

THUCYDIDES AND THE UNEASY PEACE— A STUDY IN POLITICAL INCOMPETENCE

THE narrative of Thucydides on the period from the Peace of Nicias to the Athenian expedition to Sicily (5. 25–116)¹ has been less intensively studied than any other part of the *History*. It is true that the Melian Dialogue, which contrasts so sharply with the rest of the fifth book, has accumulated a large bibliography. The problems arising from the campaign culminating in the battle of Mantinea have also received a considerable amount of attention. On the other hand, the accounts of negotiations and intrigues, mostly in the Peloponnese, which occupy much of the fifth book, have tended to be ignored, being thought to be obscure, confusing, and tedious. Scholars interested in the history of the period have experienced difficulty in tracing a coherent pattern in its catalogue of diplomatic manoeuvres and in establishing the motives which prompted them.² Scholars interested in the historical technique of Thucydides have been disappointed, even repelled, because his facility for mastering his material seems to have to a large extent deserted him. The narrative appears at first sight to be a somewhat mechanical record of uninteresting, almost trivial, events, sadly lacking in the general lessons about war and politics and the implied judgements on human behaviour, collective and individual, which he subtly conveys to his readers elsewhere in the *History*. It might almost have been written by Xenophon.

The aim of this paper is to examine and seek to account for the basic differences between the fifth book and other parts of the *History*. An attempt will also be made to show that the narrative of Thucydides, while appearing to provide little more than a record of events, is designed, by its repeated emphasis upon salient features of the period, to impress upon the minds of his readers a general lesson of great importance which has not been fully appreciated. Attention will be directed mainly to his account of the first three years after the Peace of Nicias (25–56),³ because it is here that the characteristics which have caused study of the fifth book to be thought unrewarding may be most clearly illustrated.⁴

Some scholars have asserted that the narrative of Thucydides in the fifth book is, except for the section on the battle of Mantinea, on a small

¹ It will be convenient, in the interests of brevity, to refer hereafter to this section as 'the fifth book'.

² Among the problems of the period is the mixture of forcefulness and hesitancy in the diplomacy of the Corinthians, which I discussed in *A.J.P.* lxi (1940), 413–21. A more elaborate reconstruction by D. Kagan, *A.J.P.* lxxxi (1960), 291–310, seems to me to be based on insufficiently secure foundations. P. A. Brunt, *Thucydides* (1963), 172, admirably defines the chief cause of failure in the negotiations of these years: 'Corinth and Boeotia were seeking a common front against Athens, while Argos, Elis and Mantinea had no quarrel with Athens but only

with Sparta.'

³ All references are to the fifth book unless otherwise defined.

⁴ In A. W. Gomme, A. Andrewes, and K. J. Dover, *Historical Commentary on Thucydides*, iv (1970), which has appeared since a first draft of this paper was written, there is not much discussion of the problems to be studied here. Andrewes, in his last note on the fifth book (p. 192), proposes to consider its traces of incompleteness, together with those of the eighth book, in the final volume of the *Commentary*. J. de Romilly, in the second *Notice* of the Budé Thucydides, iii (1967), i*–iv*, touches brilliantly but all too briefly upon the general character of the fifth book.

scale.¹ This statement is a most misleading half-truth. Admittedly minor events tend to be treated even more summarily than in other parts of the *History* (cf. 32. 2; 35. 1; 39. 1); and for approximately two years at the end of the period Thucydides is content to provide a bare factual record (80–116),² making hardly any attempt to explain the causes of the events which he includes.³ On the other hand, the events of the two summers immediately following the Peace of Nicias, namely 421 and 420, are described in considerable detail. Although they include only one military operation of any significance (33), Thucydides records them only a little less fully than the events of two summers in the Archidamian war, those of 428 and 426.⁴ Hence, if due consideration is given to the fact that in a history of a war he is dealing with a period of nominal peace, the scale of his narrative, at any rate on its opening phases, cannot legitimately be regarded as small.

