Ancient Studies History -- Unit 3 -- Thucydides

Unit 3: Thucydides on Democracy, Empire, Justice, Power, and Human Nature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F 10/14</td>
<td>Athens &amp; Sparta 77-80</td>
<td>Pericles, Delian League, &amp; Athenian Golden Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Peloponnesian War &amp; Thucydides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M 10/17</td>
<td>Thucydides 39-46</td>
<td>Pericles’ Funeral Oration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T 10/18</td>
<td>Thucydides 52-58</td>
<td>Pericles’ Last Speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Thucydides’ Judgment of Pericles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W* 10/19</td>
<td>Thucydides 66-76</td>
<td>Mytilenean Debate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th* 10/20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S 10/22</td>
<td>Thucydides 89-95</td>
<td>Civil War in Corcyra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M 10/24</td>
<td>Thucydides 102-109</td>
<td>Melian Dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T 10/25</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Work on Papers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W* 10/26</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>PAPERS DUE AT END OF CLASS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th* 10/27</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How to Use this Guide:

Thucydides is a sophisticated and insightful thinker; his analysis of the conflict between Athens and Sparta in the Peloponnesian War offers many important and timeless observations about democracy, empire, justice, power, and human nature. He also is a complex and challenging writer; he pushes readers to think about each and every word.

Few ninth grade students confront Thucydides, but Ancient Studies scholars will grapple with his ideas. Here is our approach: We will use this Guide to identify the key passages from the most significant sections of Thucydides’ History of the Peloponnesian War. All students will read the Introduction and the Passages presented here; ambitious students will then read those passages in context in Paul Woodruff’s translation of Thucydides: On Justice, Power and Human Nature.

There is space under each passage to write some brief notes. As you reflect on each idea, write down the following:

- What is the main focus of this passage? Democracy – Empire – Justice – Power – Human Nature
- How does Thucydides portray Athens in this passage? Favorably – Unfavorably
- What is your own reaction to Thucydides’ observation, based on your own life experience at Asheville School or in the United States? Agree – Disagree

After you read through all the passages for each assignment, write down a list of the five (5) passages that you most want to discuss in class. Select those passages that are most interesting or provocative, whether you agree with Thucydides or not. Your selections will shape out “seminar” discussions in class.

Paper Topic:

Unlike the previous units, you will have the opportunity and responsibility to design your own essay topic. As a general guideline, consider what Thucydides tells us about: Democracy, Empire, Justice, Power, and/or Human Nature.
Ancient Studies History -- Unit 3 -- Thucydides

_Athens & Sparta: Pericles, Thucydides, and the Peloponnesian War (A&S 77-80)_ Due S 10/14

**Pfingsten - Pericles, the Delian League, and the Athenian Golden Age**

Delian League

Greek revolutions against Persia

Political power – connection to military usefulness

Tribute paid by League members to Athenian Empire

Logic of Athenian imperialism

Transfer of the Delian Treasury to Athens

Enrichment of the Athenian state

Period of radical democracy

Rebellions within the Delian League

Peloponnesian War

Pericles and Democracy

**Pfingsten - The Peloponnesian War and Thucydides**

Causes of the War

Athens’ Maritime Empire & Spartan concerns about Athens

Helot revolt in 465 & Spartan rejection of Athenian aid

Peloponnesian War, 431

Inevitability of conflict

Athens’ Long Walls

Flaws in Pericles’ planning & Vacillations in Athenian strategy

Alcibiades & Sicilian campaign

Athenian blunders

Battle of Arginusae, 406 & Execution of Athenian generals

Surrender of Athens & The Thirty Tyrants

Re-establishment of democracy

Summary of conflict
The Situation: The historian Thucydides recreates the speech Pericles gave in 430 BCE honoring the Athenians who died in battle during the first year of the war against Sparta, a war that he did more to bring about than any other individual. Pericles used the occasion to highlight the differences in culture and ideals between Athens and Sparta and to remind his fellow Athenians of the glories of their city and the nobility of their cause. This is Pericles’ classic statement of what made Athens great during its Golden Age. However, as plague beset Athens the next year, and as the Peloponnesian War devastated the Greek world for more than two decades, the contrast between Athenian ideals and Athenian reality grew ever sharper.

