

CLEON'S ETHOPOETICS

In 427 B.C. the Athenian assembly passed a decree bearing on the recently suppressed revolt on the island of Lesbos. All citizens in Mytilene, the city which had led the revolt, were to be executed and their women and children sold into slavery. A trireme was swiftly dispatched to Paches with instructions to execute the decree. But the Athenians had arrived at their decision in a fit of anger; and when presently their *ὄργη* subsided, they experienced grave misgivings over an action which now seemed in their own estimation cruel and excessive. They earnestly sought to reconsider the matter, and so within the space of a day they convened once more to debate Mytilene (3.36).

The reconvening of the assembly proves, at least for the moment, the human decency of the Athenians.¹ One man, however, is prepared to 'set himself against the clear tide of public opinion,'² and to denounce the Athenians' moral qualms as surrender of policy to mere whim. 'I stoutly oppose,' says Cleon, the sponsor of the original decree, 'your reformulating your set opinions.' It is a lonely and difficult struggle; and yet, when the matter is finally put to the vote, Cleon's policy of violent retaliation very nearly carries the day.

One might explain Cleon's surprising near-success in terms of the opposition's ineptitude or the foolishness of the Athenians themselves. For Diodotus is perhaps too cerebral,³ and the capriciousness elsewhere displayed by the *demos*⁴ may also be at play. But Thucydides, in the very sentence preceding the speech, says that Cleon was 'at that time regarded by the *demos* as far their most persuasive speaker,'⁵ and it would be perverse to suppose that this speech is not meant to illustrate the man's power of persuasion. Moreover, besides *πιθανώτατος*, Cleon was *βιαίωτατος τῶν πολιτῶν*, and it is tempting to infer that his persuasiveness in the present speech flows from the *forcefulness* with which he appeals to his audience's emotions: fear (3.37.2, 39.7–8, 40.7), indignation (39.1–6), and resentment (40.5–6). Cleon understands that the Athenians will not pursue a policy of retaliation unless they are impassioned to do so. They therefore must be reminded how much they wanted to crush the Mytilenians; let them recapture the same passion now and allow it to take control of their minds (3.40.7).

Cleon's *βία* is a *forcefulness* of expression fully commensurate with and adequate for the *violence* of his proposal.⁶ But there is more to Cleon's persuasiveness than incitement of the emotions. He also makes a clear appeal to reason, as indeed he must given his audience's *ἀναλογισμός* and *μετάνοια* (3.36.4). Cleon's task is to provide today's pensive Athenians some rationale for yesterday's furious decision. And so he brings forth his policy of deterrence (3.39.7–8). The argument he adduces is by no means unassailable; but that Diodotus bothers to refute it at all is an indication that it must be taken seriously.

¹ On the cruelty of the Athenians' ultimate decision (3.50), see W. R. Connor, *Thucydides* (Princeton, 1984), pp. 86–7.

² D. M. Lewis, *Cambridge Ancient History*, v² (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 405–6.

³ F. M. Wassermann, *TAPA* 87 (1956), p. 34.

⁴ 2.65.4, 4.28.3, 6.24. See S. Hornblower, *Thucydides* (Baltimore, 1987), p. 166. On Athenian gullibility, see below, n. 9.

⁵ 3.36.6: τῷ... δῆμῳ παρά πολὺ ἐν τῷ τότε πιθανώτατος. Cf. 4.21.3.

⁶ Hornblower, *A Commentary on Thucydides* (Oxford, 1991), p. 420, translates *βιαίωτατος* 'forceful,' suggesting that "'violent"... is perhaps too unfavourable.' It is better to allow the word to embrace both senses, in the way indicated in the text.

So Cleon's persuasiveness is due in part to his ability to provide his pensive and remorseful audience a plausible rationale for yesterday's violent decree, and partly too to his ability to rekindle their spent anger. But Thucydides elsewhere insists that Cleon's political success was in large part due to his use of slander.⁷ This same speech furnishes an impressive example, for we witness Cleon furiously denouncing his opponent for his sophistry and corruption. That this slander is not without effect is evident from the fact that 'Diodotus is compelled to spend a good third of his time laboriously establishing his right merely to speak at all.'⁸

These it seems to me are the three obvious factors in Cleon's persuasiveness. But the last one mentioned should suggest another. If, as Diodotus ruefully observes, the Athenians are quick to grow suspicious of the speaker whose motives and character have been called into question, they may be no less inclined to trust in the accuser. Cleon slanders his opponent: does he make a similar effort to prove his own trustworthiness?

It is on this last factor, Cleon's pose as the trustworthy adviser, that I wish to focus our attention. The ethos⁹ that he presents has two closely-related components: its arete and its prudential wisdom.¹⁰ In the first section of this paper I shall examine Cleon's arete in terms of his devotion to justice and also his steadfast determination to act in accordance with this morality. I shall then show that this analysis implies a method for understanding in what sense Cleon is a wise man. In the course of defending a popular decree, Cleon manifests in his own person the wisdom on which that decree is based: *δόξα*, the wisdom of the common man.

[I. ARETE]

Cleon's speech contains 'three notorious echoes' of Pericles.¹¹ Their function, according to some critics, is to signal that 'the attitude of Cleon towards the empire was based upon the principles of Pericles. ... Thucydides has chosen to draw attention to the affinity between the policies of Pericles and Cleon.'¹² Others concede that Cleon's policy of force is a continuation of Pericles. But more than forceful, Cleon is

⁷ 5.16.1. Cf. 3.42.2 (Diodotus speaking), 4.27.4.

⁸ A. Andrewes, *Phoenix* 16 (1962), p. 72.

⁹ Ethos, as used by Aristotle in connection with the three modes of persuasion, designates 'the trustworthy character of a speaker as artistically created in a speech' (G. Kennedy, *Aristotle on Rhetoric* (Oxford, 1991), p. 163). This is what Dionysius of Halicarnassus has in mind when he speaks of *ethopoia* in Lysias (*Lysias* 8), and it is to be distinguished from Lysianic 'dramatic' or 'individual characterization' (characters realistically flawed): see C. Carey, *Lysias: Select Speeches* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 10–11; G. Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion in Greece* (Princeton, 1963), p. 136. (I will not discuss Cleon's ethos in stylistic terms. For a study of stylistic characterization in Thucydidean speeches, see D. P. Tompkins, *YCS* 22 (1972), pp. 181–214.)

If the Athenians do indeed find Cleon's ethos trustworthy, shall we then pronounce them foolish or gullible? Perhaps. But since the present paper focuses on the speaker rather than the audience, I shall defer discussion of the Athenians' gullibility until a later time.

¹⁰ Aristotle (*Rhet.* 2, 1378a 8–19) identifies *ἀρετή* and *φρόνησις* as the two aspects of character which are essential to effective ethos-appeal. (*εὐνοία* pertains to *πάθος*).

¹¹ 3.37.2 ~ 2.63.2; 3.38.1 ~ 2.61.2 and 1.140.1; 3.40.4 ~ 2.63.2.

