in terms, an attempt to describe what is not there?’⁴⁴ It raises too questions which apply specifically to Diodotus’ own speech: whether his advice, any more than Cleon’s, is as practical and soundly based on fact as it claims to be, and whether his defence of reasoned argument against Cleon’s attacks may not itself be subject to them.

The echoes of Cleon in what follows are very numerous. They tend to show either that he has condemned something good or that if he has condemned something bad then he exemplifies it himself. Cleon has denigrated the qualities needed for good counsel: he forgets that ‘speaking well’ is not only a matter of form, but of substance, (37.4, 38.4 ~ 42.2) or *σωφροσύνη* not only a matter of acceptable behaviour, but of sound sense (37.3 ~ 42.5). It is he who endangers the city by his attacks on cleverness and corruption; for they deprive it of good speakers (37.3, 38.3 ~ 42.4). It is he who makes impossible that equality which allows useful speech to assert itself (37.4 ~ 42.5); and it is he who speaks insincerely, to pander to his audience (37.5 ~ 42.6).

Particularly rich and complex is the echo of 38.2 (cf. 40.1) *ἢ τῷ λέγειν πιστεύσας . . . ἢ κέρδει ἐπαιρόμενος τὸ εὐπρεπὲς τοῦ λόγου ἐκπονήσας* in 42.2 *ἢ ἀξύνετός ἐστιν ἢ ἰδία τι αὐτῷ διαφέρει*.⁴⁵ Cleon sees two motives in his potential opponent, trust in subtlety and love of gain: Diodotus sees two motives in Cleon, stupidity and self-interest. Again Diodotus champions the intelligence Cleon had despised (*ξύνεσις*, *ἀμαθής* etc. are key-words). He also avoids making an accusation like Cleon’s; charges of corruption concern an ‘unsure appearance’, whereas those charged may be revealing the ‘evident benefit’ of the city (43.1). Again, Cleon represents the vice he himself castigated (38.4–7), that of looking far away, and not around. By contrast, Diodotus’ notion of ‘self-interest’ is more concrete in so far as it denotes what Cleon has been seen to do: attempt to bully his audience and possible opponents into submission; and that requires no further knowledge—or suspicions—about the speaker. But Diodotus and Cleon alike point to a weakness Thucydides himself identifies in post-Periclean Athens: its politicians’ concern with their own, not the city’s, interests (ii 65.7, 11); and in general both, like Thucydides (ii 65.8, 10), see the orators as striving for an undeserved primacy by pandering to the assembly’s taste for deceitful rhetoric.

In ch. 43 Diodotus passes from attack on Cleon to defence of himself. Its argument is puzzling because it seems to fall into two contradictory halves, each of which is in itself contorted. (1) Because of the suspicions of the assembly, speakers are forced to ‘lie’, whether their advice is good or bad (43.2–3). (2) Because the assembly does not take responsibility for its decisions but lays it on the speakers, they will be all the likelier to speak with foresight, to avoid condemnation (43.4)⁴⁶—and yet in the same breath Diodotus claims it would be better if the people had not such untrammelled power. And he has just before wished that speakers might be simpler and the assembly less competitive.

Again Diodotus is rebutting Cleon here. The notion of ‘deceit’, closely connected with the rhetorical display which panders to the people (42.6 *παρὰ γνώμην*), corresponds to Cleon’s

⁴³ See further H. D. F. Kitto, *Poiesis* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1966) 286–8.

⁴⁴ This problem is discussed philosophically in the pseudo-Platonic *Sisyphus*. It is, in effect, a fresh statement of traditional Greek doubts about human planning (cf. n. 12 above). For an attempt to answer it, see Isoc. viii 8, xv 271 and Mathieu *ad loc.*

⁴⁵ For attack on slander in general terms, cf. P. Moraux, *LÉC* xxii (1954) 17; also Hdt. vii 10.7.2; Lysias xix 5. Again the rhetorical commonplace becomes a basis for

historical analysis.

