

THE UNPERSUASIVE THEBANS (THUCYDIDES 3.61–67)

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THUCYDIDES 3.52–68 concludes the story of Plataea begun in Book 2. Weakened by two years of siege, the Plataeans surrender to the Lacedaemonians with the understanding that the guilty will be punished, but no one *παρὰ δίκην* (3.52.2).¹ When the Spartan judges arrive, however, they do not conduct a conventional trial, but simply ask their prisoners whether they have done the Lacedaemonians and their allies any good in the current war.² The Plataeans realize that they are about to be sacrificed for the benefit of the Thebans, since there is only one answer they can give. They therefore request and obtain permission to address the judges at greater length.

Critical admiration of the Plataeans' speech has been almost universal. Dionysius of Halicarnassus gives it his highest praise: "But more than all the speeches presented in the seven books I admire the defense of the Plataeans The arguments are presented with a great deal of feeling, and the language is not repulsive to the ear. For the composition is euphonious and the figures are appropriate to the matter."³ Like other Thucydidean speakers, the Plataeans are not above using their rhetorical skills to magnify achievements and minimize misdeeds.⁴ Their cause, however, is worthy of sympathy,⁵ and their appeal is one of the most moving in the History.

The speech is notable not only for its pathos, but also for the deference it pays to its audience's values.⁶ The Plataeans invoke Spartan piety not only by calling on the Spartan dead buried at Plataea (3.58.4–5, 59.2), but also by warning their audience of the opprobrium they will incur should they dedicate spoils from the Plataeans, benefactors of Greece, in temples sacred to all Greeks (3.57.1).⁷

All citations of Thucydides are from the text of Stuart Jones and Powell 1942. Editions, commentaries, and translations will be cited by name of editor, commentator, or translator alone. Translations of Thucydides are my own.

¹ *παρὰ δίκην* combines "contrary to what is just and customary," "unfairly," and perhaps "excessively." See Hornblower *ad loc.*

² εἴ τι Λακεδαιμονίους καὶ τοὺς ξυμμάχους ἐν τῷ πολέμῳ τῷ καθεστῶτι ἀγαθόν [τι] εἰργασμένοι εἰσὶν (3.52.4).

³ Dion. Hal. *Thuc.* 42 (tr. Pritchett).

⁴ For a full rhetorical analysis of the debate see Macleod 1977. See also Hogan 1972: 242–249. On the use of sophistry by sympathetic speakers in Euripides see Meridor 1979–80: 14, esp. n. 44.

⁵ Hogan 1972: 241–242.

⁶ On Plataean tact see Macleod 1977: 228–229 and 234–235.

⁷ They also speak of θεῶν . . . τῶν ξυμμαχικῶν (3.58.1) and of θεοὺς τοὺς ὁμοβωμίους καὶ κοινοὺς τῶν Ἑλλήνων (3.59.2). On Spartan piety in general see Hdt. 5.63, 7.206, 9.11; Thuc. 4.5.1, 5.75.2. See also Hornblower 1991: *ad* 3.59.2, 68.3, and Cartledge 1979: *passim* (see index under

They appeal to Spartan constancy by exposing the contradiction in obliterating Plataea, whose bravery led the Spartans' ancestors to inscribe the city's name on a tripod dedicated at Delphi (3.57.2).⁸ These same arguments reflect the speakers' awareness of the value that the Spartans place on visual signs:⁹ the graves and tripod symbolize Plataean bravery; spoils from Plataea will be visible proof of Spartan treachery. Such touches may have prompted Gomme (346) to remark that the speech was "particularly affecting and in a better world would have been effective." Presumably Thucydides' Thebans also think the speech convincing.¹⁰ Afraid that the Lacedaemonians will relent, they obtain permission to respond (3.60.1).

Critical opinion of the Thebans' speech is ambivalent. Bloomfield, for example, says (*ad* 3.53) that it is among the ablest in Thucydides and considers it a fine example of invective (*ad* 3.51). In the same comment, however, he both recognizes and excuses its shortcomings: "The reasonings are, as might be expected, one-sided and fallacious, and the representations either false or exaggerated; little decency being thought necessary to be employed to those who were so utterly helpless and destitute as the Plataeans."¹¹ Even when the Thebans contradict or malign themselves, commentators have tended to come to their aid, sometimes by claiming to perceive a parodic, sarcastic, or ironic tone.¹² Often these scholars attribute a greater effectiveness than is warranted to arguments that should, in fact, have harmed the Thebans' cause. Moreover, they fail to see how the Thebans' inept rhetoric reveals their character.¹³

The rhetorical self-portrait that Thucydides places in the Thebans' mouths is consistent with the contempt that the Athenians felt toward them.¹⁴ As Gomme (*ad* 3.68.1) notes, "Dislike of Thebes in Athens could be aroused at any time." Zeitlin argues that both Sophocles and Euripides use Thebes as the antithesis of

Sparta/Spartans: religiosity/superstition). For the purposes of this paper I am concerned only with the images that the Spartans propagated. See Tigerstedt 1965: 19–28 and 1974: 13–20.

⁸ Other appeals to Spartan stability include Thuc. 1.68.1, 1.85.1 and 1.86.2.

⁹ Hdt. 9.82; Xen. *Lac.* 11.3; Plut. *Mor.* 209c, 228e, 232e. At Thuc. 3.16.2 the Lacedaemonians are easily convinced by a *display* of force that might not have reflected the Athenians' true ability to repel simultaneous attacks by land and sea. On the Spartans' use of the visual see Powell 1988: 239–242.

¹⁰ See Hogan 1972: 243.

¹¹ Invective, however, need not be so self-revealing (cf. Thuc. 1.37–8). Hornblower several times qualifies his initial praise of the Thebans' speech (*ad* 3.64.1, 65.1, 66.2, cf. pp. 444–445). Gomme criticizes some of the arguments (*ad* 3.64.1 and 67.4), but also calls the speech "very well conceived" (*ad* 3.67.4), although of course he may mean "conceived by Thucydides."