¹² H. D. Westlake, *Individuals in Thucydides* (Cambridge, 1968), p. 65. Pericles' imperial policy, as we know it from Thucydides, is that the Athenians 'keep a tight hold on the allies' (2.13.2: τὰ τῶν ξυμμάχων διὰ χειρὸς ἔχειν). For the Periclean tenor of Cleon's policy, see, besides Westlake, A. W. Gomme, *More Essays in Greek History and Literature* (Oxford, 1962), pp. 107–8; G. Woodhead, *Mnemosyne* 13 (1960), 297; H.-G. Saar, *Die Reden des Kleons und Diodotos im Gesamtwerk des Thukydides* (Diss. Hamburg, 1953), pp. 99–100; W. R. Connor, *The New Politicians of Fifth-Century Athens* (Princeton, 1971), p. 134.

positively brutal.¹³ He urges the Athenians to execute all adult males of the rebellious city and sell the women and children into slavery. And when this fails, he calls for the execution of 'those most responsible' for the revolt—all 1000 of them (3.50.1).¹⁴ So the view taken by these critics is that Thucydides is incorporating a few superficial similarities into Cleon's speech in order to show him grotesquely 'aping' the great man Pericles.¹⁵

Of the two interpretations the former is more nearly correct. For the real significance of the echoes is that they are symptomatic of a certain shared attitude toward arete—signposts as it were that, *as regards imperial arete*, Cleon and Pericles do indeed have much in common. Our task is to heed the signposts so that we may bring this shared attitude to light. And this is the task which we must set ourselves if we wish to know what makes Cleon so persuasive; for the view of arete which a speaker holds will greatly enhance the audience's perception of his character and their trust in his advice.

First, Pericles. In his discussion of the enemy's strategic weaknesses the Athenian leader stresses that the Peloponnesians lack the capital necessary to sustain a prolonged war (1.141.3 and 5). The war is likely to last longer than the Peloponnesians expect,¹⁶ and so the Athenians' own *χρημάτων περιουσία* (enumerated in detail at 2.13) will constitute an insuperable advantage. However, the tactic of outlasting the enemy's material resources depends on the Athenians surviving the first shock of war, in particular, the impending invasion and inevitable devastation of Attica. Thus, while the Athenians' success ultimately depends on their capital reserves, in the short term the critical factor is *γνώμη*, their rational resolve.¹⁷ If the Athenians remain resolute and rational and do not impulsively abandon their strategy, they will in time prevail. In the first year of the war, the real battle will be waged at home, between Periclean *γνώμη* and the Athenians' own reckless impulses.

There is no need to rehearse the theme.¹⁸ What I wish to stress instead is that there is a very important sense in which *Pericles is himself the champion of ὀργή*. He begins his first speech (1.140.1) with the words 'I continue to adhere to one and the same policy, that we not yield to the Peloponnesians,' and then immediately adds: 'though I am all too aware that ordinary people do not take up war and prosecute it *in one and the same spirit*, but allow their misfortunes to affect their thinking.' Pericles' struggle is to vindicate *γνώμη* against *ὀργαί*, the Athenians' changeable passions. But

¹³ D. Kagan, *The Archidamian War* (Ithaca, 1974), p. 158 and *YCS* 24 (1975), 82–4. A. W. Gomme, *More Essays* (op. cit.), pp. 107–8 minimalizes the contrast.

¹⁴ We again see Cleon advocating a policy of destruction in the case of Scione, this time with complete success (4.122.6). Cleon's ruthlessness is also apparent in his treatment of Torone (5.3.4).

¹⁵ J. H. Finley, *Three Essays on Thucydides* (Cambridge, MA, 1967), p. 26. On the purpose of the echoes, see F. Cairns, *JHS* 102 (1982), pp. 203–4 (bibliography: p. 203 n. 4); A. Rengakos, *Form und Wandel des Machtdenkens der Athener bei Thukydides* (*Hermes Einzelschriften* 48 [1984]), pp. 58–65 (bibliography: p. 59 n. 144). Of the authorities, only J. de Romilly, *Thucydides and Athenian Imperialism* (Oxford 1963), pp. 163–7, is inclined to discount the significance of the 'echoes.' On Pericles as Cleon's predecessor in a 'new politics', see W. R. Connor, *New Politicians* (op. cit.), especially pp. 91–4, 119–22.

¹⁷ 2.13.2. For the diverse meanings of the word, see P. Huart, *ΓΝΩΜΗ chez Thucydide et ses contemporains* (Paris, 1973). See also L. Edmunds, *Chance and Intelligence in Thucydides* (Cambridge, MA 1975), pp. 11–12, n. 11 (bibliography).

¹⁸ See J. de Romilly's discussion of 'la lutte entre la *γνώμη* de Périclès et les *ὀργαί* du peuple' in *Thucydide: La Guerre du Péloponnèse Livre II* (Paris, 1962), pp. xvi–xxv (cf. 101). Cf. also P. Huart, *Le Vocabulaire de l'Analyse Psychologique dans l'Oeuvre de Thucydide* (Paris, 1968), pp. 160–2; R. Zahn, *Die Erste Periklesrede* (Borna-Leipzig, 1934), pp. 59–61; L. Edmunds, *Chance and Intelligence* (op. cit.), pp. 13–15.

at the outset of his first speech he also foresees that at some later time he will be called upon also to restore in the Athenians that same spirit of confident defiance—*τῇ αὐτῇ ὀργῇ*—with which they undertook this war.

Pericles' foresight proves correct: when we read his last speech (2.60–4) we see Pericles striving not only to dispel his audience's anger against himself but also to resuscitate their spirits. For his part he has never wavered (2.61.2: *ἐγὼ μὲν ὁ αὐτός εἰμι καὶ οὐκ ἐξίσταμαι*).¹⁹ They, however, have undergone a change of heart (*μεταμέλεια*), and are no longer willing to abide by their policy. The plague, as he explains, has utterly demoralized them, and their demoralization has been all the more severe for the unexpectedness of the calamity which has caused it: the plague, says Pericles, is the one thing that has befallen them without their precise foreknowledge. And yet it is the sort of unexpected misfortune which Pericles had predicted might happen (1.140.1).²⁰ There is inherent in events a stupid waywardness equal to the *ἀμαθία* which is to be found in ordinary men.²¹ For this reason, as Pericles has already explained in the proem of his first speech, the Athenians must expect to encounter some unforeseen misfortune. Such misfortune, while itself of little significance for the final outcome, yet can have a devastating effect on the Athenians' morale. They must beware of such setbacks, not because chance can prevail over their ultimate success, but because it can alter their spirit (*ὀργῇ*) and undermine their resolve.