⁴⁶ With Classen–Steup, I take *ἀξιοῦν* in 43.4 to mean ‘expect, assume’ and its subject to be *ὑμᾶς* (understood). Diodotus is not saying what the orators ought to think it right to do, nor even what the people should require of them—neither of which would be enough to defend them—but what the people should expect or assume that they *do* do. But the possible ambiguity of *ἀξιοῦν* may be meant to uncover the weakness of his argument: he is speaking of what should be, not what is the case.

assertion that orators in the assembly speak 'insincerely' (37.5 *παρὰ δόξαν*): i.e. the orators do 'deceive', and because the assembly is 'too clever' (43.3 *διὰ τὰς περινοίας*); but what that means is that it is over-suspicious. Further *πρὸς τὰ μέγιστα καὶ ἐν τῷ τοιῶδε . . . ἡμᾶς περαιτέρω προνοούντας λέγειν* (43.4) replies to *ὡς ἐν ἄλλοις μείζουσιν οὐκ ἂν δηλώσαντες τὴν γνώμην* (37.4; cf. 40.3): i.e. the orators are in fact concerned with 'greater matters' than showing themselves cleverer than the next man and the laws; and their responsibility to the assembly is some guarantee of their speaking with foresight. But while Diodotus scores a point against his adversary, at least in so far as Cleon's criticism of the assembly was not adequate, his own self-defence is disturbing. First, he does not simply claim to be speaking the truth by contrast with his opponent (cf. e.g. Dem. iv 51; Isoc. viii 62): indeed, he comes close to admitting that he must lie.⁴⁷ Nor does he claim to speak it courageously whatever the cost to himself (e.g. Thuc. vi 33.1; Dem. viii 68–72): rather he suggests that fear of the assembly may make his advice better. Likewise, he is far from the sovereignty of Pericles (ii 65.9). He does not claim to have foresight of his own (ii 60.5); nor can he bluntly recall to the people that they are responsible for their decisions (i 140.1, ii 60.4, 64.1). In fact, if anyone, it is Cleon who has something of that quality, who dares openly to criticize and contradict the people, although he cannot control them and does not deserve to. Moreover, his reply to Cleon's charge of bribery is highly evasive: he is far from able flatly to deny any such imputation, like Pericles (ii 60.5, cf. ii 65.8), but rather tries to divert attention to the speakers' proposals in themselves. Diodotus' emphasis on what is 'evident' (43.1–3) is thus as questionable as Cleon's on what is 'present'—especially since the future is in his own words 'not evident' (42.2)—and his dislike of 'cleverness' (43.3) no more respectable than Cleon's; so though he makes valid criticisms of his adversary, he leaves the reader with the thought that Cleon's charges may stick.⁴⁸

Both parts, then, of Diodotus' argument, and his difference from Pericles, lead us to question his motives. But they also make plain the unconditioned power of the *demos*. Like the tyrant, it is afraid or suspicious of everyone⁴⁹ and accountable to no-one.⁵⁰ So whereas Cleon had seen an excess of liberty in Athens' assembly and contrasted it with her tyranny over the empire, Diodotus (like Aristophanes in the *Knights*) sees the *demos* as a tyrant at home no less than abroad. This recalls the Mytileneans' speech. There is no equality for speakers in his view, as there is no equality for allies in theirs; and the speakers are as afraid of the tyrant people as the allies are. Moreover Cleon and Diodotus have both complained, in a phrase that seems to echo one which occurs often and significantly in the Mytileneans' speech (37.4, 42.5 *ἀπὸ τοῦ ἴσου*, ~ 12.3 *ἐκ τοῦ ἴσου*, cf. 9.2, 10.4, 11.1 and also 40.6), that the Athenians were not 'equal' or impartial judges, but merely eager to get the better of orators. It is no wonder, then, that Diodotus' argument, like the Mytileneans', is contorted and self-contradictory; for both feel the pressure of necessity embodied in the Athenian people.

So chs. 42–3 form, with chs. 37–8, a two-sided portrayal of the factors which prevent sound deliberation in post-Periclean Athens. Speakers pander to the assembly, whether to gratify its democratic love of debate or to appease its tyrannical suspiciousness, both of which traits imply a refusal to accept responsibility for its decisions. They cannot simply guide it by the authority of wisdom, and their public spirit is questionable (cf. ii 65.6–9); for Cleon is plainly trying to maintain his influence with the *demos*, Diodotus is perhaps bribed by the allies.