It is virtually beyond dispute that the fifth book lacks revision of the kind to which the accounts of the Archidamian war (2–5. 24)⁵ and of the Athenian expedition to Sicily (6 and 7) are generally acknowledged to have been subjected. In this respect, as in the absence of speeches in *oratio recta*, it resembles the eighth book, though an important difference between them will be noted below. The absence of speeches in the fifth book, apart from the Melian Dialogue, is especially striking because it is so largely concerned with debate, some of it conducted in public assemblies. Evidence, other than the absence of speeches, that a section of the *History* lacks revision takes two forms, which should be differentiated, though occasionally they overlap. The first consists of inconsistencies, absence of information or explanation which seems to be required, general obscurities in the subject-matter; the second of harshness in composition which causes a sentence to be wanting in clarity, though the thought is not especially tortuous. Neither phenomenon is wholly absent from any substantial section of the *History*, but they are more numerous in the fifth and eighth books, where their frequency is justifiably believed to betray lack of revision. The first of these defects may be illustrated by reference to a striking example in the fifth book. Thucydides twice mentions an agreement between Athens and Sparta to refrain from making war or peace with other states except by mutual consent (39. 3; 46. 2), although the text of their alliance, which he has earlier reproduced verbatim (23), does not include any stipulation of this kind. There appears to be no satisfactory explanation of this

¹ W. Schmid, *Geschichte der gr. Literatur*, i. 5 (1948), 133, 'sehr kurz und abrupt', cf. de Romilly, *op. cit.* ii* with n. 1.

² Apart from the Melian Dialogue, which could perhaps be more accurately defined as fiction than as fact.

³ One reason why he deals so briefly with the events of these two years is doubtless that the challenge to Spartan authority, which before the battle of Mantinea might have permanently transformed the balance of power in Greece, had now become a lost cause, though fitfully revived by the Argive democrats with some support from Athens. The main issue had been decisively settled (despite the claims of Alcibiades, 6. 16. 6).

⁴ This calculation is based on the text

of the Teubner *editio minor*, in which the number of lines on each page is almost uniform. Summer 428 occupies rather less than 11 pages (including a speech of considerable length); summer 426, under 9½ pages; summer 421, slightly over 8½ pages; summer 420, 10 pages (including the text of a treaty). I have not taken into account the summer of 422 (a little more than 9 pages), because, although it belongs to the Archidamian war, hostilities were confined to the Thraceward area.

⁵ There is some disagreement about the end of the fourth book and the beginning of the fifth (1–24). According to Gomme, n. after 47. 12 (p. 62), they are fully revised, but Andrewes, *ibid.*, supports the view that they are not.

inconsistency.¹ Other passages belonging to this category are not infrequent.² Examples of awkwardness in composition, which cannot be easily remedied by emendation, are also plentiful.³

The years of uneasy peace present a historian with a daunting task, because the subject-matter is so complex. Athens and Sparta, exhausted by the Archidamian war, do not occupy the centre of the stage so firmly as in other periods covered by the *History*. Argos, Boeotia, and Corinth were able to play more or less major parts, and even lesser powers, including Elis and Mantinea, exerted their influence upon the course of events to an unusual extent. A further complication is that in several states rival factions are known to have been in conflict with one another in promoting different foreign policies. A vast amount of negotiation took place, much of it secret, as each state or faction sought to make the most of any new turn of events in order to further its own interests. Such opportunities were abundant, mainly because Spartan leadership was discredited but also because friction soon developed between Athens and Sparta when the terms of their hastily concluded peace treaty proved difficult or impossible to implement. To guide the reader through this labyrinth was indeed a formidable undertaking.⁴

Another feature of the period, which has adversely affected the fifth book, is its dearth of outstanding personalities. In this respect it may be contrasted with the other palpably unrevised book, namely the eighth, which is dominated by the personality of Alcibiades and also contains slighter but clear-cut sketches of leading figures in the revolution of the Four Hundred—Peisander, Antiphon, Phrynichus, and Theramenes. Even the Spartan admiral Astyochus emerges as a personality with sharply defined qualities, though they are almost wholly discreditable.⁵ The fifth book, on the other hand, suggests that the leading figures of the uneasy peace were relatively colourless.⁶ Agis plays a much greater part than any other leader, but Thucydides does not provide a clear picture of his personality. Alcibiades makes an almost sensational entry, in which the impact of his personality is vividly presented (43–5); thereafter the record of his activities throughout the uneasy peace, in which his accomplishments were not impressive, is almost perfunctory.⁷ No other leader is at all prominent, and the negotiators attending the many conferences held in this period are normally, though not invariably, left unnamed.