As you read, consider two potential parallels:

- The ways the United States views itself, relative to other nations
- The way Asheville School views itself, relative to other schools

Also, consider how either a Spartan or a Greek held subject to Athens might respond to Pericles’ claims

Key Passages:

1) I shall begin by speaking of our ancestors: They, by their courage and their virtues, have handed Athens on to us, a free country. They certainly deserve our praise.

   a) Even more so do our fathers deserve it. For to the inheritance they had received they added all the empire we have now, and it was not without blood and toil they handed it down to us of the present generation.

   b) And then we ourselves, assembled here today, who are mostly in the prime of life, have, in most directions, added to the power of our empire and have organized the State in such a way that it is perfectly well able to look after itself both in peace and in war. [2.36] (40)

2) Let me say that our system of government does not copy the institutions of our neighbors. It is more the case of our being a model to others, than of our imitating anyone else.

   a) Our constitution is called a democracy because power is in the hands not of a minority, but of the whole people.

   b) When it is a question of settling private disputes, everyone is equal before the law

   c) When it is a question of putting one person before another in positions of public responsibility, what counts is not membership of a particular class, but the actual ability which the man possesses

   d) No one, so long as he has it in him to be of service to the state, is kept in political obscurity because of poverty [2.37] (40)

3) And, just as our political life is free and open, so is our day-to-day life in our relations with each other

   a) We are free and tolerant in our private lives, but in public affairs we keep to the laws

   b) We give our obedience to those whom we put in positions of authority

   c) We obey the laws themselves, especially those which are for the protection of the oppressed [2.37] (40-41)
4) When our work is over, we are in a position to enjoy all kinds of recreation for our spirits
   a) In our own homes we find a beauty and good taste which delight us every day and which drive
      away our cares
   b) Then the greatness of our city brings it about that all the good things from all over the world flow
      into us [2.38] (40-41)

5) Then there is a great difference between us and our opponents, in our attitudes towards military security:
   a) Our city is free and open to the world, and we have no periodical deportations in order to prevent
      people from observing or finding out secrets which might be of military advantage to the enemy
   b) We rely not on secret weapons, but on our own real courage and loyalty [2.39] (41)

6) There is a difference too in our educational systems:
   a) The Spartans from their earliest boyhood, submit to the most laborious training in courage
   b) We pass our lives without all these restrictions, and yet are just as ready to face the same dangers
      are they are
   c) We do not have to spend our time practicing to meet sufferings which are still in the future
   d) And when they are actually upon us, we show ourselves just as brave as these others [2.39] (42)

7) There are other points on which our city deserves to be admired:
   a) Our love of what is beautiful does not lead to extravagance
   b) Our love of things of the mind does not make us soft
   c) We regard wealth as something to be properly used, rather than as something to boast about
   d) As for poverty, no one need be ashamed to admit it; the real shame is in not taking practical
      measures to escape from it
   e) Each individual is interested not only in his own affairs but in the affairs of the state as well
   f) We do not say that a man who takes no interest in politics is a man who minds his own business;
      we say that he has no business here at all
   g) [We believe that] the worst thing is to rush into action before the consequences have been properly
      debated
   h) We are capable at the same time of taking risks and estimating them beforehand; others are brave
      out of ignorance [2.40] (42-43)

8) Again, in questions of general good feeling there is a great contrast between us and most other people:
   a) We make friends by doing good to others, not by receiving good from them
b) When we do kindnesses to others, we do not do them out of any calculation of profit or loss; we do them without afterthought, relying on our free liberality [2.40] (43)

