

## Engendering Justice in a Gendered World: the case of Thucydides' Athenians

While masculinity's role in shaping political culture has long been recognized by sociologists and political scientists, masculinity's role in ancient Greece, and, in particular, its function in Thucydides' history, remains relatively unexplored. As sociologists have warned, the conflation of women and gender has led to analyses that overlook how politics is shaped by masculinity and men's interests (Nagel 1998), and more recently—and perhaps most importantly—by competition between a plurality of masculinities (Wendt and Anderson 2015). While Wohl (2002) has analyzed the overlapping matrices of sexuality and politics, and Balot (2014) has assessed the function of courage, both in the context of fifth-century Athens, I explore how competing masculinities produce two conceptualizations of justice, one informed by a more moderate masculinity, the other by an unconstrained hypermasculinity in Thucydides' history.

The goals of this paper are threefold. First, I outline the case for a Thucydidean theory of masculinity in the Corcyra episode (3.82.4). According to Bassi, Thucydides' description of *stasis* suggests masculinity's precarity (2003). Under stable conditions, masculinity was restrained and moderate. As *stasis* swept through cities and the norms that stabilized the community were undermined, a reckless masculinity competed with a restrained, pre-*stasis* form. Competing narratives of what constituted the interests of the city defined political parties. In this context, appealing to a man's sense of self as citizen man became a rhetorically useful strategy for a speaker seeking support, as masculinity's zero-sum dynamic (Winkler 1990) ensured that the speaker with the most patriotic and bold plan would win, thereby exacerbating conflict.

Second, I explore the relationship between Thucydides' theory of masculinity and the Athenians' duelling conceptualizations of justice. At the meeting in Sparta before the outbreak of war (1.76.3) and in the Melian Dialogue (5.89) the Athenians argue that justice is only relevant

when there is an equality of power. The question of justice's compatibility with empire becomes the central debate in discussions concerning the fate of Mytilene. Here I trace the similarities between the speeches of the Mytilenean Debate and Thucydides' theory of masculinity at 3.82.4. I suggest that Diodotus' rhetoric is shaped by more restrained masculinity; Cleon's, by hypermasculinity. While Diodotus' speech speaks to those whose masculinity is restrained, who value intelligence and deliberation, all qualities associated with a pre-*stasis* masculinity, Cleon's encourages rash haste and thoughtlessness, symptoms of a destabilized masculinity. Cleon's hypermasculinity can be witnessed not only in the qualities he privileges, but in his gross manipulation of justice. Cleon's opponent, Diodotus, rejects the language of justice, noting that the conflict cannot be settled in a court of law, echoing the Athenian ambassadors in Book One and in the Melian Dialogue. Restrained men exercise reason, understanding that empire precluded considerations of justice.

Cleon, however, fully embraces the language and principles of justice, arguing that the harshest punishment is the just course: the Mytileneans' punishment becomes evidence of their injustice, and in a rather Thrasymachean rhetorical turn, evidence of the Athenians' rightness, since justice serves the interests of the stronger. Given the zero-sum stakes of Cleon's understanding of Athenian *arche* to even consider justice would be to admit defeat. While Cleon's argument feels rhetorically more aggressive, the language of justice establishes Athens and Mytilene as equals, thereby weakening Cleon's argument despite his rather aggressive assertions to the contrary. Cleon's manipulation of justice signals the destabilization of culturally constructed language, a symptom of both *stasis* and hypermasculinity.

Lastly, I consider the implications of a gendered treatment of justice in Thucydides' text. If the international arena is one which exists as a Hobbesian state of nature, then in international

law there is no true justice or injustice; law and justice belong to the realm of civil society (Low 2007). The dynamics of masculinity expose Diodotus' and the Athenians' "realist" rejection of moral language as more moderately masculine, while Cleon's position—that justice serves the interests of the stronger—hypermasculine. A gendered reading of justice in Thucydides' text reveals the essential role played by masculine culture not only in theories concerning justice but in the construction of nature itself in realist thought.

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