Yet another problem with which Thucydides had to contend in dealing with the uneasy peace was that of collecting abundant and reliable information about its long series of moves and counter-moves. He claims that his exile brought him the advantage of contact with Peloponnesians (26. 5), and there is some reason to believe that he may have been in the Peloponnese at about the time when the battle of Mantinea was fought.⁸ Nevertheless, the task of

¹ It is discussed by K. von Fritz, *Die griechische Geschichtsschreibung*, 1. Anm. (1967), 309–10 n. 22, and by Gomme and Andrewes, n. on 39. 3.

² Cf. 34. 1, where some explanation of *neodamodes* is required; 40. 1, where there is a reference to Argive reactions to the demolition of Panactum before its demolition became known (42. 1).

³ Cf. 36. 1; 40. 2; 49. 4; 55. 4.

⁴ Cf. de Romilly, *op. cit.* iii*: 'l'on comprendra, dans ces conditions, que le

récit soit nécessairement obscur, rempli de lacunes, peu cohérent lui-même.'

⁵ *My Individuals in Thucydides* (1968), 290–307.

⁶ Thucydides may be creating a slightly misleading impression because of his preoccupation with what, as will be suggested below (323–4), he seems to have considered to be the basic general lesson of the period.

⁷ *Individuals in Thucydides*, 212–19.

⁸ E. Schwartz, *Geschichtswerk des Thukydides* (1929), 58. The Peace of Nicias seemed

assembling material was probably more arduous than for any other part of the *History*. The situations were so tangled and the negotiations so often secret, sometimes involving distrust and deception, that the number of informants able to supply him with satisfactorily complete and unbiased accounts must have been very limited. To determine the motives which gave rise to each manoeuvre must have presented an even more serious problem; and it may be accepted as certain that, here as elsewhere, when there was doubt, he was not content to guess. He appears to have been better informed about the aims of Argos, Mantinea, and Elis than about those of Corinth, Boeotia, and Megara.¹ The lack of guidance on the aims of Athenian foreign policy and the absence of information about internal politics at Athens, except on a single episode (43–6), suggest that because of his exile he was forced to rely almost exclusively upon Peloponnesian sources.

The features of the fifth book which distinguish it from other parts of the *History* might, not unreasonably, be attributed wholly to three factors: its unrevised condition, the character of the events which it records, and the sources which Thucydides had at his disposal. A case could be made out for believing that, writing probably when its events were fairly recent,² he decided to be content, for the present at least, to produce a narrative which was as accurate and intelligible as he could make it; that he chose to describe in considerable detail the many diplomatic moves in the period immediately after the Peace of Nicias, partly because they might have had far-reaching consequences³ and partly because he was becoming increasingly interested in diplomacy conducted by small groups of negotiators.⁴ He doubtless hoped that subsequently he might undertake a thorough revision of his narrative, especially if additional evidence from Athens became accessible to him; that a more coherent pattern might emerge when the passage of time might help him to recognize which episodes were historically the most significant. He could then expect to have at his disposal a firm basis for considered judgements, explicit or implicit, on the actions of states, factions, or individuals. He could also, perhaps with the addition of some speeches, use other episodes besides the Athenian aggression against Melos as raw material for political interpretations relevant outside their immediate context.

An explanation on these lines might be deemed to account adequately for the differences between the fifth book and other parts of his *History*. If, however, the narrative is examined more closely, these differences will be found to be less marked and the treatment of the subject-matter less incompatible with his normal practice. He is not in fact content to confine himself to a factual record. The impression which his narrative makes upon the reader is not created solely by the character of the events which he describes; it is deeply influenced by his own interpretation of them, which he conveys with considerable subtlety. His predilection for supplying the reader with guidance and instruction is less conspicuous in the fifth book, because it lacks a final revision. This element is, however, discernible even here and is most easily traced in his narrative of the period from the summer of 421 to the winter of 419/18

likely to restore Athenian control of the Thraceward area, and he may have felt, as an exile, that his life might be in danger if he lived there (*ibid.*, n. 2).

¹ *A.J.P.* lxi (1940), 413 n. 3.