In ch. 44 Diodotus comes to his proposals. He insists again that his concern is with *εὐβουλία*. Cleon's speech belonged to the realm of forensic oratory; but this is a parliament, whose proper task is to think ahead, not to pass judgement. So in insinuating questions of justice, Cleon is guilty

⁴⁷ Deceitful speakers were solemnly cursed at the opening of assemblies: see Ar. *Thes.* 356–60; Dem. xviii 282 and Goodwin *ad loc.* That makes Diodotus' words the more surprising (note also Plat. *Lach.* 178a–b). And the oxymoron *ψευσάμενον πιστὸν γενέσθαι* is disturbing, like *μὴ ἐμφανούς φράσαι* (42.2).

⁴⁸ In general on Thucydides' concern with the public spirit of Athens' leading politicians, cf. G. F. Bender, *Der Begriff des Staatsmannes bei Thukydides* (Würzburg 1938) 21–6, 53–7, 74–81.

⁴⁹ Cf. vi 53.3, 60.1 with 59.2 (the *δήμος τύραννος*,

misusing its knowledge of the past, merely behaves with suspicion like the Pisistratid tyrants, instead of taking warning from their example); Soph. *OT* 584–6; Eur. *Ion* 624, fr. 605 N; Xen. *Hieron* ii 10, vi 5–6.

⁵⁰ Cf. Hdt. iii 80.3, 6; Ar. *Vesp.* 587. In general, on the *demos* as lacking responsibility and blaming speakers, see Thuc. ii 59.1, viii 1.1; Ar. *Eq.* 1356 f.; *Ecc.* 193–6; [Xen.] *Ath. Pol.* ii 17; Lys. xx 20; Dem. *Proem.* xxvi 2 (cf. Moraux, *art. cit.* 18 n. 49). 'Deceiving the people' was a crime punishable by death: Hdt. vi 136.1; Dem. xx 135.

of ‘specious oratory’ (44.4), exactly what he himself condemned in the same words (38.2). The appeal to justice, then, and the stance of the accuser make him in these circumstances no better than the sophistical speakers he abhors; for forensic oratory, where a decision is to be taken, is no more than epideictic, a merely theoretical display. At the same time, through Diodotus’ polemic Thucydides leaves a deeper question in the reader’s mind, one already suggested by 40.2. Deliberation concerns the future, but it is based on things as they now are. Cleon, like the Athenians at Melos, emphasizes the present at the expense of the future; but do Diodotus’ proposals for the future rest on an adequate view of what is? The historian’s answer to this question follows in two chapters of brilliant rhetoric (45–6).

45.1–2 counters Cleon’s demand that Athens make an example of Mytilene (39.7–8, 40.7): no action aimed at that will in fact stop future revolts—quite the contrary. And Diodotus is able to back up his assertion by reference to the past (οὐδείς πω . . . τίς πω . . .). He thus also answers 39.3: the Mytileneans, given what human nature is and the circumstances were, could not have been expected to take warning from the example of the other allies. Now Cleon is right, as far as he goes, in his account of their action and its motives, which historically complements their own in rhetorically contradicting it; and Diodotus echoes his language (39.3 ἐλθεῖν ἐς τὰ δεινά . . . ἐν ᾧ γὰρ ᾤήθησαν περιέσεσθαι ~ 45.1 καταγνοὺς ἑαυτοῦ μὴ περιέσεσθαι . . . ἦλθεν ἐς τὸ δεινόν). But he ignores what lies behind their behaviour; that is for Diodotus, as 45.3 now makes explicit, human nature. This concept answers yet another charge of Cleon’s, that they acted quite deliberately (39.7, 40.1). But his opponent, using a forensic line of defence,⁵¹ though with a deliberative purpose, argues that the Mytileneans were impelled by an ἀνάγκη φύσεως. His argument is of the type discussed above on iii 9: he undermines a position based on legality or morality by recourse to what men are really like. This is the more effective because Cleon himself had introduced that notion in condemning the Mytileneans (39.5 πέφυκε).