¹² E.g., Bloomfield (*ad* 3.61.1); Classen-Steup (*ad* 3.61.1, 65.2, 67.6); Marchant (*ad* 3.64.2); Gomme (*ad* 3.63.2 and 64.4). See also Macleod 1977: 238. Hornblower detects "contemptuous echoes" (*ad* 3.63.3) and a "jeering reference" (*ad* 3.65.2).

¹³ See Gomme *ad* 3.67.4. On characterization in Thucydides see Hornblower 1987: 57–59 (esp. n. 48) and Hornblower *ad* 1.86. The strongest proponent of characterization in the speeches is Tompkins 1972. On national character in Greek literature see Halliwell 1992: 49, n. 27.

¹⁴ See Roberts 1895: 4–14.

Athens.¹⁵ Euripides and Aristophanes were perhaps responding to the appearance of Heracles on Theban coins in the latter part of the fifth century when they depicted the hero as a buffoon and a glutton in the *Alcestis* and *Frogs*.¹⁶ The emphasis on Cadmus' Phoenician origins in Athenian literature may have been an attempt to portray the Thebans as "barbarians."¹⁷

The speech that Thucydides composed is also consistent with the reputation the Thebans had in antiquity for being incompetent speakers.¹⁸ In Plato's *Symposium* (182b), for example, Pausanias speaks of Elis and Boeotia and other places where men are *μη σοφοὶ λέγειν*. Plutarch's Alcibiades (*Alc.* 2.6) quips that Theban children play the flute because they cannot discourse.¹⁹

The self-revealing rhetorical incompetence of Thucydides' Thebans is most evident in the remarkable insensitivity they exhibit to their audience's distrust of rhetoric, in their inadvertent reduction of the Spartans' reputation along with their own, and in their clumsy paraphrases, which tend to confirm rather than refute their opponents' arguments. The peroration strengthens Thucydides' portrait of the Thebans as "cruel men . . . who violate the customs of all Greece" (Eur. *Suppl.* 308–311).

THE EXORDIUM: λόγοι AND ἔργα

Thucydidean orators often try to win the good will of their audiences by purporting to be disinclined to speak unless compelled. In the exordium of the funeral oration (2.35.3), for example, Pericles insists that he speaks only in deference to custom. The Athenian ambassadors (1.73.1) state that they are in Sparta for other business and imply that they address the assembly only because of the outcry raised by Sparta's allies. The Plataeans, too, devote a significant part of their exordium (3.53.3–4) to justifying their speech.²⁰ In response, the Thebans declare that they would not be speaking at all if the Plataeans had not deviated from the matter at hand.

As far as our speech is concerned,²¹ we would not have asked to make it, if they on their part had answered the question in brief and had not turned against us with an accusation,

¹⁵ Zeitlin 1990. See also Bacon 1966, and Hubbard 1992: 97–98. Hubbard points out (98, n. 55) that anti-Theban propaganda was not limited to Athens.

¹⁶ Demand 1982: 2–3 and 136, n. 6. Demand tries to reconstruct a more balanced picture of Thebes than Athenian sources alone allow.

¹⁷ Demand 1982: 53; Hubbard 1992: 97, n. 54.

¹⁸ For Theban *μισολογία* see Plut. *Mor.* 575e. For the Boeotians as "dull and stupid" see Ar. *Ach.* 860–958 and Plut. *Mor.* 995e; on "Boeotian swine" see Pindar *Ol.* 6.90. On the Theban speech in Xen. *Hell.* 3.5.8–15 see Grant 1965: 263–264 and Gray 1989: 107–112.

¹⁹ On the changing view of flute-playing in the fifth-century see Demand 1982: 88–89 and n. 20 (p. 155), which gives new meaning to Ar. *Ach.* 863–864.

²⁰ Ironically, because there is no real charge against them (as there should be) it is more difficult for them to justify their speech. See Macleod 1977: 228.

²¹ Hobbes's rendering of this passage (Schlatter 1975) avoids the awkwardness inherent in the retention of the Greek word-order by placing "speak" at the end of the Thebans' first sentence.

and had not presented a lengthy self-defense having to do with matters that are not under debate—moreover, have not even been charged—and had not praised themselves for what no one faulted (3.61.1).

τοὺς μὲν λόγους οὐκ ἂν ἤτισταίμεθα εἰπεῖν, εἰ καὶ αὐτοὶ βραχέως τὸ ἐρωτηθὲν ἀπεκρίναντο καὶ μὴ ἐπὶ ἡμᾶς τραπόμενοι κατηγορίαν ἐποιήσαντο καὶ περὶ αὐτῶν ἔξω τῶν προκειμένων καὶ ἅμα οὐδὲ ἤτισταμένων πολλὴν τὴν ἀπολογίαν καὶ ἔπαινον ὧν οὐδεὶς ἐμέμψατο.

The tactic of blaming the Plataeans for necessitating a response would seem especially well suited to this audience: Spartan distrust of rhetoric and contempt for prolixity were proverbial.²² The Thebans' flawed rhetoric, however, undercuts their apparent depreciation of λόγοι. It is ill-advised for the Thebans to begin their speech with τοὺς μὲν λόγους since this expression does not refer to spurious arguments by the Plataeans, as one might expect, but to the Thebans' own oration. Moreover, the Thebans do not offer to support their words with empirical evidence.²³ To the μὲν-clause referring to their own speech they counterpose a δέ-clause expressing the necessity of *replying* to the charge (ἀντεπεῖν) and of *refuting* the Plataeans' self-praise (ἐλεγχον ποιήσασθαι). Even when the Thebans appeal to the truth, it is as something the Spartans will hear rather than see, ἴνα . . . τὸ δ' ἄληθές περὶ ἀμφοτέρων ἀκούσαντες κρίνῃτε (3.61.1).