² Cf. Schwartz, *op. cit.* 62.

³ See above, p. 316 n. 3.

⁴ I have discussed the development of this interest in *Rylands Bulletin*, liii (1970), 227–46.

inclusive (25–56). In order to establish that Thucydides is very much concerned with providing guidance and not merely information, it will be necessary first (A) to analyse his presentation of an episode which seems to be typical; secondly (B) to survey more briefly his account of the part played by each of the states most involved in the events of these years; finally (C) to draw attention to features of the period on which he lays most emphasis.

A. A TYPICAL EPISODE

An account of action taken by the Argives in the spring of 420 creates a most unfavourable impression of Argive statesmanship (40–1). Because the Boeotians, with whom they were hoping to conclude an alliance, had not fulfilled a promise to send envoys to Argos and because of faulty information about the progress of negotiations involving Sparta, Boeotia, and Athens, they formed a totally mistaken assessment of their own position and prospects. They imagined that they could no longer hope to conclude an alliance with Athens and that they might now find themselves at war with Sparta, Tegea, Boeotia, and Athens. This prospect of becoming to a large extent isolated and of being confronted with a powerful combination of enemies threw them into a state of alarm which Thucydides presents very graphically. He contrasts it with the ambitious pride which had hitherto fired them in their aspirations to become leaders of the Peloponnese.¹ Accordingly they hastily abandoned their policy of refusing to come to terms with the Spartans and sent an embassy to Sparta to negotiate a peaceful settlement, choosing as their representatives persons likely to be most acceptable there. Thucydides describes the course of these negotiations in some detail (41). Among the Argive proposals was one to revive an old agreement, which had been in operation in the sixth century, whereby in the event of a frontier dispute either side was entitled to challenge the other to battle under prescribed rules (41. 2). The Spartans at first regarded this proposed revival of an archaic custom as *μωρία*, as well they might, but eventually accepted the terms suggested by the envoys. They seem—presumably because they knew that the Argives would soon find their fears of isolation to be largely groundless—to have felt some doubts whether the envoys would succeed in persuading the Argive assembly to accept the provisional settlement (41. 3). Meanwhile news reached Argos that the recent agreement between Sparta and Boeotia had not, as had been imagined, been made with the concurrence of the Athenians, who had, on the contrary, protested that it violated their own alliance with Sparta. The Argives therefore proceeded to ignore their envoys still engaged in negotiations at Sparta² and devoted all their attention to efforts, which eventually proved successful, to induce the Athenians to ally with themselves. Thucydides might have dismissed this abrupt volte-face on the part of the Argives in a couple of sentences. He has chosen to record it fully, giving prominence to their errors and anxieties and causing their handling of the situation to appear slightly ridiculous.

B. THE PARTS PLAYED BY THE PRINCIPAL STATES

The Spartans were under a cloud during this period largely through their disaster at Pylos (28. 2; 75. 3). Their conclusion of a peace treaty and then

¹ 40. 3 ἐν φρονήματι ὄντες τῆς Πελοποννήσου ἡγήσασθαι; cf. Andrewes, n. ad loc., on the forcefulness of this phrase.

² 44. 1 ἡμέλουν, cf. the neat translation of de Romilly, 'ils ne s'occupèrent plus de leurs ambassadeurs'.

of an alliance with Athens alienated all their major allies, whose interests they ignored. They failed to foresee the resentment and apprehension which their selfishness inevitably evoked (29. 2-4), and their efforts to curb the resulting disaffection were for the most part ineffective. They chose to rely almost wholly on negotiation, and in three years they only once dispatched a substantial army on an expedition beyond the borders of Laconia (33).¹ Their diplomacy was, however, irresolute, tortuous, and maladroit, partly because their leaders were not in agreement on foreign policy (36. 1); and they failed to exploit the glaring disunity among the states which had grievances against them. Finally in 418 they found themselves compelled to do what they had for so long sought to avoid, namely to commit themselves to military action on a large scale in order to restore their authority in the Peloponnese.