9) Taking everything together: I declare that our city is an education to Greece:
   a) And I declare that in my opinion each single one of our citizens, in all the manifold aspects of life, is able to show himself the rightful lord and master of his own person, and to do this, moreover, with exceptional grace and exceptional versatility
   b) No subject can complain of being governed by a people unfit for their responsibilities
   c) Mighty indeed are the marks and monuments of our empire which we have left
   d) Future ages will wonder at us, as the present age wonders at us now
   e) Our adventurous spirit has forced an entry into every sea and into every land
   f) Everywhere we have left behind us the everlasting memorials of good done to our friends or suffering inflicted on our enemies [2.41] (43)

10) What I would prefer is that you should fix your eyes every day on the greatness of Athens as she really is, and should fall in love with her.
   a) When you realize her greatness, then reflect that what made her great was men with a spirit of adventure, men who knew their duty, men who were afraid to fall below a certain standard
   b) It is for you to try to be like them. Make up your minds that happiness depends on being free, and freedom depends on being courageous. Let there be no relaxation in face of the perils of war [2.43] (44-45)

11) One’s sense of honor is the only thing that does not grow old, and the last pleasure, when one is worn out with age, is not … making money, but having the respect of one’s fellow men [2.44] (45)

12) The greatest glory of a woman is to be least talked about by men, whether they are praising you or criticizing you [2.45] (46)
Thucydides -- Pericles’ Last Speech & Thucydides’ Judgment of Pericles (52-58)  Due: T 10/18

Thucydides recreates Pericles’ speech in 429 BC after the Athenian people started to turn against the war and against Pericles’ decision to retreat behind the walls and fight at sea. Two military defeats on land and the outbreak of plague in the city have caused the Athenians to vote Pericles out of office. Pericles tries to win the people back and to renew enthusiasm for the war:

- He insists on protecting the interests of the city rather than of any individual.
- He asserts that he can see what ought to be done, that he loves the city, and that he is above the influence of money.
- He offers the Athenians the choice between submission with slavery or danger with the hope of survival. He calls on Athenians to endure hardship without complaint or discouragement.
- He calls the Athenian navy the basis of Athenian empire.
- He notes the superiority and confidence that results from control of the sea.
- He highlights the importance of maintaining the empire and the danger in loosening the tyranny over others.
- He laments the unpredictability of the plague, but calls on the Athenians to show the same toughness as of old.
- He urges the Athenians to bear the burden of envy that accompanies a great and glorious empire.

Pericles convinces the Athenians to continue the war, but dies a horrible death from plague months later.

Passages -- Pericles’ Last Speech:

1) “I expected you to get angry with me, and I can see why it has happened. I have called this assembly to remind you of certain points and to rebuke you for your misplaced anger at me and for your giving in too easily to misfortune.” [2.60] (52)

2) “I believe that if the city is sound as a whole, it does more good to its private citizens than if it benefits them as individuals while faltering as a collective unit.” [2.60] (52)

3) “But if (as is the case with us) a people are compelled either to submit directly to the rule of their neighbors, or else to take on great dangers in order to survive, a man who runs away from danger is more to be blamed than one who stands up to it. [2.61] (53)

4) “For my part, I am the man I was. I have not shifted ground. It is you who are changing; you were persuaded to fight when you were still unharmed, but now that times are bad, you are changing your minds; and to your weak judgment, my position does not seem sound. [2.61] (53)

5) “Still, you live in a great city and have been brought up with a way of life that matches its greatness; so you should be willing to stand up to the greatest disasters rather than eclipse your reputation… So set aside the grief you feel for your individual losses, and take up instead the cause of the common safety.” [2.61] (53)

6) “Keep in mind too that if we hold fast to our liberty and preserve it we will easily recover our land and houses; but people who submit to foreign domination, will start to lose what they already had… What you should remember is that it is more shameful to lose what you have than to fail in an attempt to get more.” [2.62] (54)