Rarely do speakers in Thucydides, especially those addressing a Spartan audience, place such an inordinate emphasis on their own λόγοι.²⁴ Sthenelaïdas, for example, similarly begins, τοὺς μὲν λόγους τοὺς πολλοὺς τῶν Ἀθηναίων (1.86.1). Here, however, τοὺς μὲν λόγους clearly refers to the Athenians' earlier speech. Sthenelaïdas goes on to complain that the Athenians did not deny the allies' accusations. Thus he implies that the Athenians' words indirectly acknowledge what they are doing, namely harming the Lacedaemonians and their allies.²⁵

²² Laconic speech, of course, has its own kind of rhetorical force (e.g., Thuc. 4.40.2). On Spartan attitudes toward more conventional Greek discourse see Hdt. 3.46, 9.91, and Thuc. 4.84.2. Numerous Laconian apothegms (e.g., Plut. *Mor.* 216a, 217d, 220e) convey this attitude; see Tigerstedt 1974: 16–30. See also Parry 1981: 80–82 on Thucydides' use of attitudes to λόγοι and ἔργα to define differences in national character.

²³ From the numerous instances in the History in which speakers purport to base their arguments on observable facts as opposed to hearsay it is clear that such an appeal was thought to have considerable persuasive force. See Cleon's criticism of Athenian audiences (3.38.4), which implies that they should rely on an examination of deeds. At 1.73.2 the Athenians suggest that ὄψις is more valuable than ἀκοαί. See also Hdt. 1.8.2. On the value of visual proof in ancient Greece in general see Hartog 1988: 260–273.

²⁴ The Mytileneans' τοὺς λόγους ποιησόμεθα (3.10.1) is not as emphatic. The Lacedaemonians, not known for their conventional rhetorical skills, begin a sentence in their exordium with τοὺς δὲ λόγους μακροτέρους (4.17.2); the surprising emphasis on their own lengthy speech anticipates their audience's surprise at this apparent departure from custom (note the ellipsis of χρῆσθαι when they refer to their customary brachylogy). The overall rhetorical quality (or lack thereof) of this speech deserves further study.

²⁵ He is somewhat more direct at 1.86.2: καὶ τοὺς ξυμμάχους, ἦν σωφρονῶμεν, οὐ περιοψόμεθα ὀδικομένους οὐδὲ μελλήσομεν τιμωρεῖν· οἱ δ' οὐκέτι μέλλουσι κακῶς πάσχειν (emphasis added).

The Corinthians demonstrate an equally acute awareness of the Spartans' distrust of λόγοι when they profess to have empirical evidence of Athenian wrongdoing: "And if they were harming Greece unseen [ἀφανείς], I suppose, there would still be need for instruction as for men who do not know [οὐκ εἰδότες, literally "have not seen"]. Now, though, why should we go on at length, when you see [ὁρᾶτε] some [Greeks] enslaved . . ." (1.68.3). In this contrafactual condition the word ἀφανείς implies that Athenian wrongs can, in fact, be observed. The verb ὁρᾶτε here retains the sense of visual as well as mental perception.

Nor do the Thebans exploit the opportunity afforded by the Spartans' question, which stressed having done something of value (εἰργασμένοι εἰσίν, 3.52.4). Instead of paraphrasing or reiterating the question, as the Plataeans do in order to redefine its terms, the Thebans simply speak of "what was asked" (τὸ ἐρωτηθέν). The overall impression of the opening of the exordium is that the Thebans object more strenuously to the Plataeans' speaking than to their having done anything wrong or even to their having failed to do anything good.²⁶

One kind of λόγος that the Spartans did value was reputation.²⁷ In their plea for mercy the Plataeans rely heavily on their own reputation for ἀρετή and the Thebans' for treachery. The Thebans acknowledge the force of these arguments when they express the purpose of their speech, "so that neither our bad character (κακία) will help them, nor their reputation (δόξα), but so that after you have heard the truth about both you may judge" (3.61.1). Because the Thebans refer to their own κακία and the Plataeans' δόξα before they appeal to the truth, however, the immediate impression is that they acknowledge the validity of both reputations. The scholiast may sense the rhetorical danger here. He helps the speakers by explaining, "The Theban speaks ironically, for he does not hold such an opinion as is clear from what follows."²⁸ But even if one grants an ironical tone to this passage, it cannot compensate for the fact that all Greeks knew that the Thebans had collaborated in the Persian wars.²⁹ The Spartans would hardly be disposed to share the ironic perspective and think Theban κακία illusory.

Again, comparison with other speakers addressing a Spartan audience is instructive. At the first gathering of Lacedaemonian allies, the Corinthians' analysis of Spartan and Athenian character (1.70.2–9) is in effect an elaborate comparison of their reputations. Athenian quickness is allegedly reason to go to war in all haste; Lacedaemonian slowness places the allies in danger. In response the Athenians assert (1.73.3) that their reputation for bravery and innovation

²⁶ See Macleod 1977: 242.

²⁷ Archidamus (1.85.1) stresses the importance of reputation, as do the Plataeans (3.58.2). See also 4.17.2, 17.4, 18.5, 20.2.

²⁸ Hude *ad loc.* Similarly, Classen-Steup *ad loc.* Steinberg (1870: 20) classifies the statement as ironic. Marchant (*ad loc.*) sees no irony. The scholiast, I should add, detects non-existent irony at Homer *Il.* 20.434.

