Political Shorthand: Thucydides' Metaphorical Use of 'Tyranny'

Tyranny in archaic and classical Greece is a well-known and well-documented occurrence, present in genres ranging from Herodotus' *Histories* to the *epinikia* of Pindar. Given the wide variety of sources in which such a concept can appear, there is an inherent difficulty in squaring any solid definition. Nevertheless, it is necessary to better understand the nature of the social and historical contexts of what evidence we do have from the period, and Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* is a natural candidate for such an endeavor. Due to the nature of Athenian expansionism and the Spartan reaction to said expansion, tyranny is one of many themes to dominate Thucydides' text. His analysis of the Peloponnesian War, whether considered more history or political science, is invaluable to us for understanding both the war and the events that influenced so many other canonical texts, like Aristophanes' comedies or the work of Euripides (Smith, 2009). Thus understanding Thucydides' use of tyranny as a term is paramount to understanding both his *History* and the part of society which he has illustrated.

Given its importance, there is no surprise that many have already made enriching arguments to outline the nature of empire and tyranny within the *History,* looking not only at 'τυραννίς' itself but its various related words too, like 'τύραννος'. Their results suggest that

Athens, with an abundance of daring, had exerted its influence too far (Forde, 1986), and Sparta reacted with force. At the same time, due to the high external pressures, any internal jockeying for power in Athens was immediately feared to be a move for individual control of the *polis* (Tritle, 2006; Meyer, 2008), which fear is present even in Athenian opponents like Syracuse (Mader, 2013). Given such a high-stakes climate, Athens and its influence ultimately begin to crumble once Alcibiades is exiled and Athens overextends into Syracuse. Surrounding this

narrative is the ever-present delineation of tyranny, both from the characters and Thucydides himself, sometimes implicitly but many times by explicit speech or action.

The aim of this paper is to show how Thucydides specifically uses the term 'τυραννίς' in the course of his narrative, finding that there are primarily two distinct uses: in a small number of important speeches and in the analysis of events prior to the Peloponnesian War. The focus will rest on three key instances: Pericles' final speech (2.60-64), Cleon's Mytilenian speech (3.37-40), and the story of Harmodius and Aristogeiton (6.53-59). From this, I will argue that Thucydides uses the term in this way to express that 'τυραννίς' is a shorthand used by the characters of the *History,* and by extension late-fifth century Greeks, to tap into a larger discussion of political power and fear. Thus, in the same way that religion can be a frame of mind for the figures of the *History* (Furley, 2006), so can the concept of tyranny, especially given the close association between piety and tyrants, evidenced in many of their legitimization projects (Palmer, 2001). This reflects a metaphorical use of the term 'τυραννίς', where its accusation might not necessarily be accurate, but it is nevertheless clearly understood by its audience; a use which seems to have been understood by at least Aristophanes (*Wasps* 487-92). Likewise, this metaphorical use reflects the mental framework of the characters to better explain their decisions. They might speak or act in a certain way, within the larger framework of tyranny, but whether or not a genuine tyranny was at play is outside consideration. The result, while not defining the term per se, gives weight to its highly charged status and provides further evidence for larger discussions of fear and power with the Greek world.

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