What the Athenians' *ὀργή* was, and what it must become once more, Pericles explains in his final speech. For all that the Athenians have suffered in the first year of war, they nonetheless should still face the enemy with courage, and indeed with more than courage: *μὴ φρονήματι μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ καταφρονήματι* (2.62.4). *καταφρόνημα* in normal usage denotes contempt and so implies boastfulness. But in the sentence which follows, Pericles offers a different explanation. Good fortune often attends incompetence (*ἀμαθία εὐτυχής*) and gives rise to hope (devoid of intelligence and reason). On this basis even a coward may boast; and this boastfulness is the sum of his courage.²² *καταφρόνησις*,²³ on the other hand, is a sense of superiority arising not from *τύχη* but *γνώμη*.²⁴ Such was the sense of superiority the Athenians felt when they decided to go to war and the superiority which they should still feel now. Their initial decision was based on an intelligent assessment of conditions and circumstances. Pericles has frequently rehearsed the analysis,²⁵ on each occasion demonstrating that the war will not be waged at high cost and with no profit (2.62.1). *καταφρόνησις*, then, is a confident state of mind which combines reason with courage, and as such is a state of mind peculiarly Athenian.²⁶

It was with confidence and a brave disposition that the Athenians originally declared they would not yield to Peloponnesian demands. But since that time they

¹⁹ Cf. 1.140.1: *τῆς μὲν γνώμης αἰεὶ τῆς αὐτῆς ἔχομαι*.

²⁰ R. Zahn, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

²¹ S. Hornblower's 'wayward' nicely captures the active sense of *ἀμαθώς* applied to events (*Commentary* (*op. cit.*), p. 227).

²² Cf. 2.40.3.

²³ For *-μα/-σις* synonymity, compare *ἀξίωμα-ἀξίωσις* (2.37.1). See A. W. Gomme, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides* 2 (Oxford, 1956), p. 172; J. S. Rusten, *Thucydides: The Peloponnesian War Book II* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 138.

²⁴ 2.62.4: *καταφρόνησις δὲ ὅς ἂν καὶ γνώμη πιστεύῃ τῶν ἐναντίων προύχῃ, ὃ ἡμῖν ὑπάρχει*. See R. Zahn, *Die Erste Periklesrede* (*op. cit.*), p. 58; L. Edmunds, *Chance and Intelligence* (*op. cit.*), p. 73.

²⁵ 1.141.2–144.1, 2.13.3–9.

²⁶ 2.40.2–3, 43.1. See C. W. Macleod, *Collected Essays* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 127–8; L. Edmunds, *Chance and Intelligence* (*op. cit.*), p. 100. Elsewhere *καταφρόνησις* is dangerous and foolish, e.g. 1.122.4, 2.11.4. See A. W. Gomme, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides*, vol. 3 (Oxford, 1956), p. 642.

have encountered the setbacks which Pericles warned them they would, and they have fallen prey to passion and anger. If the Athenians will only master these emotions, they may turn their minds away from their misfortunes and regain their earlier rational perception that, in the long run, the enemy must succumb. They will recapture their original spirit, and will again face up to the enemy certain of their own superiority.

The challenge for the Athenians is to confront adversity not just bravely but with an *ὀργή* characterized by courage borne of reason. For this they have as teachers not only Pericles and their fathers but also the example of those comrades who in the first year of the war have fallen in battle.

Pericles' eulogy of the fallen (2.41.5–42.4) gives us his view of arete. At the critical moment, these Athenians stood their ground and *ἄνδρες ἀγαθοὶ ἐγένοντο*, as they died a heroic death.²⁷ But just as important as what they did is what they thought: Pericles represents them, as J. S. Rusten observes, 'reaching a complex, dignified, and intensely rational *decision* to offer their lives.'²⁸ And in the process they defined the arete of a man:²⁹ not only is it standing one's ground, as they did (2.42.4: *ὑπέμειναν*), but doing so in the confidence that this decision to risk death is rational and correct. If, then, the present Athenians cannot otherwise recapture their original *ὀργή*, let them emulate the rational courage displayed by the fallen,³⁰ and face up to their hardships with this same spirit. They must live up to their city's reputation for choosing hardship and death before submitting to misfortune (2.64.3: *ὄνομα μέγιστον... διὰ τὸ ταῖς ξυμφοραῖς μὴ εἶκειν...*). Thus will they maintain the city's imperial prestige (2.63.1: *τὸ τιμώμενον ἀπὸ τοῦ ἄρχειν*) and preserve for themselves a level of power and influence which, being unmatched by all previous generations, will secure for them an 'undying glory' (2.64.5: *δόξα αἰείμνηστος*).

Such is the arete to which Pericles exhorts the Athenians in his final speech. But there is also an apotrepic component in this speech. The acquisition of power always breeds envy among those who aspire to the same for themselves, and resentment among those who are under its control. Pericles assures the Athenians that all such hostility will fade with time, while the glory of their achievement will abide through the ages. But he knows that the Athenians are haunted by their sense of this pervasive hostility, and haunted too by the sense that there is something immoral about their *δύναμις*. The allies, of course, decry the Athenians' empire, claiming that it is tyrannical and unjust. What Pericles fears is that this charge should affect the Athenians' conscience, and that they should come to feel shame and remorse over the manner in which they have acquired and maintain their position.

The Athenian who feels such scruples Pericles labels *ὁ ἀπράγμων*.³¹ He is the

²⁷ 'A formula...endlessly repeated in the epitaphioi', says N. Loraux, *The Invention of Athens* (Cambridge, MA, 1986), p. 99. Cf. J. S. Rusten, *HSCP* 90 (1986), pp. 71–4.

²⁸ J. S. Rusten, *ibid.*, pp. 75–6. Cf. A. M. Parry, *Logos and Ergon in Thucydides* (Salem, NH, 1988), pp. 167–71.

²⁹ *ἀνδραγαθία* differs from *ἀρετή* only in its specification of manliness (cf. 2.45.2: *γυναικεία ἀρετή*). So too when Socrates asks Meno to give his own version of arete, the young Thessalian responds (71e2): *πρώτον μὲν, εἰ βούλει ἀνδρὸς ἀρετήν... εἰ δὲ βούλει γυναικὸς ἀρετήν...*

³⁰ Cf. 1.144.4, where Pericles says that the Athenians' fathers repelled the Medes *γνώμη πλέονι ἢ τύχῃ καὶ τόλμῃ μείζονι ἢ δυνάμει*.

³¹ Pericles' *ἀπράγμων* may allude to more or less specific political figures opposed to empire. But even if this is so, Pericles' concern is with the effect such people have on the *ὀργή* or disposition of the Athenians at large. See H. T. Wade-Gery, *JHS* 52 (1932), pp. 205–27; A. Andrews, *JHS* 98 (1978), pp. 1–8; G. Großmann, *Politische Schlagwörter aus der Zeit des Peloponnesischen Krieges* (Zurich, 1950), pp. 133–6; A. W. Gomme *HCT* 2 (op. cit.), pp.

quietist, and he believes that the principle 'live and let live' commends what justice demands: the Athenians must surrender their power over others. Pericles concedes to him not that the empire *is* unjust and tyrannical, but that it is *so perceived* by the allies; and on the basis of this limited concession he draws a very different conclusion. Because they are perceived as tyrants, the Athenians have incurred the deep and abiding hatred of the allies, and therefore simply cannot risk giving them their freedom. But not content merely to refute the argument based on the demands of justice, he also questions the moral pretensions of the scrupulous critic (2.63.2: *εἴ τις καὶ τόδε* [sc. *τὸ τῆς ἀρχῆς ἐκστήναι*] *ἐν τῷ παρόντι δεδιὼς ἀπραγμοσύνη ἀνδραγαθίζεται*). The critic is reacting to the present circumstances with fear. In this he is no different from the rest of the Athenians. But where he does differ is in his dressing up his faintheartedness in high moral language. The critic claims that surrendering the empire is consonant with the principle of renouncing action where it infringes on the freedom of others; and he claims too that adhering to the principle of *ἀπραγμοσύνη* is the true measure of a man's arete. This is a novel but not impossible view of the term. Certainly the Spartans, addressing the Athenian Assembly in 425 B.C., use arete to denote generous dealing with those who have been reduced by their enemies (4.19.2–3).³² But for Pericles there is only one context in which such a view of arete is valid: the winning of personal friendships among the Athenians themselves.³³ For the rest, Periclean arete is *ἡ ἐς τοὺς πολέμους ὑπὲρ τῆς πατρίδος ἀνδραγαθία* (2.42.3). It means avenging the polis and 'establishing everlasting memorials of evil wrought on our enemies and services provided our friends' (2.41.4).