²⁹ See Muecke 1978. He points out (366) that irony based on context depends on a similar interpretation of the world by both speaker and audience, on their sharing certain values or customs.

against the Persians should warn the Spartans of what to expect in case of war. In both examples the speakers know that their audience concurs at least with their premises, if not with their conclusions. In his reply to the Corinthians, for example, Archidamus (1.84.1–2) does not deny that the Spartans are slow, but asserts the positive consequences of this slowness combined with other Spartan attributes. Sthenelaïdas (1.86.1) does not directly challenge the Athenians' boast to have been ἀγαθοί in the Persian wars; instead he tries to turn the reputation of the Athenians back against them.³⁰ The Thebans, on the other hand, ask their audience to revise drastically not only their view of the Thebans, but also their opinion of the Plataeans, men honored by members of both Athenian and Peloponnesian alliances for their extraordinary contributions in the Persian wars.³¹

PROOFS: PARAPHRASE AND PARODY

In the course of their speech the Thebans attack the Plataeans' account of their alliance with the Athenians, of the behavior of Thebes and Plataea during the Persian wars, and of the invasion of Plataea by the Thebans in 431. An unusual feature of these arguments is the frequent paraphrase of the Plataeans' statements.³² In fact, every chapter of the speech but the first contains at least one example of explicit reference to the Plataeans' words. Many Thucydidean speakers restate their opponents' arguments in order to distort and weaken them.³³ When the Thebans use this tactic, however, they reveal their lack of rhetorical skill.

At 3.62.1 the speakers challenge the reputation the Plataeans gained in the Persian wars. They paraphrase and respond to the Plataeans' boast that they were the only Boeotians to join in attacking the Persians for the liberation of Hellas (3.54.3).

Again, they say that when the barbarian attacked Hellas, they alone of the Boeotians did not medize. With this especially they glorify themselves and revile us. But we, as far as medizing is concerned, say that they did not [only] because the Athenians did not; however, in the same way later when the Athenians were attacking the Greeks, [we say] that once again alone of the Boeotians they atticized (3.62.1–2).

³⁰ The Thebans entangle themselves in contradictions when they attempt to use a similar argument at 3.67.2. See the discussion of this passage below, 106–107.

³¹ Cf. Badian 1993: 110–111.

³² I count eight uses of φασί, φατέ, or λέγετε (with or without ὡς) to express direct paraphrase of the Plataeans. No other speech in Thucydides approaches this statistic. The Corinthians in Athens (1.37–43) use this tactic, but only twice. It is entirely missing from the closely responding speeches of Cleon and Diodotus (3.37–48).

³³ See, for example, Sthenelaïdas' misrepresentation (1.86.3) of Archidamus' assessment of Peloponnesian resources (1.80.3). The Corinthians (1.38.2) soften the Corcyraeans' complaint (1.34.1). Alcibiades (6.17.1) exaggerates Nicias' words (6.12.2). On misquotation in tragedy see Meridor 1979–1980.

ἐπειδὴ δὲ καὶ ὁ βάρβαρος ἦλθεν ἐπὶ τὴν Ἑλλάδα, φασὶ μόνοι Βοιωτῶν οὐ μηδίσαι, καὶ τούτῳ μάλιστα αὐτοὶ τε ἀγάλλονται καὶ ἡμᾶς λοιδοροῦσιν. ἡμεῖς δὲ μηδίσαι μὲν αὐτοὺς οὐ φαμεν διότι οὐδ' Ἀθηναίους, τῇ μέντοι αὐτῇ ἰδέα ὕστερον ἰόντων Ἀθηναίων ἐπὶ τοὺς Ἑλλήνας μόνοις αὖ Βοιωτῶν ἀπικίσαι.

The restatement is intended to weaken the Plataeans' boast by turning a positive action, "fighting the Persians," into the absence of a negative one, "not medizing." But here the negative action, "medizing," is the very source of Theban ill-repute. Curiously, throughout this debate only the Thebans themselves use this propagandistic expression. They repeat it in four other passages (3.62.2, 63.1, 64.1, 64.5), often gratuitously. Yet they should have been aware that any mention of "medizing" would place them in the worst possible light. Similarly, for all the scorn they intend to convey with the word "atticize," the force of this taunt depends on an implicit condemnation of its model "medize."

In this passage (3.62.1–2) the Thebans' rationale for the Plataeans' purported patriotism is that they were simply following the Athenians' lead.³⁴ This explanation, however, exhibits a dangerous lack of tact. It implies that even at the battle of Plataea the Plataeans were mere lackeys of the Athenians. If so, then they looked to the Athenians rather than to the Lacedaemonians for leadership. Despite their initial reluctance to go to Plataea, however, the Lacedaemonians were then still the acknowledged leaders of the Greek forces.³⁵ The Plataeans (3.54.4) diplomatically make this point when they recall that in their own land they fought alongside the Lacedaemonians under Pausanias. In contrast, although the Thebans intend only to reduce the Plataeans' reputation, they carelessly malign that of the Spartans by retrospectively depriving them of the esteem in which they were held in 479.

The Thebans' accusation might also be interpreted as an allusion to Marathon, but such a reference would be equally offensive. Since the Lacedaemonians were too late for the battle, the Plataeans had only two options: to fight alongside the Athenians or to collaborate with the Persians. Again Plataean tact underscores Theban rhetorical clumsiness. When the Plataeans boast (3.54.4) of their contributions in the fight against the Persians, they stress the naval engagement at Artemisium and the battle of Plataea.³⁶

³⁴ Herodotus (8.30) launches a similar and equally unconvincing accusation against the Phocaeans. See Gillis 1979: 69.

³⁵ Hdt. 9.27. Herodotus (9.28) places the Plataeans next to the Athenians on the left wing, but does not imply that they were under the Athenians' command at Plataea. Cf. Badian 1993: 116–121.

³⁶ See Gomme 1956 and Hornblower 1991: *ad* 3.54.4. Badian 1993: 117–118 indirectly offers a different explanation for the Plataeans' reticence when he argues that they were then virtual slaves of the Athenians and had no choice but to fight at Marathon. He relies heavily on the grave mounds seen by Pausanias, but as Herodotus points out (9.85), such evidence is not always reliable. Cf. Thuc. 1.98.4. Badian may also over-interpret the verb *δίδομι* at Hdt. 6.108. The Epidamnians in Thucydides "handed themselves over" or "surrendered themselves" (*παρέδοσαν*, 1.25.2; *δεδομένην*, 1.26.3) to the Corinthians without making themselves their slaves.