The Argives had benefited greatly from their neutrality in the Archidamian war and were in 421 in a favourable position to make a bid for the leadership of the Peloponnese (28. 2). There seemed to be every prospect of building up a strong coalition from states estranged from Sparta. They are, however, seen to have failed rather ignominiously to profit from these advantages, largely through the timidity and ineptitude of their diplomacy. They allowed themselves to become involved in immensely complex intrigues, in which they seem seldom to have appreciated that the aims of their allies, or prospective allies, were different from their own. Their sudden decision to seek a reconciliation with Sparta and their equally sudden abandonment of this policy have already been discussed.² When in 419 they found a pretext for attacking Epidaurus, their military effort seems half-hearted (53-5), and they sought to excuse their lack of progress by blaming their Athenian allies (56. 2). Thucydides nowhere suggests that they were hampered by factional dissensions at home: a democratic government was firmly in control (29. 1; 31. 6) until the defeat at Mantinea, followed by Spartan intervention, caused its temporary eclipse (81. 2).

When the Corinthians took the initiative in organizing under Argive leadership a coalition of states with grievances against Sparta (27), their ultimate aim was undoubtedly a renewal of war against the Athenians,³ at whose hands they had sustained severe losses (cf. 30. 2). They pursued this objective consistently, but they had to be wary of disclosing it to others, even in private discussions. Their motives are nowhere explicitly defined by Thucydides, who chooses rather to stress their secretiveness and deviousness. They were undertaking a difficult task, but their handling of it does not seem to have been very skilful.

The Boeotians, like the Corinthians, refused to accept the Peace of Nicias. In the series of diplomatic exchanges which ensued, their support was eagerly sought because their hoplite army was second only to that of Sparta. They cannot be said to have shown much capacity for turning their exceptionally strong position to their own advantage. Pressed to join the coalition led by Argos, they hesitated for a long time, ostensibly because as oligarchs they distrusted the Argive democracy (31. 6; 32. 5-6). Later their magistrates found themselves in a most embarrassing situation through their own miscalculations. Because they failed to anticipate the unfavourable reaction of

¹ On two occasions in 419 the Spartan army was mobilized but at once disbanded (54. 1-2; 55. 3).

² See above, p. 319.

³ *A.J.P.* lxi (1940), 413-21.

their federal assembly to proposals which they laid before it, they were forced to abandon somewhat ignominiously negotiations with other states which appeared to have been virtually completed (38).¹ The Boeotians did, however, achieve one diplomatic success, namely when the Spartans consented to make a separate alliance with them, even though it constituted a violation of agreements between Sparta and Athens and inevitably increased Athenian resentment (39. 3; 42. 2).

Mantinea (29. 1; 33) and Elis (31; 34. 1) had purely local disputes with Sparta. They joined the Argive coalition because they had infringed the autonomy of weaker neighbours and expected to suffer punishment now that the Spartans were freed from the preoccupations of a major war. The outlook of both states seems to have been parochial: there is no evidence that they paid much heed to wider issues, such as the balance of power in Greece, except where their own interests were involved. The Eleans showed some tactical skill in exploiting their responsibility for administering the Olympic festival to bring discredit upon the Spartans (49–50). On the other hand, their decision in 418 to withdraw their contingent, when the allied command rejected their demand that the confederate army should be used against Lepreum (62), was a palpable blunder, which betrays the narrowness and short-sightedness of their policy.

Lastly, the Athenians were involved in many of the negotiations which Thucydides records. He gives a full account of one episode in which they played the leading role, namely when, thanks to the astute tactics of Alcibiades, they were persuaded to join the Argive coalition (43–6). From the rest of his narrative on the whole period of uneasy peace their policy is seen to have fluctuated considerably, doubtless because neither the faction of Alcibiades, who advocated involvement in the Peloponnese, nor the faction of Nicias, who wished to avoid a breach with Sparta, was able to establish a lasting ascendancy. Thucydides does not, however, shed much light upon the aims of Athenian diplomacy, as has already been noted,² and to a greater extent than in his treatment of other states he seems content with a bare factual record.³ His account fails to provide an adequate basis for judging whether or not Athenian policy was well conceived and well executed.⁴

C. FEATURES STRESSED BY THUCYDIDES

In his narrative of the first three years of the uneasy peace (25–56) he seems deliberately to give prominence to a small number of distinctive features which are all associated with diplomacy and have affinities with each other. The first of these features is that, while accounts of negotiations are abundant and mostly detailed, a very high proportion of this diplomatic activity proved abortive. On a strikingly large number of occasions embassies sent out by a state, or by several states, returned home without having made appreciable progress towards resolving the issues which were under discussion. It will suffice to list passages recording the termination of negotiations which achieved little or nothing. The list is as follows: 30. 5, Spartans to Corinth; 32. 3–4, Corinthians and Argives to Tegea; 32. 5–7, Corinthians to Boeotia; 36. 1, Athenians,

¹ I have discussed this episode more fully in *Rylands Bulletin*, liii (1970), 235–7.