Let us examine Cleon's speech in light of this analysis of Periclean arete. Pericles conceded that the allies regard the empire as tyrannical and unjust. Cleon goes a step further and asserts that it *is* a tyranny (3.37.2: *τυραννίδα ἔχετε τὴν ἀρχήν*), suggesting thereby that the allies' perception is correct and that their hatred is permanent and irreversible. Again the consequence of the tyrannical nature of empire is that the Athenians must preserve their control over the allies; and the Athenians, having decided to do so at first, now again are filled with remorse (3.37.1: *μεταμέλεια*), and think that the solution is to deal generously with the allies. This time, however, the principle with which they delude themselves is not *ἀπραγμοσύνη* but *δημοκρατία* (37.1–2). Cleon perceives that the Athenians are now ready to listen to reason (if they are wrong) and to show mercy (even if they are right).³⁴ He is willing to concede that reasonableness and pity may be extended to those who are capable of returning the generosity (40.3). Such people are those who, like his audience, share in the security and trust of democratic life. But Cleon's complaint is that the Athenians are now adopting this same generous democratic disposition toward the allies, who are incapable of returning the favour and becoming true friends. 'They obey you not by virtue of the harm you do yourselves in attempting to gratify them, but because you prevail over them, not in winning their good will but in using force.'

177–8; L. B. Carter, *The Quiet Athenian* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 39–51. For the idea that 2.63–4 is directed against the 'triumphant *ἀπράγμονες*' of 404 B.C., see J. de Romilly, *Thucydides and Athenian Imperialism* (op. cit.), pp. 149–51. On *πολυ-* and *ἀπραγμοσύνη* in general, see L. Edmunds, *Cleon, the Knights, and Aristophanes' Politics* (Lanham, MD, 1987), pp. 17–20 and n. 10 (bibliography).³² Cf. D. MacDowell, *Mn* 16 (1963), pp. 127–8.

³³ 2.40.5. For the correct interpretation of Pericles' words, see J. S. Rusten, *Thucydides: Book II* (op. cit.), p. 156.

³⁴ 3.37.2: *λόγῳ πεισθῆναι, οἴκτῳ ἐνδοῦναι*. Cf. 40.2–3. On generosity and compassion in the orators' eulogies of the Athenian democracy, see N. Loraux, op. cit., p. 67; C. W. Macleod, op. cit., p. 119.

The Athenians may act in accordance with their generous democratic disposition and claim that to do so is virtuous. But such arete is that same false *ἀνδραγαθία* ridiculed by Pericles (3.40.4):

εἰ δὲ δὴ καὶ οὐ προσήκον ὁμῶς ἀξιούτε τοῦτο δρᾶν, παρὰ τὸ εἰκὸς τοι καὶ τούσδε ξυμφόρως δεῖ κολάζεσθαι, ἢ παύεσθαι τῆς ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ἀκινδύνου ἀνδραγαθίζεσθαι.

Suppose that the empire is unfair, but also that punishing the Mytilenians will deter others from revolt: if so, it is in the Athenians' interest to inflict an *unjust* reprisal; and if the democratic spirit so pervades the Athenians' soul that they cannot do this, they then must abstain from ruling others so that they may pursue this 'manly arete' of theirs without risking their own destruction. In these words, we hear the same mocking tone as in Pericles' use of *ἀνδραγαθίζεται*. But whereas Pericles derided τὸ ἄπραγμον and warned against allowing it to supplant the influence of those committed to bold initiative (τὸ δραστήριον), Cleon attacks the influence of the democratic spirit.

What should guide the Athenians is not generosity—that is the element in democracy which renders it incapable of imperial rule³⁵—but their original state of mind. Thucydides tells us that the Athenians resolved to annihilate Mytilene ὑπὸ ὀργῆς, under the impulse of anger (3.36.2). Now, however, they have abandoned this ὀργή, and it is Cleon's task, as it is Pericles', to help them rediscover their earlier disposition. For this he does as Pericles did, offering himself as an example of steadfastness which his audience shall emulate: ἐγὼ μὲν οὖν ὁ αὐτός εἰμι τῇ γνώμῃ (3.38.1).

What is this γνώμη to which Cleon so steadfastly adheres? On the one hand, it is his 'proposal' or 'policy' that the Athenians bring the Mytilenians to justice. But that γνώμη itself is based on the premise that 'where vengeance follows most closely upon the wrong, it best equals it and most amply requites it,' the reason being that anger fades with time, and without anger there is no revenge. Cleon's political proposal assumes that the Mytilenians are enemies and rests on the accepted view that, when responding to enemy aggression, justice means revenge.³⁶ This is the revenge sanctioned by conventional arete: one strives to surpass one's enemies in harm inflicted.³⁷

To sum up: Pericles' Athenians feel that, if they had heeded the Peloponnesian demand to 'liberate the Greeks,' they would have freed themselves of the burden of their tyranny and the intense hostility which it has inspired throughout the Greek world. They would be enjoying a quiet conscience and moreover would have been spared the personal suffering by which they have been so devastated. Having sought in the first half of his speech to restore their broken spirits, Pericles in cc. 63–4 attempts also to render his audience free of remorse over their acquisition and use of imperial δύναμις.

When Cleon appears, the Athenians have again fallen prey to moral qualms, and require a leader who will dispel these thoughts and restore them to their original ὀργή. Cleon does so, and, like Pericles, calls on the Athenians to reject the notion that

³⁵ 37.1: ἔγνω δὲ δημοκρατίαν ὅτι ἀδύνατόν ἐστιν ἐτέρων ἀρχεῖν. The accusative δημοκρατίαν results from prolepsis, and its predicate, ἀδύνατόν, is neuter because Cleon here is interested in τὸ δημοκρατικόν, the spirit of generosity which is the essence of democracy. See J. Steup (*Thucydides*, Band 3 (Berlin, 1892³), p. 64.

³⁶ See the remarks of the Syracusan generals at 7.68.1.