45.4–6 now enlarges on the workings of human nature. The generalizations give weight to Diodotus’ claim about the Mytileneans; they also take up, point by point, Cleon’s account of what moved the allies:

πενία . . . ἐκ τῶν ὑποδεεστέρων ~	39.3 μακρότερα τῆς δυνάμεως
ἐξουσία ~	39.3 ἡ παρούσα εὐδαιμονία
ἐλπίς ~	39.3 ἐλπίσαντες
ἔρως ~	39.3 (ἐλάσσω) τῆς βουλήσεως
τύχη . . . ἀδόκητος . . . παρισταμένη ~	39.4 ἀπροσδόκητος εὐπραγία.

Diodotus then intensifies his argument by a further polemical echo: 45.7 νόμων ἰσχύι (cf. 46.4 τῶν νόμων τῆς δεινότητος, 48.2 μετ’ ἔργων ἰσχύος ἀνοία) ~ 39.3 ἰσχύὴν ἀξιώσαντες τοῦ δικαίου προθεῖναι. What does violence is not the Mytileneans’ injustice but Cleon’s justice; and each is as impractical as the other. And by a striking paradox, Cleon’s ‘laws’ (νόμοι) represent not only unreal ‘convention’, but also foolish brutality. Indeed, he himself had argued that force was a tool necessary to an empire (37.3 ἰσχύι). So behind Cleon’s comforting contrast of a just Athens with an unjust Mytilene Diodotus sees the danger that the ruler will err as the ruled did by relying for her safety on force rather than suasion; and if the ally yielded to a feeling of elation, Athens risks yielding to a feeling of righteous anger (cf. 44.4 ~ 38.1).

46.1–4 continues the attack, again echoing Cleon’s words (39.7–8) in order to reverse his arguments. The harsher Athens is, the more her allies will tend to desperate action, which will damage the finances Cleon aims to protect. Indeed, Cleon’s policy will lead the Athenians to ‘sit around’ besieging their allies abroad, just as, in his view, they ‘sit around’ revelling in rhetorical virtuosity at home (38.7, 46.3 καθήμενοι). Furthermore (46.5–6), the Mytileneans’ autonomy may justly heighten Athens’ indignation at their revolt (cf. 39.2), but it also understandably reinforces their resentment of her domination. What is needed, then, is not a punitive but a preventive policy towards the allies. This is Diodotus’ way of ‘setting an example’.

What historical illumination comes from this brilliant polemic (45–6)? The Mytileneans are goaded to revolt by the mere existence of the empire. This fact is at first veiled by Diodotus’ disquisition on human nature, though it is implicit in 45.6 (περὶ τῶν μεγίστων . . . ἐλευθερίας ἢ

⁵¹ Cf. Navarre, *op. cit.* 269; Moraux, *art. cit.* 20 n. 55; Ar. *Nub.* 1075 and Dover *ad loc.*

ἄλλων ἀρχῆς). It emerges, however, quite plainly at 46.5 in another striking paradox: precisely because the Mytileneans were 'free' they were driven to make a bid for 'autonomy'. This is because the Athenian empire cannot but be violent and oppressive (βία ἀρχόμενον). In this both Cleon and Diodotus share a true insight. But if that is so, how can a policy of indulgence afford Athens any protection against revolt? For the Mytileneans' so-called autonomy was an example of such indulgence; and yet it only incited them the more to revolt because it made the brute fact of her empire the more burdensome. And what they were after was not milder treatment, but, like the Melians, whom the Athenians fail to persuade, freedom (45.6, 46.5). Their own speech complements and further elucidates this paradox. They were well aware that they were 'autonomous', aware too that Athens had reason to keep them sweet, but because they felt her domination steadily growing, neither of those considerations could in practice weigh with them. So in the last analysis Diodotus no more than Cleon offers any protection to Athens, not simply because human nature is incorrigible, but also because empire, of its very nature, is intolerable. Moreover, the imperial power is driven by the same natural impulses as its subjects (45.6 ἄλλων ἀρχῆς, cf. i 76.3; v 105.2). This has already emerged in the Mytileneans' speech; and the language in which Diodotus describes men's motives recurs in connection with Athens' ultimately ruinous aims in Sicily.⁵²