The peculiar syntax of the Thebans' assertion further weakens their attack. The use of the accusative-and-infinitive construction not only for the charge of atticizing, $\mu\acute{o}\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma\ \alpha\acute{\upsilon}\ \beta\omicron\iota\omega\tau\acute{\omega}\nu\ \acute{\alpha}\tau\tau\iota\kappa\acute{\iota}\sigma\alpha\iota$, but more surprisingly for Plataean motives, $\delta\acute{\iota}\omicron\tau\iota\ \omicron\upsilon\delta'\ \acute{\iota}\theta\eta\nu\alpha\acute{\iota}\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$, marks them as opinion rather than fact.³⁷ The word-order is also careless: placement of "we" so close to "medize" ($\eta\mu\epsilon\acute{\iota}\varsigma\ \delta\grave{\epsilon}\ \mu\eta\delta\acute{\iota}\sigma\alpha\iota$) only directs attention to Theban collaboration.³⁸

When at 3.63.2 they respond to the Plataeans' justification of their alliance with Athens, the Thebans turn away from their Spartan audience and address the Plataeans directly. The shift from "they say" to "you say" raises the emotional level of the Thebans' speech.³⁹ At the same time, it signals to the judges how little the Thebans care about the Lacedaemonians and their allies,⁴⁰ while it accentuates the depth of their private hatred of the Plataeans.

In order to defend yourselves against us you became, as you say, allies and citizens of Athens. So you ought to have brought them in only against us, and not joined them in attacking others, as you could have, in fact, if somehow you were brought over to their side against your will. After all, you still had the alliance with these Lacedaemonians against the Persians, which you keep putting up as a screen. Indeed it was sufficient to protect you from us, and, what is most important, to allow you to take counsel without fear (3.63.2).

Here the Thebans imply that the Plataeans' failure to abandon the alliance when the Athenians turned against other Greeks exposes the speciousness of their motives for the alliance. The assertion, however, that the Plataeans ought only to have brought in the Athenians against the Thebans, appears to concede the Plataeans' contention that the initial alliance with the Athenians was indeed prompted by Theban aggression. The speakers' carelessness here neutralizes their earlier attempt (3.61.2) to lay on the Plataeans full responsibility for hostilities between the two cities. Furthermore, although the Thebans' paraphrase includes the Plataeans' claim to Athenian citizenship (3.55.3), their retort completely passes over this matter. By needlessly repeating this detail and leaving it unchallenged the Thebans draw attention to the assertion and even lend it credibility.⁴¹

³⁷ Most commentators observe the attraction and cite other examples, but do not comment on the possible rhetorical effect in this or other passages. Cf. the Corinthians' forceful shift to direct assertion at 1.37.2.

³⁸ Word-order generates a further difficulty here: $\varphi\alpha\mu\acute{\epsilon}\nu$ must first be understood with $\omicron\upsilon$ ("we claim that they did not"), but then $\varphi\alpha\mu\acute{\epsilon}\nu$ alone must be inferred twice. Classen-Steup's accentuation ($\omicron\upsilon\ \varphi\alpha\mu\acute{\epsilon}\nu$) is intended to separate $\omicron\upsilon$ from $\varphi\alpha\mu\acute{\epsilon}\nu$. Cf. Gomme *ad loc.*

³⁹ The Corinthians are also emotional (esp. 1.37–38), but still direct their words to the men who will make the decision.

⁴⁰ The Spartans generally try to preserve at least the appearance of acting for the common good of the alliance. Lacedaemonian ambassadors (4.22.3), for example, will not negotiate publicly because they do not want to expose themselves to complaints by their allies. Presumably public negotiations would show them to be self-serving.

⁴¹ The problems surrounding the Plataeans' supposed Athenian citizenship have not been adequately resolved. See Gomme 1956 and Hornblower 1991: *ad* 3.55.3. See also Badian 1993: 123 and 221, n. 27, and Amit 1973: 75–78.

The Thebans seem to forget the judges completely when they add that the alliance with the Lacedaemonians was enough to protect the Plataeans from the Thebans.⁴² Even King Archidamus (2.72.3), in the negotiations prior to the investment of Plataea, acknowledges the validity of the Plataeans' fear that abandoning the alliance with Athens will expose them to Theban aggression. This Spartan audience, too, would have known all too well how little the Lacedaemonian alliance could have protected the Plataeans.

The Thebans again include a detail that is both unnecessary and detrimental to their argument when they attack the Plataeans' assertion (3.55.3) that at a certain point it was no longer honorable to betray the Athenians.

And you say that it was shameful to betray your benefactors. But it is more shameful and unjust to betray utterly all the Greeks to whom you swore, than the Athenians alone—the one trying to enslave Greece, the others to free it (3.63.3).

καὶ λέγετε ὡς αἰσχρὸν ἦν προδοῦναι τοὺς εὐεργέτας· πολὺ δέ γε αἰσχίον καὶ ἀδικώτερον τοὺς πάντας Ἑλλήνας καταπροδοῦναι, οἷς ξυνωμόσατε, ἢ Ἀθηναίους μόνους, τοὺς μὲν καταδουλομένους τὴν Ἑλλάδα, τοὺς δὲ ἐλευθεροῦντας.

The antithesis “the one (τοὺς μὲν) trying to enslave Greece, the others (τοὺς δέ) to liberate it” is intended to strengthen the claim that the Plataeans did something even more shameful in helping the Athenians. The μὲν-clause clearly refers to the Athenians, while all other Greeks (Plataeans, of course, excluded) apparently are members of the δέ-group. Clearly the Thebans view themselves as one of the liberators.⁴³ At 3.62.5 they profess to be “now enthusiastically joining in the liberation of the rest [of the Greeks].” Here, however, the grammatical referent of “the others trying to free Greece,” is “the Greeks to whom you swore.”⁴⁴ The Thebans make strange spokesmen indeed for a group from which they were excluded because of their collaboration. By referring to the oaths the Thebans once again draw attention to their ignominious role in the Persian wars.⁴⁵

The Thebans' use of paraphrase at 3.64.4 presents a different kind of problem. They state,

And as to those things wherein you were once useful [to the Greeks], as you claim, now you have shown that they are not your own, but what your nature always wanted has been tested and the truth brought out: you accompanied the Athenians down the path of injustice (3.64.4).