³⁷ Xen. *Mem.* 2.6.35. See J. S. Rusten, *Thucydides Book II* (op. cit.), p. 156 and the thorough survey in M. W. Blundell, *Helping Friends and Harming Enemies* (Cambridge, 1989), Ch. 2. R. P. Winnington-Ingram, *BICS* 12 (1965), pp. 73, 76 and S. Hornblower, *Commentary* (op. cit.), p. 438 comment on Cleon's adherence to this ethic.

generosity can be reconciled with ἀνδραγαθία and to embrace instead a traditional arete.³⁸ The Athenians must make no concessions to their enemies and be ready to harm them where they can. And they must secure their national interests regardless of what some may say about the justice of their actions. *They must recapture a disposition consonant with traditional arete.*

This disposition is the one which prevailed when Pericles' Athenians decided to go to war and when Cleon's decided to annihilate the Mytilenians. Apart from the enormity of Cleon's policy, the crucial difference lies in the nature of the disposition which each has it in view to restore. The spirit of defiance which Pericles demands is firmly rooted in a 'sense of superiority' which is itself entirely consonant with reason and intelligence. But the original disposition to which Cleon summons the Athenians is that very passion and anger into which Pericles has seen the Athenian spirit degenerate. Thus, whereas Pericles must free the people's γνώμη of anger (2.59.3) in order to rescue their rational resolve, Cleon actually tries to resuscitate the anger of the people, explicitly repudiating intelligence and reason in the process. Pericles strove 'to direct the Athenians' γνώμη away from their present afflictions' (2.65.1). But Cleon says: 'put yourselves in your γνώμη as closely as you can to the moment of your affliction.' Cleon makes no attempt to disguise that he is intolerant of reason and reflection. On the contrary, he openly celebrates ignorance. What this salutary ἀμαθία is can be deduced from our discussion of arete: it is *acquiescence in traditional views*. As we shall see in the next section, it is wisdom based on this sort of *orthodoxy* which Cleon sees as the truest political wisdom, a wisdom which he himself self-consciously exemplifies.

[II. THE WISDOM OF THE COMMON MAN]

As we have seen, Cleon opens his speech with a broad generalization: the democratic spirit is incapable of empire. But he does not state this opinion as an objective truth. Instead, he says that *he personally* has recognized the truth of this generalization many times in the past (πολλάκις μὲν ἤδη) as well as now in the present (μάλιστα δὲ νῦν). So Cleon not only begins his speech with the generalization; he marks it, with the words ἐγὼ γε ἔγνων, as his own repeatedly-confirmed personal conviction.³⁹

Cleon turns again to the first-person singular at 38.1: 'in the policy I propose I am the same person as I was before.' As I have stressed, this policy of retaliation follows the dictates of traditional arete, according to which one strives to surpass one's enemies in harm inflicted. But Cleon's policy rests on a second basic assumption as well, the truth of which is even more apparent. He rejects out of hand any claim that Mytilenian injustice is actually advantageous to the Athenians. The opposite is true: injustice obviously harms the victim and benefits the wrong-doer.

The words with which Cleon opens c. 38, ἐγὼ... ὁ αὐτός εἰμι τῇ γνώμῃ, thus indicate not only that Cleon stands firm in his policy proposal, but that the general principles on which that proposal is based also remain unchanged. And they also indicate that these principles are for Cleon a matter of *intense personal conviction*.

Aristotle remarks that when a speaker makes generalizations about human behaviour, he reveals his own moral purpose (προαίρεσις); and when he does this he

³⁸ Cf. A. W. H. Adkins, *Moral Values and Political Behaviour in Ancient Greece* (New York, 1972), p. 134: 'it is on the requirements of traditional arete that Pericles and Cleon take their stand.' But this statement holds true not only for 3.40.4 (the passage Adkins had under discussion) but for virtually all that Pericles and Cleon have to say on the subject of arete.

³⁹ Compare the words of Cleon's Sicilian counterpart Athenagoras at 6.38.2.

enhances the ethos of his speech.⁴⁰ This is exactly what Cleon's vehement personal opinions about general moral issues achieve. They define his ethos.

Aristotle terms such generalizations *γνώμαι*, 'maxims'. This is not the place to enter into a lengthy discussion of maxims in rhetorical theory. I wish only to stress the most fundamental and least controversial aspects of their rhetorical use; and for that the highly conventional *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum* serves us well.⁴¹ We begin with the observation that 'a maxim is the expression of an individual opinion about general matters of conduct.'⁴² Cleon's speech has many such generalizations, and as we have seen in connection with 37.1 and 38.1, they bear the stamp of his individual *ἐγώ*.⁴³ There are three in quick succession at 37.3:

- χεῖροσι νόμοις ἀκίνητοις χρωμένη πόλις κρείσσων ἐστὶν ἢ καλῶς ἔχουσιν ἀκύροις
- ἀμαθία μετὰ σωφροσύνης ὠφελιμώτερον ἢ δεξιότης μετὰ ἀκολασίας
- οἱ φαυλότεροι τῶν ἀνθρώπων πρὸς τοὺς ξυνετωτέρους ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πλεον ἄμεινον οἰκοῦσι τὰς πόλεις.

These maxims arise in connection with Cleon's comparison of two distinct models of political society, concerning which we shall have more to say later. For now it will be sufficient to note that the starting point of the comparison is the wholly conventional view that *ἀκίνητοι νόμοι* are best.⁴⁴

Cleon begins c. 39—*ἐγώ... ἀποφαίνω Μυτιληναίους μάλιστα δὴ μίαν πόλιν ἡδικοκτότας ὑμᾶς*—as though he were going to eschew maxims and treat the specifics of the crime. What follows, however, is not the narrative of events we expect. Cleon begins instead with an account of the aggravating circumstances of the revolt. The Mytilenians were islanders protected from the enemy by their own navy and were treated with the greatest consideration by the Athenians. They ought to have been dissuaded from aggression by the dangers inherent in exceptional prosperity. However, prosperity made them reckless (39.3). This leads to the generalization (39.4), familiar from many sources, that prosperity creates hubris.⁴⁵ For this reason (39.5) the Athenians ought never to have made special concessions to the Mytilenians—a thought which leads to yet another generalization: it is human nature to feel contempt for those who make concessions but to be daunted by those who are unyielding.⁴⁶ And so Cleon, for all that he protests himself ready to forgive and

⁴⁰ *Rhet.* 2, 1395b11–17. Cf. 3, 1418a17–19.

⁴¹ G. Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion* (op. cit.), p. 115; J. Martin, *Antike Rhetorik. Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft* II.3 (Munich, 1974), p. 9; P. Moraux, *EC* 22 (1954), 6–7.

⁴² 11 (Fuhrmann): *Γνώμη δέ ἐστι μὲν ὡς ἐν κεφαλαίῳ καθ' ὅλων τῶν πραγμάτων δόγματος ἰδίου δήλωσις*. Cf. Arist. *Rhet.* 2, 1394a21–5.

⁴³ Cf. D. Ebener, *Kleon und Diodotos. Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift*, Halle v, 1955/6, p. 1091: the *ἐγώ* of 37.1 alerts us to the vehemence of the speaker. On the 'egoism' pervading Cleon's speech see Gomme, *HCT* 2 (op. cit.), pp. 299, 307 and W. R. Connor, *Thucydides* (op. cit.), pp. 50 n. 61, 65 and n. 36. Alcibiades displays a similar penchant for the first-person pronoun at 6.16.1 and 89.1–2 (D. Ebener, loc. cit., p. 1151 n. 10). Gomme (ibid., pp. 307, 308, 312, 313) notes Cleon's maxims in passing and observes that they frequently are not well-suited to their context.