² See above, p. 318.

³ *Individuals in Thucydides*, 218.

⁴ One reason is that it was difficult for him to obtain information from Athens while he was in exile (see above, p. 318); another reason will be suggested below (p. 323).

Boeotians, and Corinthians, together with Spartan allies, to Sparta;¹ 38. 4, Corinthians and Chalcidians to Boeotia; 46. 4, Athenians to Sparta; 50. 1, Spartans to Elis; 50. 5, Argives, allies of Argos, and Spartans to Corinth;² 55. 1-2, a conference of envoys 'from the cities' at Mantinea sponsored by the Athenians and reconvened after an adjournment.³ There are also several references to inaction, vacillation, procrastination: 30. 5, Corinthians; 31. 6, Boeotians and Megarians; 32. 4, Corinthians; 32. 6, Boeotians; 38. 4, ἀμέλεια δέ τις ἐνῆν καὶ διατριβὴ τῶν πάντων, a most illuminating comment, appropriate to many situations other than the one to which it is applied; 48. 2-3, Corinthians. Only one conference is reported in detail at which the negotiators reached general agreement, namely when Athens became a member of the Argive coalition (46. 5).⁴ Even on this occasion, however, the outcome was not entirely satisfactory, since the Corinthians declined to join the alliance, being content with their existing ἐπιμαχία with Argos, Mantinea, and Elis (48. 2).⁵

Two other groups of passages will serve to point to features of the period upon which Thucydides lays much emphasis. In the first group, in which action or inaction by a city or cities is attributed to fear, the references are: 29. 1, Mantineans; 29. 4, Peloponnesians; 32. 4, Corinthians; 38. 3, Boeotians; 40. 1 and 3, Argives; 44. 3, Spartans; 50. 3, Eleans;⁶ 52. 1, Boeotians. The second group, which is a large one, embraces grievances and suspicions, expressed or unexpressed, including cases where inter-state agreements are believed to have been, or to be about to be, infringed. The passages are: 29. 3, Peloponnesians; 30. 1, Spartans; 30. 2-4, Corinthians; 31. 3-5, Eleans; 32. 7, Corinthians; 35. 2, Athenians and Spartans; 35. 4, 42. 2, 46. 2-3 and 5, Athenians; 49. 1-5, Eleans and Spartans; 52. 1, Spartans; 53, Argives; 55. 1, Corinthians; 56. 2, Argives; 56. 3, Athenians.⁷

Since the amount of diplomatic activity which took place in the period after the Peace of Nicias was so large, and since much of it was complex because of the number of states involved, any historian writing about these years would find himself compelled to devote a substantial proportion of his narrative to it, even if he considered it to be unimportant and uninteresting.⁸

¹ καὶ πολλὰ ἐν ἀλλήλοις εἰπόντων καὶ οὐδὲν ξυμβάντων.

² An earthquake terminated these negotiations, but it was a very convenient earthquake, which 'may only have served as an excuse for ending a seemingly endless conference' (Gomme, n. ad loc.).

³ In this instance, as Gomme and Andrewes, n. ad loc., point out, Thucydides gives hardly any information about the discussions of the envoys, but his reticence is exceptional in his narrative of the period.

⁴ The full text of the treaty between Athens, Argos, Mantinea, and Elis follows (47).

⁵ Gomme, n. ad loc., notes that the ξυμμαχία between Argos, Mantinea, and Elis, to which Thucydides refers here, has not been expressly mentioned before, though it is implied in 44. 2 and 46. 5. This omission may be a mere oversight, as Gomme believes. It may, however, reflect a tendency

on the part of Thucydides to pay more attention to disagreement than to agreement, because the former seemed to him to be a more significant feature of the period than the latter.