καὶ ἃ μὲν ποτε χρηστοὶ ἐγένεσθε, ὥς φατέ, οὐ προσήκοντα νῦν ἐπεδείξατε, ἃ δὲ ἡ φύσις αἰεὶ ἐβούλετο, ἐξηλέγχθη ἐς τὸ ἀληθές· μετὰ γὰρ Ἀθηναίων ἄδικον ὁδὸν ἰόντων ἐχωρήσατε.

⁴² See Gomme *ad* 3.63.2. See also Badian 1993: 120–121.

⁴³ See Macleod 1977: 240.

⁴⁴ See Gomme *ad* 3.63.3.

⁴⁵ Reference to the alliance with the Lacedaemonians against the Persians (3.63.2) also alienates the Thebans from the rest of the Greeks.

The initial words of the sentence, "And as to those things wherein you were once useful," inadvertently create the impression that the Plataeans were, in fact, good men—an impression all too easy to make since it was the accepted opinion concerning their contributions against the Persians. The postponement of "as you say," in other words, risks imparting credibility to the very assertion on which the Thebans intend to cast skepticism.⁴⁶

Other Thucydidean speakers are more deft in their use of ὥς φασι (or similar expressions) to suggest skepticism. In the first debate in the History, for example, the Corinthians argue, "And yet, if [the Corcyraeans] were, as they say, good men ..." (1.37.5). Here ὥσπερ φασὶν precedes the laudatory adjective ἀγαθοί and casts a prospective shadow on it.⁴⁷ Moreover, the Corinthians place their opponents' claim in a contrafactual condition⁴⁸ and use the particle καίτοι, which allows the speaker to accept a statement for purposes of argument without implying that he believes it.⁴⁹ Again at 1.37.2 and 1.39.1 the Corinthians are careful to begin their restatement of Corcyraean assertions with φασί or καὶ φασί. Contemporary rhetoric exhibits an equally adroit handling of word-order. Antiphon 5, for example, contains numerous passages where φασί or λέγουσι precedes an allegation.⁵⁰

It is perhaps no coincidence that the Thebans use this tactic effectively only when their complaint may be legitimate. Concerning the invasion of Plataea in 431 they assert that the Plataeans broke their agreements and murdered their Theban captives. "Nevertheless," the Thebans conclude, "you say that we are the ones who violated custom and you think that you yourselves ought not to pay a penalty in return" (ὅμως φατέ ἡμᾶς παρανομῆσαι καὶ αὐτοὶ ἀξιοῦτε μὴ ἀντιδοῦναι δίκην, 3.66.3).

⁴⁶ The postponement of "as you say" in ἐγένεσθε ἐπὶ τῇ τιμωρίᾳ, ὥς φατέ (3.63.2); ὑμεῖς μὲν γὰρ ἀδικοῦμενοι αὐτούς, ὥς φατέ, ἐπηγάγεσθε (3.63.4), and καὶ μὴ παλαιὰς ἀρετὰς, εἴ τις ἄρα καὶ ἐγένετο (3.67.2, echoing 3.56.5) is similarly problematic. Cf. the subtle word order at 1.33.3 where τὸν δὲ πόλεμον creates the impression that the war exists, i.e., is already underway; δίκαιον (1.32.1) creates the misleading impression that the Corcyraeans will base their appeal on what is just. Also cf. ὥστε οὐ δικαστὰς (3.46.4), where Diodorus postpones the modifier ἀκριβεῖς to create the illusion that he is not asking them to be "jurors," when, in fact, he is asking them not to be too strict as jurors.

⁴⁷ Compare also Athenagoras' words at 6.37.1, εἰ δὲ δὴ, ὥσπερ λέγονται, ἔλθοιεν, to his assertion in the same passage that Syracuse is better prepared than τῆς νῦν στρατίας, ὥς φασιν, ἐπιούσης. The reader knows that there truly was an Athenian force and that it was on its way to attack Sicily. The position of ὥς φασιν certainly strengthens the narrative irony. But one may still ask how it functions within Athenagoras' speech. Is it simply a rhetorical error? Could it be a slip suggesting that he knows more than he lets on?

⁴⁸ See also 1.86.1. The Thebans, on the other hand, seem to weaken their response at 3.65.2 by placing it in a hypothetical condition. Notice also the unexpected present tense at 3.65.2 (in what initially appears to be a contrafactual condition); cf. Bloomfield *ad loc.*

⁴⁹ See Denniston 1954: 556–557.

⁵⁰ See Antiphon 5.20, 21, 26, 28, 29, 52, 53. Three of the four quotations discussed by Meridor (1979–80) appear in conditions (Eur. *Andr.* 355–356; *Hec.* 1218–21; and *Trö.* 998), while the fourth (Eur. *Andr.* 32) begins λέγει γάρ.

When the Thebans challenge the arguments concerning their own behavior in the invasion of Plataea (3.65.1), they repeat almost verbatim the Plataeans' accusation that the attack was ἐν σπονδαῖς καὶ προσέτι ἱερομηνίᾳ (3.56.2). Once again their response does not adequately address the Plataeans' charge, since it makes no reference at all to the peace or the festival. By mentioning these details the Thebans appear to concede their opponents' point and may, in fact, admit their own impiety.⁵¹

Even when the Thebans do not paraphrase, but merely echo their opponents' arguments, they stumble rhetorically. They defend their attack on Plataea, for example, by arguing that they were invited into the city by a group with the best interests of Plataea at heart.

If your leading men, both by virtue of property and birth, willingly invited [us in], because they wanted to keep you from a foreign alliance and instead to restore the ancestral institutions of all Boeotians, what are we guilty of? Those who take the lead, after all, transgress rather than those who follow (3.65.2).