The Athenians' speech at Sparta further complements the Mytilenean Debate in this respect (i 76.3–77.5). There the argument is more positive: their rule, they say, is to be praised for respecting legality. But there too the forensic style masks and unmasks unpleasant truths. In keeping and extending their empire the Athenians were following the dictates of human nature (i 76.3); and even if that argument allows them to claim that it is not right for them to be hated, it equally reveals that such hate is as natural as their own self-aggrandizement. This they in effect admit themselves, by saying that subjects resent whoever happens to be their ruler at the time (i 77.5). The same point is a constant in the Mytilenean Debate. Further, they argue that if Athens had applied naked force, the allies would have accepted their position more readily (i 77.4); the trouble is that she has dealt with them 'on a basis of equality' (77.3, 4). But again this only reminds us that legal behaviour on the part of an imperial power cannot but be a mere form. So though the argument may undercut protest against Athens from the allies, it also undercuts the Athenians' claim that their moderation in the exercise of power should make a difference to their subjects' attitude. The same, as we have seen, applies to the Mytileneans' 'autonomy' (compare i 77.3, 4 ἀπὸ τοῦ ἴσου with the same phrase or similar ones in iii 9.2, 10.4, 11.1). Finally, the Spartans in meditating war against Athens are consulting their own interest (i 76.2 τὰ συμφέροντα λογιζόμενοι); and that was precisely what Athens was doing in enlarging her empire (i 75.5 τὰ συμφέροντα . . . εὖ τιθέσθαι). So despite the Athenians' implicit claim to be more powerful than Sparta (i 73.1 ἢ . . . πόλις ἡμῶν ἀξία λόγου ἐστίν; cf. 78.1), they have also to grant that it is reasonable for her to resist them; and in that case, so is it for the allies. That was what the Mytileneans claimed in their speech, for all their miscalculations not without well-based hopes of success; and both Cleon and Diodotus agree that revolt by the allies at least diminishes Athens' strength.

In 47.1–5 Diodotus suggests that Athens will be safe enough if she cultivates the friendship of the common people in the allied cities. But what he says about the common people in Mytilene is deceptive. It is not clear from Thucydides' narrative that good will towards Athens played a part in moving them to surrender; what is clear is that hunger did (27.1). Further, as Cleon observed (39.6), they made no appeal to Athens for help; Thucydides mentions as informers only a handful of πρόξενοι whose motives were private and factious (2.3). So to say that the whole *demos* is well-disposed is at best a half-truth which conceals the oppressiveness of empire as such; nor can it necessarily be extended to the allied cities in general.⁵³ It should also be recalled that Diodotus'

⁵² For ἔλπις, ἔρως and τύχη, see iv 65.4, vi 11.5, 24.3–4; also compare iii 45.6 (καὶ μετὰ πάντων . . . ἐδόξασεν) with vi 31.1. Further, Kitto, *op. cit.* 343–9.

⁵³ This is not the place to tackle the vexed question of the loyalty of the allied *demoi* to Athens. But it seems clear that Thucydides means his readers, and gives them the

evidence, to question Diodotus' over-confident view. For a sober vindication of the historian, see esp. J. de Romilly, *BICS* xiii (1966) 1–12. For Thucydides' implicit criticism of Diodotus, cf. *Ar. Ach.* 642: καὶ τοὺς δήμους ἐν ταῖς πόλεσιν δείξας ὡς δημοκρατοῦνται (mentioned by de Romilly, *art. cit.* 9). The Athenians congratulated them-

word for the attitude of their *demoi* (εὐνοῦς, intensified to εὐεργέτης in 47.3) is one which has occurred in the mouth of both the Mytileneans themselves and Cleon to indicate what Athens' subjects cannot feel for her (9.2, 12.1, 37.2). This, together with 45–6, suggests that what Diodotus says of orators' 'deceit' in 42–3 can be applied to his own words here. Just as Cleon is shown to have made a hollow rhetorical display like those he condemns and obscured the facts of human nature, so Diodotus, who deploras deceit, tries to lull the Athenians into comforting illusions about the attitude of their allies. Whether bribed or not, he speaks *παρὰ γνώμην καὶ πρὸς χάριν* (42.6). Moreover, his bold notion that the Athenians must let themselves be wronged (47.5) is hollow. For he is not in fact recommending indulgence towards those who in his view committed the offence; if he were, he would be admitting that the *demos* bears responsibility for it. In order to avoid any such implication he has to claim that the *oligoi* were free agents while the *demos* was compelled. But that leads to an appeal to considerations of justice, in spite of his declared preference for ones of expediency;⁵⁴ and his distinction recalls one of Cleon's, already shown to be dubious or invalid, that between rebellious allies who are free and those who are constrained by Athens' tyranny.