⁶ Cf. 50. 4 on the widespread fear felt by the Greeks assembled at Olympia.

⁷ 25. 2 and 26. 2 have been excluded, because Thucydides is here summarizing in general terms the features of the period with which he is about to deal.

⁸ Comparison with the account of Diodorus (12. 75-78. 2) is not at all fruitful, since it is extremely brief and seems to be founded very largely upon information derived originally from Thucydides. Diodorus lays somewhat less emphasis on diplomacy, but he uses a phrase to describe the situation in the Peloponnese (77. 3, τοιαύτης δὲ παραχῆς γενομένης καὶ ἀναρχίας οὐσης) which is wholly consistent with the impression which Thucydides creates.

It is also undeniable that for a historian to deal briefly with negotiations between Greek states was seldom easy, because agreement was hardly ever achieved rapidly and in many cases not at all. There were several retarding factors. In the fifth century Greek diplomatic technique, though no longer primitive, had not reached an advanced stage of development. Love of argument for its own sake, a characteristic of Greeks in all ages, tended to prolong discussion, as did the wariness of Greek states in seeking to avoid committing themselves to agreements which might in any way prejudice their jealously guarded autonomy. Thus at all times Greek diplomacy normally moved at a very slow pace and often broke down completely. It must also be admitted that to complain of being wronged by others, sometimes with little justification, was a practice very prevalent among Greeks, in politics as in private life. Hence the last of the features which, as shown above, are stressed by Thucydides, namely feelings or expressions of grievance, cannot be regarded as altogether abnormal. What is abnormal is that so many passages referring to such grievances are found crowded together in so few pages of text.

In spite of these reservations there is no doubt that Thucydides, had he wished, could have dealt with the period very differently, and indeed more summarily. His treatment of it, which has been illustrated by the three aspects examined above, suggests that he has a clearly conceived purpose in writing as he does. In the part of the *History* covering the Archidamian war, and less markedly elsewhere, he normally follows the practice of selecting for detailed treatment episodes which seem to him especially important or instructive and of recording the remainder briefly, in many instances very briefly indeed. Among the clearest examples of the former category are the revolt of Mytilene (3. 2-50) and the Pylos episode (4. 2-41), of the latter category the Athenian seaborne raids mainly against coastal districts of the Peloponnese in the first two summers of the war (2. 17. 4; 23. 2; 25; 30; 56). In his account of the period after the Peace of Nicias Thucydides adopts a somewhat different method of presentation, but his aim is much the same. The negotiations of this period, unlike those of the period before the outbreak of war, had only a temporary and relatively minor influence upon the course of history, as he shows plainly enough. On the other hand, he chooses to record them in some detail, and to give much prominence to the fact that almost all of them proved largely abortive, because he wishes to focus attention upon the utter bankruptcy of Greek statesmanship at this time, especially in the Peloponnese. This is the basic lesson which he intends to convey to his readers.

His conviction that at Athens political leadership deteriorated disastrously after the death of Pericles has already been sufficiently established in his account of the Archidamian war. He has also made abundantly clear his opinion of Spartan military leadership, namely that, except for that of Brasidas, it was overcautious, conventional, and lacking in imagination.¹ He has not had occasion to devote much attention to Spartan handling of relations with other states since the outbreak of war, except during the Pylos episode when Sparta was confronted with an extremely difficult situation (4. 15-22). In the fifth book, and especially in the part which has been examined, his presentation of the many diplomatic exchanges which occurred is designed to convey his verdict on the statecraft not only of Sparta but also of Argos and of the states hitherto allied with Sparta which were now disgruntled or even

¹ *Individuals in Thucydides*, 122 and 136.

hostile. Their leaders are shown to have been nonentities who intrigued, wrangled, misled others, concealed their real motives, pursued selfish or parochial objectives. They expended a prodigious amount of effort, most of it rendered quite fruitless by their own timidity, suspicion, instability, lack of foresight, or sheer incompetence.