The argument echoes the Plataeans' assertion that ἡγεμόνες are responsible for what an alliance does (3.55.4). The intended effect of the Thebans' argument, however, is not entirely clear.⁵² If the speakers are trying to appropriate the Plataeans' reasoning in order to excuse their own actions and transfer responsibility to the Plataean oligarchs, they then implicitly admit that the Plataeans should not be held responsible for the actions of the Athenians.⁵³ If, on the other hand, the echo is intended to weaken the Plataeans' argument, the justification of the Thebans' invasion of Plataea is undercut as well. The Thebans come dangerously close here to condemning their Plataean sympathizers as a faction indistinguishable from the cabal they claim was responsible for handing their own city over to the Persians (3.62.3–4).⁵⁴ The speakers themselves may belatedly perceive the problem, for they suddenly turn the argument in a new direction by dismissing this hypothesis altogether and sketching a different picture of Plataean politics: "But neither are [the Plataean sympathizers guilty], as we judge, nor are we" (3.65.3).⁵⁵

⁵¹ Cf. 7.18.2. Gomme (*ad* 3.56.2) observes the lack of particulars in the narrative at 2.4.2 and adds that the Plataeans' claim that the Thebans attacked ἱερομηνίᾳ may to an extent be false, "though if it were so intended, its repetition by the Thebans in their answer is unexpected." Badian (1993: 112) points out that we do not know whether the Thebans, too, should have been celebrating the festival.

⁵² Cf. de Romilly 1956: 204, n. 1; she speaks of an "élégance rare" in the Thebans' echo (3.65.2) of the Plataeans' argument (3.55.4), but does not consider the purpose of the echo.

⁵³ The oligarchic view of 3.65 perhaps led Gomme to comment (*ad* 3.65.2) "a parody and *only a verbal parody* of 55.4" (emphasis added).

⁵⁴ As Macleod (1977: 239) observes, the political language of 3.62 is intended to appeal to the Spartans.

⁵⁵ Marchant observes another unexpected turn at 3.66.2; here the Thebans mention their soldiers killed in the fighting after the invasion of Plataea only to dismiss their deaths as being less grievous.

Furthermore, in portraying themselves as dutiful allies the Plataeans appeal to the value that the Spartans place on obedience.⁵⁶ This aspect of the argument is entirely missing from the Thebans' "parodic" response. When the Thebans speak of their men brought in by Plataean sympathizers, "leading" and "following" pertain to initiative and direction. They have nothing to do with military leadership and obedience, since the Thebans clearly had no legal or military obligations to the Plataean cabal.⁵⁷

THE PERORATION

At the close of their speech the Thebans finally turn back to their Spartan audience.

And do not relent in hearing of their acts of valor in the past if indeed there were any, these ought to protect men who are suffering wrong. But for those who act disgracefully, double punishment is due, because their wrong is contrary to what befits them (3.67.2).

Earlier (3.64.2 and 4) the Thebans implicitly conceded that the Plataeans had fought bravely against the Persians, but maintained that their current collaboration with the Athenians was proof that the earlier services did not reflect true Plataean character. Here they muddle two arguments, remarkably suggesting that the Plataeans may not, in fact, have performed those services, yet still deserve twice the punishment for having abandoned their native virtue.⁵⁸

Theban character is perhaps nowhere better depicted than in their reply to the Plataeans' final plea for mercy. In response the Thebans ask the Spartans to take pity not on the Plataeans, but on the Thebans.

Do not let them profit from lamentation and pity by crying out upon your fathers' graves and their own desolation. For in turn we point to our youth who suffered far more terribly at their hands and were put to death. Some of the fathers of these young men died at Coroneia bringing Boeotia to your side, while others, old men, left with desolate households, supplicate you far more justly to punish these men. More worthy of pity are men who suffer undeservedly, while those who suffer justly, as these do, are on the contrary objects of joy (3.67.2-3).

By mentioning the Spartan graves the Thebans merely remind their audience of the most eloquent passage in the Plataeans' speech.⁵⁹ Equally important, they ask the Spartan judges to care more about Theban losses at Coroneia than about the Spartans buried at Plataea.⁶⁰ Especially revealing is the image of old Theban men

⁵⁶ E.g. Hdt. 7.104; Xen. *Lac.* 2.2, 8.1; Plut. *Mor.* 215 d, 218 c, 221 e.

⁵⁷ The Theban invaders do not "follow" the sympathizers' advice to kill their opponents (2.2.4).

⁵⁸ See Macleod 1977: 241.

⁵⁹ Hornblower (*ad* 3.58.5) speaks of their conjuring the dead.

⁶⁰ See Macleod 1977: 241. Classen-Steup 1892 and Gomme (1956: *ad* 3.67.3) call the Thebans' boast that they brought Boeotia to the Lacedaemonians' side "flattering." They should say flattering to the speakers, for this feat was accomplished without any help from the Spartans. Similarly at 3.62.5

supplicating the Spartans.⁶¹ Supplication here does not have the customary sense of an appeal for mercy and protection; it is a call for vengeance. Commenting on the expression of malignant joy (ἐπίχαρτοι) with which the passage ends, Gomme remarks (*ad* 3.67.4) that “in this last chapter, the Thebans become more and more envious . . . malevolent . . . and hateful.”

When they turn a final time to their invasion of Plataea, the Thebans are again carried away by the force of their hatred.

They acted contrary to custom, although they had suffered nothing prior at our hands, and based their judgments on hatred rather than justice, and do not now pay the commensurate penalty. For they will suffer what is customary, not, as they assert,⁶² after they raised their hands in surrender from battle, but after they had come to terms and handed themselves over for trial. Preserve then, Lacedaemonians, the law of the Greeks transgressed by them (3.67.5–6).