⁴⁴ Speakers often remark on the value of such stability and praise laws of great antiquity. So Antiphon 5.14–15, 6.2, Isocrates 15.82, Aeschines 1.6. In Thucydides we have the remarks of the Corinthians at 1.71.3 and Alcibiades at 6.18.7. See further M. Edwards and S. Usher, *Greek Orators I* (Warminster and Chicago, 1985), p. 77.

⁴⁵ The notion is usually that *excessive* prosperity breeds hubris (e.g. Solon 6W: *πολὺς ὄλβος*). The element of *suddenness* or *unexpectedness* in Cleon's account (*ἀπροσδόκητος, παρὰ δόξαν*) clearly betrays the influence of Thucydides' own thinking: see J. de Romilly's discussion of the 'law of hubris' (*Thucydides and Athenian Imperialism* (op. cit.), pp. 322–9).

⁴⁶ On the appearance in maxims of words like *εἰώθε* (39.4) and *πέφυκε* (39.5), see C. Meister, *Die Gnomik im Geschichtswerk des Thukydides* (Winterthur, 1955), p. 19.

forget, in this case simply cannot: forgiveness, as he reminds us with the final maxim of this section, is reserved for unintentional error. In his proof of Mytilenian injustice we find Cleon relying very heavily on widely-accepted generalizations about human behaviour.⁴⁷

The same is true of the concluding section of his speech (40.2–7). He begins it just as he began cc. 37, 38, and 39: in the first person with ἐγώ expressed.⁴⁸ Three maxims follow. The first two define the limits of reasonableness and pity (40.3; above, p. 31), while the last (40.6) asserts that those who attack without reason attack violently and hard, fearing the heightened wrath of one who has survived unprovoked aggression.

All speakers in Thucydides avail themselves to some extent of maxims. To judge from the study of C. Meister, Pericles does so somewhat more often than other speakers.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, it is Meister's contention that there is in Thucydides no speaker whose use of maxims makes him γνωμοτυπικός beyond all others.⁵⁰ This is correct if we are looking, as does Meister, only at the frequency of maxims. Still, there is an important sense in which Cleon does distinguish himself as a speaker of maxims.

A maxim is 'the expression of an individual opinion about general matters of conduct.' But Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and the *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum* agree that a maxim may run counter to accepted opinion. If so, it is παράδοξος and requires explanation. But maxims at other times express views which agree with accepted opinion. And when the maxim is one which agrees with accepted opinion (ἐνδοξος), 'there is no need to produce reasons because what you say is not unfamiliar nor difficult to accept.'⁵¹

Cleon's maxims on justice and punishment are overwhelmingly ἐνδοξοί. They are basic and obviously true to the audience.⁵² This holds for all his maxims, including those of c. 37.⁵³ Maxims, it is true, do not distinguish Cleon; endoxic maxims do.

To sum up: employing the first-person singular, with ἐγώ expressed, at each major juncture of his speech, Cleon makes it clear that he is voicing his own strong personal convictions. The general nature of these convictions is also evident. Yet, for all that these generalizations are expressed with fervid conviction, they are by no means idiosyncratic or controversial. On the contrary, they are for the most part *in perfect accord with accepted opinion*. In rhetorical terms: Cleon argues on a basis of endoxic maxims. Indeed, he is the champion of accepted opinion.

The battle to defend accepted opinion begins in earnest at 37.3. There Cleon contrasts two poleis, one of which is governed by ordinary people, the other by intellectuals:

πάντων δὲ δεινότατον εἰ βέβαιον ἡμῖν μηδὲν καθεστήξει ὧν ἂν δόξῃ πέρι, μηδὲ γνωσόμεθα ὅτι χεῖροσι νόμοις ἀκινήτοις χρωμένη πόλις κρείσσων ἐστὶν ἢ καλῶς ἔχουσιν ἀκύροις, ἀμαθία τε μετὰ σωφροσύνης ὠφελιμώτερον ἢ δεξιότης μετὰ ἀκολασίας, οἳ τε φαυλότεροι τῶν ἀνθρώπων πρὸς τοὺς ξυνητωτέρους ὥς ἐπὶ τὸ πλεον ἄμεινον οἰκοῦσι τὰς πόλεις.

⁴⁷ Cf. P. Moraux, op. cit., 12.

⁴⁸ For the division of Cleon's speech into discrete sections, see P. Moraux, op. cit., pp. 7–15.

⁴⁹ C. Meister, op. cit., p. 14.

⁵⁰ C. Meister, op. cit., p. 15.

⁵¹ *Rhet. ad Alex.* 11; Arist. *Rhet.* 1394b7–10.

⁵² J. H. Finley, *Three Essays* (op. cit.), p. 31 aptly notes Cleon's 'forceful outpouring of familiar judgments.'

⁵³ That is not to say that Cleon does not strike the pose of the outspoken critic. But as we have seen in our analysis of Cleon's opening pronouncement (37.1: δημοκρατία ἀδύνατον ἄρχειν: above, pp. 8–9), the controversy is more apparent than real: everyone knows that the spirit of generosity characteristic of democracy is an impediment to ruling others. On 37.2 (empire is tyranny) see J. de Romilly, *Thucydides and Athenian Imperialism* (op. cit.), p. 125. On 37.3 (ordinary people better manage the affairs of state than do intellectuals), see below p. 36 and n. 55.

Just as mediocre stable laws are superior to laws which are constantly being improved,⁵⁴ so too a prudent ἀμαθία is better than unrestrained cleverness. The first of these terms means not just a lack of education, but an intellectual diffidence toward the laws (cf. 37.4: ἀμαθέστεροι τῶν νόμων), arising from the common man's reluctance to place great faith in his own native intelligence (ξύνεσις). This keeps the laws 'unaltered' and makes the polis 'more powerful.' Finally, if lack of education entails this sort of 'obedience to the laws' (σωφροσύνη), then it is generally people of ordinary intelligence who 'better govern their cities.' This series of maxims is not paradoxical, though it is indeed controverted by the critics of democracy.⁵⁵

Cleon concludes his syncretism of the two cities by calling on public speakers to resist the temptations of intellectualism and instead to adopt the attitude of ordinary souls: just as they allow their decisions to conform to the wisdom of the laws so their leaders should not challenge the wisdom of their decisions. 'We speakers,' says Cleon, 'should not allow ourselves to be so carried away by eloquence and intellectual rivalry that we give advice which runs counter to *what has seemed best to you the people*'. This is the translation required by the context, for Cleon has just been talking about policies which 'have seemed best—δόξῃ ᾧν—to us'. Moreover, the words pointedly recall Archidamus' παρὰ τὸ δοκοῦν ἡμῖν, the meaning of which is clearly 'contrary to what seems best to us'.⁵⁶ But the problem with Cleon's version is that it omits the definite article, which would make it clear that δόξαν is the neuter participle and refers to yesterday's decision. And without that we run the risk of confusing παρὰ δόξαν, 'contrary to what has seemed best,' with the ordinary sense of the phrase: 'contrary to expectation'.⁵⁷