Thucydides was himself an intellectual, and it was one of his deepest convictions that statesmanship was dependent primarily upon powers of intellect. He might indeed be charged with attaching too much importance to intellectual capacity or incapacity as an influence upon the course of history. Four qualities required of a statesman are named in a speech of Pericles, who claims to have been conspicuous in them all; the first is an ability *γινῶναι τὰ δέοντα* (2. 60. 5). To Thucydides the greatest statesmen were those who could predict, by using their powers of reasoning, the consequences of action taken by themselves or by others (*πρόνοια*), those who were abundantly endowed with intelligence (*ξύνεσις*) and sound judgement (*γνώμη*).¹ The leaders most admired by him for their possession of these intellectual qualities were Themistocles (1. 138. 3) and Pericles (2. 65. 5–6, 8, and 13); but some others are expressly credited with intelligence, including Brasidas (4. 81. 2), Hermocrates (6. 72. 2), Antiphon (8. 68. 1), and Theramenes (8. 68. 4).² It is in these qualities of intellect that the leaders in the period of uneasy peace are found by Thucydides to be most conspicuously wanting, though plenty of other defects are implied in his presentation of them.³ It was, in his opinion, largely through their shortcomings that there was so little positive achievement and so much discord and confusion.

This conclusion may be somewhat reinforced by glancing very briefly at his treatment of the campaign ending in the Spartan victory at Mantinea. Here, though he is concerned mainly with the planning and execution of military operations, he creates much the same impression that there was a dearth of intelligent and determined leadership, and he does so by adopting a similar method of presentation. Criticism is implied, or at least hinted at, in a number of passages. For example, the Athenians at first sent only a modest force to the Peloponnese, and it did not arrive in time to play any part in the military movements which seemed likely to lead to a major battle near Argos but were halted by the conclusion of a truce (59. 3; 61. 1). Subsequently a reinforcement of about the same size was too late to fight at Mantinea (75. 5). The Argives, when their generals made the truce with Agis, were at first disposed to observe it, rejecting the protests of their allies; they were then persuaded to change their minds but dallied before joining in the attack on Orchomenus (61. 1–3). The Mantineans refused to allow their army to fight at Mantinea (62), a decision which seems both spiteful and foolish.⁴ It is, however, against Agis that Thucydides directs most of his implied criticism. When the Argive generals prevailed upon Agis to accept their proposals for a truce, he evidently failed to foresee the violent reaction against it at Sparta; and there seems to

¹ His use of these and other terms denoting intellectual qualities has been exhaustively examined by P. Huart, *Le Vocabulaire de l'analyse psychologique dans l'œuvre de Thucydide* (1968); cf. 502–7 for a summary of conclusions.

² Alcibiades was perhaps superior in intelligence to any of the leaders in this second

group, but Thucydides pays tribute only to his achievements (6. 15. 4; 8. 86. 4).

³ It is noteworthy, though it could be fortuitous, that neither any of the terms denoting prediction (Huart, *op. cit.* 352) nor *ξύνεσις* nor *γνώμη* (sound judgement) occurs in 5. 25–56.

⁴ See above, p. 321.

be at least a suggestion that his detractors were right in accusing him of having wasted a golden opportunity (60. 1-3; 63. 1-2). When on the day before the battle of Mantinea he led his troops towards a strong position held by the Argives, a blunt censure of his leadership by an elderly Spartan appears to be deserved (65. 1-2). On the day of the battle his troops suddenly found themselves face to face with the enemy with barely enough time to take up their action stations (66. 1-2). The picture of Spartan consternation drawn by Thucydides may well be exaggerated,¹ but it suggests, rightly or wrongly, that Agis was at fault in permitting this critical situation to arise. His decision to move two Spartan companies to a different place in his battle line when the armies were about to clash was based on sound reasoning. It seems, however, to have been somewhat rash, even though the dangers which it produced may have been largely due to the disobedience of his two polemarchs (71. 1-72. 1).² No one in authority emerges with credit from the account of the battle. It was left to the Spartan hoplites to settle the issue by their disciplined steadiness in an almost desperate situation, thereby regaining for Sparta the prestige and authority forfeited because of past failures (75. 3).

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¹ Andrewes, n. on 66. 1.

² In 72. 2, although *Λακεδαιμόνιοι* is the subject, the *ἐμπειρία* in which they were

worsted is clearly that of their High Command. The previous sentence is concerned with orders issued by Agis.