The Thebans would like their audience to think that the commensurate penalty (τὴν ἴσιν τιμωρίαν) would be even more severe than what the Plataeans are about to suffer. The expression, however, is more likely to suggest that the proposed punishment is excessive: it would be difficult to think of a penalty more severe than summary execution.⁶³ By this point in their speech it is surely clear that the Thebans’ own judgments are “based on hatred rather than justice.”

Furthermore, when the Thebans speak of law and custom their arguments are as specious as the Plataeans’ appeal to the νόμος of self-defense to disguise their own brutality. The Thebans cannot disguise the illogic of first contending that the Plataeans’ treatment of Theban prisoners transgressed Greek law (3.66.2) and then asking the Spartans to preserve this same law by transgressing it in return (3.67.6).⁶⁴ Mention of the terms of surrender recalls the Plataeans’ legitimate complaint that they handed themselves over to the Lacedaemonians not thinking they would undergo such a trial, but one that was νομιμωτέραν (3.53.1). The

the Thebans take the credit for Coroneia (ἡλευθερώσαμεν), while they help themselves to a share of the Spartan claim to be liberators of Hellas (ξυνελευθεροῦμεν); see Classen–Steup *ad loc.* At 3.63.4 the liberators seem to be not the Lacedaemonians, but (surprisingly) all Greeks; see Classen–Steup *ad loc.* Cf. 3.59.4 where the Plataeans tactfully speak of the Spartans as liberators; cf. also 1.69.1. Herodotus (7.220) may suggest that the Spartans did not like to share their glory. On the Thebans’ independent claim to victory at the end of the war see Demand 1982: 44.

⁶¹The verb ἰκετεύειν does not always have a technical sense, but can mean simply “beg” or “entreat.” The Plataeans, however, clearly intend it to have a religious force when they use it in reference to the Spartan graves (3.59.2); this force carries over to the Theban paraphrase and response.

⁶²Gomme (*ad loc.*) points out another flaw: “But not only ‘as they assert,’ but ‘as *our* soldiers suffered whom they executed,’ 66.2; and it is a little curious that this is not expressed here, for it is this difference that makes the Plataean punishment οὐκ ἴση.”

⁶³See Bloomfield *ad loc.* The Plataeans (3.53.2) fear that the contest is περὶ τῶν δεινोटάτων; see also δεινότητα (3.59.1) and δεινότατα (3.59.2). On Spartan decisions involving capital offenses among themselves see Plut. *Mor.* 217b.

⁶⁴Cf. Bloomfield *ad loc.*

allusion was likely to remind the Spartans, as it does the reader, that no Plataean was to be punished *παρὰ δίκην*.

At the very close of their speech the Thebans once again try to capitalize on Spartan distrust of rhetoric. They warn their audience that arguments dressed in fine words cloak wrongdoing (3.67.6). If, however, a cloak of words implies the concealment of base deeds, then the Thebans' own lengthy speech in which they attempt to mitigate their well-earned reputation for *κακία* should focus suspicion directly on themselves.

The Theban speech is ironic, but in a different sense than is often assumed. Commentators have tended to explain what the Thebans would like their Spartan audience to understand. Thucydides, however, has composed a speech that allows his audience, the readers of the History, to derive a different picture of Theban character than the speakers intend.⁶⁵

The speech is also ironic in a larger sense. The Thebans are unaware of the irrelevance of their arguments, which focus (as do those of the Plataeans) on past actions, to the decision of the Spartan judges.⁶⁶ In part, Thucydides provides this ironic perspective in the prologue to the debate, where he reveals the underlying motive for the sham trial. The Spartans, he says, wanted to procure the capitulation of Plataea without force so that in case of peace with Athens they could retain it as having "willingly" handed itself over (3.52.2). Such a motive precludes considerations of justice. When the Thebans ask to respond to the Plataeans' speech, they reveal their ignorance of this factor and therefore of the degree to which the fate of the Plataeans has already been decided. Even the Plataeans themselves, who perceive the bias of their judges (3.53.2) and the overall difficulty of their task (3.53.4), show complete lack of suspicion of the Spartans' hidden motive when they argue that they should at least be allowed to return to their condition prior to the surrender (3.59.3).

The epilogue to the trial (3.68.1–5) confirms the expectation that both speeches can have little effect on the judges. Thucydides says that the Lacedaemonians decided that their question would be right because they believed, or so they claimed,⁶⁷ that the Plataeans' rejection of their earlier offer relieved them of obligations to the treaty. He adds his own interpretation: "The Lacedaemonians turned away from the Plataeans primarily for the sake of the Thebans, because they thought that they were useful for the war just then proceeding" (3.68.4).⁶⁸ The restriction "just then" (*ἄρτι τότε*) suggests that the Spartans may have been aware of Theban character and thus may have suspected that in the future, as

⁶⁵ See Connor 1984: 133, n. 63.

⁶⁶ On irony of viewpoint (as opposed to rhetorical irony) in Thucydides see Connor 1984: 36, n. 36.

⁶⁷ On *δῆθεν* here see Denniston 1954: 265. The historical problems with 3.68.1 do not affect my argument; on these problems see Gomme *ad loc.* and Badian 1993: 113–114.

⁶⁸ The Thebans' reference to "leaders, as you are now" (3.67.7) may reveal their hegemonic ambition by suggesting that the Spartans will not always retain their power.

in the past, they would be less than dependable allies. At this point in the war, however, the Spartans' overriding concern is with their immediate advantage. It is for this reason that the Thebans' inept speech fails to harm their cause.

The condemnation of the Plataeans for the benefit of Thebes not only emphasizes the futility of the Plataeans' position, but also demonstrates the irrelevance of the past to Spartan policy. In Book 5 the Athenians will exclude from their debate with the Melians all arguments concerning the future (5.87).⁶⁹ In the course of the History the exigencies of war increasingly restrict the factors that are germane to political discourse. The Plataean debate marks one stage in this progression.

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⁶⁹ On the Plataean debate as a kind of "preview of the Melian Conference" see Parry 1981: 190.

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