To sum up. Diodotus' speech overall makes a point hard to rebut—that what is needed is not a legal judgement inspired by anger, but a deliberation on matters of expediency governed by reason. But his detailed argument, as much as Cleon's, reveals that empire is necessarily oppressive and revolt inevitable; and, indeed, Cleon has the merit of being more honest in this regard. Neither speaker has any remedy for these evils; nor is it clear that, once there is a revolt, Diodotus' policy of friendship with the *demoi* will be any more effective in bringing it to an end than Cleon's undifferentiating hatred.⁵⁵ There is a similar parallel in the criticisms both speakers make of the assembly, where it emerges that rational discussion may be impossible there—again a point on which Cleon is less equivocal than his adversary. Human nature weighs both on the allies and on Athens, as a democracy no less than as an empire.

V

Machiavelli writes in *Il Principe* (iii 5):

'Li uomini si debbono o vezzeggiare o spegnere; perché si vendicano delle leggieri offese, delle gravi non possono; si che l'offesa che si fa all'uomo debbe essere in modo che la non tema la vendetta'.

(‘Men are either to be flattered and indulged, or utterly destroy’d; because for small offences they do usually revenge themselves, but for great ones they cannot; so that injury is to be done in such a manner, as not to fear any revenge’ [1675 translation]).

The alternatives proposed by Diodotus and Cleon, and the realism of the two men's arguments, recall the Florentine's. But Thucydides' realism has a further dimension.⁵⁶ He is not writing a hand-book, but a history. He uses the power of his reason to give not direct advice for

selves on giving democracy to their allies (see de Ste. Croix *art. cit.* 39 n. 3); but Aristophanes in the *Babylonians* 'showed what sort of a democracy the *demoi* in the subject cities have'. It is clear from what follows that this line refers to something that was dangerous to say in Athens, but welcome to the allies, i.e. Aristophanes showed up Athenian oppression of them, felt by their *demoi* as much as anyone else. On the Athenians' cultivation or imposition of democracy in allied cities, see R. Meiggs, *The Athenian Empire* (Oxford 1972) 207–19.

⁵⁴ Winnington-Ingram, *art. cit.* 79 sees the incongruity. But *αἰσχρὸν* and *τοῦ μὴ καλοῦ* in 42.2 do not, as he claims (p. 78), constitute an appeal to moral considerations in

conflict with Diodotus' prudential programme (which has anyway not yet been formulated). *καλός* and *αἰσχρός* are used without specifically moral force: cf. i 33.1, 120.5; ii 84.2; Hdt. vii 10.δ.2; viii 144.1. *τοῦ μὴ καλοῦ* is also a polemical echo of *καλῶς* in 37.4 and 38.4, as *εἰ* . . . *εἰπεῖν* is of *τῶν εἰπόντων* (38.4): 'speaking well' for Diodotus means offering good advice, for Cleon merely specious manipulation of words.

⁵⁵ This is tentatively suggested by Ebener, *art. cit.* 1141.

⁵⁶ For a broad and illuminating contrast of the two writers, see K. Reinhardt, *Vermächtnis der Antike* (Göttingen 1966) 184–218.

action but simply insight into truth, not merely the facts, but the impulses behind them which are the constants in human affairs (*cf.* i 22.4) and which all political deliberation has to face.⁵⁷ The tragedy is that to see the truth is sometimes to see that all advice is futile.⁵⁸

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⁵⁷ Contrast Thucydides' view of the usefulness of history with the more shallowly optimistic view of orators and rhetoricians (see n. 35 above), which was no doubt familiar to him. In general, see A. Rivier, *MH* xxvi (1969)

129–45 = *Études de littérature grecque* (Geneva 1975) 399–419; J. de Romilly, *Entretiens Hardt* iv (1956) 41–66.

⁵⁸ I owe very valuable comments on an earlier draft of this article to Dr D. C. Innes and Dr C. B. R. Pelling.