One solution is to follow Stahl and Saar and restore a definite article: παρὰ τὸ δόξαν.⁵⁸ But another possibility is that the ambiguity is intentional. If so, 'urging you contrary to what has seemed best to you the people (παρὰ τὸ δόξαν)' becomes indistinguishable from 'giving you the people paradoxical advice (παρὰ τὴν δόξαν).' That Cleon wants to sow this confusion is suggested by the awkward omission of the definite article; it will be confirmed when, in the very next sentence

⁵⁴ Cleon seems to be using the ἀκίνητοι νόμοι maxim (above, n. 44) in order to suggest that repeal of the Mytilene decree is tantamount to undermining the laws themselves. Gomme objects (*HCT* 2 (op. cit.), p. 300): Cleon is 'confusing ψηφίσματα with νόμοι; the laws of Athens would not be affected by the rescinding of an executive decree.' But it is doubtful whether the fifth century made so clear a distinction between laws and decrees: see S. Hornblower, *Commentary* (op. cit.), pp. 423–4. And in any event it is not at all certain that the βέβαιον καθεστηκός which the Athenians disturb is the decree per se. I reserve for the study alluded to in n. 9 my own view of the matter.

⁵⁵ C. Meister, op. cit., p. 41 says that 37.4 is the explanatory epilogue which rhetorical theory requires for paradoxical maxims. 37.4 certainly does serve an explanatory function. But what it explains is not a paradox but a debatable view—an ἀμφισβητούμενον, to use Aristotle's term. Cleon is taking issue with the view, common among critics of democracy (e.g. [Xen.] *Ath. Pol.* 1.8–9), that it is the δέξιοι and συνετοί who best govern. On the oligarchic overtones of such terms, see H.-G. Saar, op. cit., p. 31 n. 2; G. Großmann, op. cit., pp. 146–53.

⁵⁶ 1.84.2. I say 'pointedly,' because there is so much in this discussion of ἀμαθία and σωφροσύνη which recalls Archidamus' defence of Spartan ways. See A. W. Gomme, *HCT* 2 (op. cit.), pp. 300–1; J. H. Finley, *Three Essays on Thucydides* (Cambridge, MA, 1967), p. 30 ('a harsh travesty of the Spartan ideal'). In a detailed discussion of the matter, H.-G. Saar, op. cit., pp. 28–31 argues that, just as the Corinthians at Sparta recited Athenian strengths in order to expose to the Spartans the obsolescence of their ways, so too Cleon rehearses Spartan virtues in order to goad the Athenians to recognize and correct their own weaknesses. I reserve for the study alluded to in n. 9 my own view of Cleon's apparent echoing of Archidamus.

⁵⁷ A. W. Gomme, *HCT* 2 (op. cit.), p. 302.

⁵⁸ I. M. Stahl, *Thucydidis de bello peloponnesiaco libri octo*, II.1 (Leipzig, 1875), p. 59; H.-G. Saar, op. cit., p. 26 (the emendation was first proposed by Reiske).

(38.1), Cleon charges that his opponent is planning to base his attack on the Mytilene decree on certain paradoxical ideas about justice and self-interest. What Cleon gains from the ambiguity is a suggestion that advising the people against 'what has seemed best' to them necessarily involves the employment of arguments which are paradoxical and absurd.⁵⁹

As we have seen, Cleon's political generalizations, for all that they are his fervid personal convictions, are merely a restatement of accepted opinion. And in that they are based on these endoxic maxims, Cleon's policy proposal and the Mytilene decree itself are likewise *ἐνδοξοί*. Yet intellectuals will urge the Athenians with generalizations that are in the *second* mode indicated by the rhetorical treatises: paradoxes of the sort, 'it is advantageous to suffer injustice' (38.1). Such generalizations will require further explanation, as the rhetorical treatises enjoin; and the explanation will have to be very ingenious indeed.

Confident in his power of speech, his opponent would try to prove *τὸ πᾶν δοκοῦν*... *ὡς οὐκ ἔγνωσται* (38.2). If Cleon had said *τὸ δόξαν*, there would be no doubt about his meaning: his opponent is prepared to argue that *what has been decreed* is not yet decided. Gomme, certain that this is the correct sense, is compelled to explain the present participle as equivalent to *ὁ πᾶν ἐδόκει*, 'what was altogether our view yesterday.'⁶⁰ A better explanation for Cleon's avoidance of the aorist is that he is aiming at the same ambiguity as in the words *παρὰ δόξαν*. The opponent would claim that the decree is not a completed deliberation. But because decrees are the direct expression of *δόξα*, such a claim implies also a view, flatly paradoxical, that *τὸ πᾶν δοκοῦν*, 'the universal opinion of men' (Marchant), is not yet firmly established.⁶¹

The advocate of repeal will try to prove that the truth about justice and self-interest is the opposite of what it seems. Or rather *would* try. The optative *ἀγωνίσαιτ' ἄν* shows us that this attempt is contingent: it could happen only if Cleon were to desist from his defense of accepted opinion and allowed the Athenians to indulge their taste for such paradox. This, however, will not happen. 'I stoutly oppose, now just as from the very first, your reformulating your set opinions' (*ἐγὼ τό τε πρῶτον καὶ νῦν διαμάχομαι μὴ μεταγνῶναι ὑμᾶς τὰ προδεδογμένα*). What he means by the *τὸ πρῶτον* is that, while he is defending a particular decree *now*, he has *ever and always* defended the basic tenets of accepted opinion. Cleon's battle against repeal of the Mytilene decree is part of his ongoing struggle⁶² on behalf of democracy and a political society governed by those he terms 'ordinary-thinking people.'

A second alternative is therefore more likely: rather than flatly contradicting accepted opinion on justice and self-interest, the advocate of repeal will try to deceive the Athenians about these same matters by more subtle means (37.2: *τὸ εὐπρεπὲς τοῦ λόγου ἐκπονήσας παράγειν πειράσεται*). Intimidated by Cleon from producing

⁵⁹ Many render *παρὰ δόξαν* 'contrary to their true opinion.' C. W. Macleod, for example, has 'insincerely' (op. cit., p. 98). Gomme expresses reservations (*HCT* 2 [op. cit.], p. 302).

⁶⁰ *HCT* 2 (op. cit.), p. 303. H.-G. Saar, op. cit., p. 34 n. 2 compares I.140.1: *τοῖς κοινῇ δόξασιν*.

⁶¹ E. C. Marchant, *Thucydides Book III* (London, 1909), p. 147. Cf. I. M. Stahl, op. cit., p. 61 (id quod omnino videtur), J. Steup, *Thucydides* 3 (op. cit.), p. 69 (was allgemein angenommen wird).

⁶² Gomme, *HCT* 2 (op. cit.), p. 309 places a pause after *διαμάχομαι* and treats *μὴ μεταγνῶναι* as an imperative. This certainly solves the problem of understanding a sentence which otherwise appears to be saying that Cleon has defended the Mytilene decree (*τὰ προδεδογμένα*) not just *now* but *from the very first* (or—reading *τότε* in place of *τό τε*—'at that time as well as now'). But rather than strain the syntax in this way, we should (with Cleon) strain the semantic range of *τὰ προδεδογμένα*.

blatant paradoxes, he will nonetheless produce some subtly specious arguments about justice and Athenian interests. He still exploits the audience's susceptibility to paradox; but he is smart enough to maintain the form of legitimate political debate.

The agon which Cleon's opponent seeks to join is ostensibly a political agon. But whereas a legitimate political debate concerns the public good, this is a sophistic agon, which rewards the contestants themselves with prizes (38.3: ἀθλα). Moreover, these prizes are, as it were, chrematistic (38.2: κέρδει ἐπαιρόμενος) and are awarded not by an epideictic jury but by an enemy of the polis. Hence the prizes come at the expense of the Athenians as a whole.

Cleon concludes his assault on logos by sternly rebuking his audience for permitting their Assembly to be transformed into this sort of sophistic circus (38.4–7: αἴτιοι δ' ὑμεῖς κακῶς ἀγωνοθετοῦντες). The complexity of his rebuke arises from its 'almost bewildering series of antitheses.'⁶³ But underlying it all is λόγος-ἔργον. And this is important, for Cleon's denigration of reason will not be complete until he has shown that logos is inimicable not only to accepted opinion but also to *action* itself.⁶⁴

The Athenians, says Cleon, behave as 'speech-spectators' and 'deed-listeners.' These words, θεαταὶ μὲν τῶν λόγων, ἀκροαταὶ δὲ τῶν ἔργων, contain a double antithesis, one which implies that the Athenians have got things backward: they ought to listen to words and see deeds with their eyes. But translating λόγοι 'words' misses the pejorative sense. Cleon has only a moment earlier associated λόγος with deception (τὸ εὐπρεπὲς τοῦ λόγου); and now λόγων occurs in antithesis to ἔργων. Such an antithesis is used frequently in Greek to indicate a disjunction between speciousness and fact.⁶⁵ Consequently, the close association in the present passage of hearing with λόγοι and seeing with ἔργα series effectively to designate the former as the faculty of questionable, the latter of certain perception.

Intelligible to our vision are ἔργα—not just present facts (τὰ πεπραγμένα ἤδη) but also the future realities deducible from them (τὰ μέλλοντα). But the Athenians are insensible of palpable evidence (τὸ δρασθὲν πιστὸν) ὄψει and disregard the element of sight in foresight (σκοπεῖν); ears open and eyes closed, they hearken only to clever talk. Moreover, what makes this talk so clever is that it is informed by reason. For λόγος is *rational* speech; and while not everyone has the power to orate in this fashion, all can compete in reasoning itself. The goal of Athenian listeners is to show that they do not lag behind in intelligence (γνώμη). This display involves being ahead of everyone else in agreeing with the speaker's point and even anticipating his line of reasoning. Yet the more alert they are to the outcome of the logic, the less they apprehend the real consequences of all this talk (38.6).

38.5–7 represents the Athenians as so in love with reason and rational discourse that they have utterly divorced it from any reference to objective, experiential reality. The objects of reason are its own insubstantial creations: paradoxes which correspond to nothing real (ἄτοπα), objects which are 'something other than' the present reality (τὰ παρόντα). The Athenians are careless about what is familiar and what has been previously subjected to close scrutiny.

Cleon's view of reason and experience is different. One makes decisions on a basis of concrete evidence and on a basis of past and present states of affairs. This procedure, which renders λόγος unnecessary, is well-exemplified by Cleon's own maxims. They are indeed δεδοκμασμένα, views validated by repeated scrutiny, his own as well as that of the great mass of people, and therefore conforms to δόξα,

⁶³ C. W. Macleod, *op. cit.*, pp. 93–4 (he has all of 38.2–7 in view).

⁶⁴ Contrast Pericles at 2.40.2. ⁶⁵ A. M. Parry, *Logos and Ergon* (*op. cit.*), p. 48.

accepted opinion.⁶⁶ When considered in these terms γνώμη is freed of its normal association with reason. Thus, the ἔγνων with which Cleon opens his speech and introduces his first generalizing γνώμη is no less a leitmotiv for him as the words τῆς γνώμης are for Pericles.⁶⁷ But in Cleon's case the motif proclaims that the man's wisdom is based on experience, in strictest opposition to reason.⁶⁸

In his treatise *Against the Sophists* (ca. 390 B.C.), Isocrates invites us to sympathize with the reaction of common men as they watch the false teachers of wisdom:

Ἐπειδὴν κατίδωσιν τοὺς τὴν σοφίαν διδάσκοντας τὰς ἐναντιώσεις ἐπὶ μὲν τῶν λόγων τηρούντας, ἐπὶ δὲ τῶν ἔργων μὴ καθορώντας, ἔτι δὲ περὶ μὲν τῶν μελλόντων εἰδέναι προσποιουμένους, περὶ δὲ τῶν παρόντων μηδὲν τῶν δεόντων μῆτ' εἰπεῖν μήτε συμβουλευσαι δυναμένους, ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον ὁμονοοῦντας καὶ πλείω κατορθοῦντας τοὺς ταῖς δόξαις χρωμένους ἢ τοὺς τὴν ἐπιστήμην ἔχειν ἐπαγγελλομένους... εἰκότως οἶμαι καταφρονοῦσι (οἱ ἰδιῶται), καὶ νομίζουσιν ἀδολεσχίαν καὶ μικρολογίαν ἀλλ' οὐ τῆς ψυχῆς ἐπιμέλειαν εἶναι τὰς τοιαύτας διατριβάς.⁶⁹

Cleon, in terms strikingly similar to Isocrates, champions δόξα against what professes to be a more exact science of politics. In Cleon's view, that which 'has seemed best to the people' is best, for it conforms to δόξα, the wisdom of the common man. And to insist on reasoning further about Mytilene is merely to engage in χρόνου διατριβή: a learned philosophical discussion which in reality is nothing other than an insidious 'waste of time' (38.1). Perceiving his audience's desire to subject their decision to further discussion, Cleon claims that they are falling victim to their own intellectual pretensions; and in order to rescue them from this, he demonstrates in his own person what it is to deliberate wisely rather than smartly. Cleon rejects reason and rational discourse and argues instead on the basis of experience, accepted opinion, and the endoxic maxim. And in the process he shows that, far from merely advocating ἀμαθία μετὰ σωφροσύνης, he is himself the σώφρων ἀμαθής.

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⁶⁶ δεδοκμασμένου at 38.5 is neuter and not masculine (sc. λόγου). It amounts to a synonym for γνώμη 'maxim'. And since Cleon's maxims regularly conform to δόξα (they are 'endoxic'), it is tempting to see in δεδοκμασμένου a play on δόξα (C. W. Macleod, op. cit., p. 94 detects a play on τὸ δοκοῦν at 38.2).

⁶⁷ L. Edmunds, *Chance and Intelligence* (op. cit.), p. 8, commenting on 1.140.1.

⁶⁸ C. W. Macleod, op. cit., p. 92: 'His opening... impl(ies) that the speaker is a wise man and that the substance of his reflections has repeatedly been confirmed by experience'.

⁶⁹ Isoc. 13.7-8.