7) “You have reason besides to support the dignity our city derives from her empire, in which you all take pride; you should not decline the trouble, unless you cease to pursue the honor, of empire. And do not
think that the only thing we are fighting for is our freedom from being subjugated; you are in danger of losing the empire, and if you do, the anger of the people you have ruled will raise other dangers.” [2.63] (54-55)

8) “You see, your empire is really like a tyranny—though it may have been thought unjust to seize, it is now unsafe to surrender.” [2.63] (55)

9) “After all, it was you who decided in favor of this war along with me; so don’t be angry at me. What the enemy [the Spartans] did when they invaded was just what was to be expected when we refused to submit to them; and this plague has struck contrary to all expectations—it is the only thing, of all that has happened, that has defied our hopes.” [2.61] (55)

10) “What heaven sends we must bear with a sense of necessity, what the enemy does to us we must bear with courage—for that is the custom in our city; that is how it used to be, and that custom should not end with you.” [2.64] (55)

11) “Keep this in mind: our city is famous everywhere for its greatness in not yielding to adversity and in accepting so many casualties and so much trouble in war; besides, she has possessed great powr till now, which will be remembered for ever by those who come after us.” [2.64] (55)

12) “To be hated and to cause pain is, at present, the reality for anyone who takes on the rule of others, and anyone who makes himself hated for matters of great consequence has made the right decision; for hatred does not last long, but the momentary brilliance of great actions lives on as a glory that will be remembered forever.” [2.64] (55-56)

13) “And for you, keep your minds on the fine future you know will be yours, and on the shame you must avoid at this moment. Be full of zeal on both counts. Send no more heralds to the Lacedaemonians, and do not let them know how heavy your troubles are at present. The most powerful cities and individuals are the ones that are least sensitive in their minds to calamity and the firmest in their actions to resist it.” [2.64] (56)

**Passages – Thucydides’ Judgment of Pericles**

14) “As individuals, however, they were upset by what had happened to them—the people were upset because they had been deprived of the little they had, and the powerful because they had lost their fine possessions in the country. Most all, however, it was because they had war instead of peace. [2.65] (56)

15) “As a group, they did not give up their anger against him until they had punished him with a fine. Not long after, however, as is common with a mob, they made him general again and turned all public affairs over to him, for their pain over their private domestic losses was dulled now, and they thought he was the best man to serve the needs of the city as a whole.” [2.65] (56)

16) “As long as he was at the head of the city in time of peace, he governed it with moderation and guarded it securely; and it was greatest under him.” [2.65] (56)
17) “And after his death his foresight about the war was even better recognized, for he told them that if they would be quiet and take care of their navy, and not seek to expand the empire during the war or endanger the city itself, they should then have the upper hand.” [2.65] (57)

18) “But they did the opposite on all points, and in other things that seemed not to concern the war they managed the state for their private ambition and private gain, to the detriment of themselves and their allies.” [2.65] (57)

19) “The reason for Pericles’s success was this: he was powerful because of his prestige and his intelligence, and also because he was known to be highly incorruptible.” [2.65] (57)

20) “He would not humor the people in his speeches so as to get power by improper means, but because of their esteem for him he could risk their anger by opposing them.” [2.65] (57)

21) “Athens was in name a democracy, but in fact it was a government by its first man. But because those who came after were more equal among themselves, with everyone aiming to be chief, they gave up taking care of the commonwealth in order to please the people.” [2.65] (57)

22) “Since Athens was a great imperial city, these mistakes led to many others, such as the voyage against Sicily… They weakened the strength of their army through private quarrels about popular leadership, and they troubled the state at home with discord for the first time. [2.65] (57)

23) “They had brought about their own downfall through private quarrels.” [2.65] (58)

**Consider:**

What new challenge does Pericles face in giving this speech?

How does Pericles’ description of the Athenian empire differ in this speech from his Funeral Oration?

Are there any specific points on which Pericles contradicts his claims in the Funeral Oration?

How do other cities now appear to view Athens?

And how do many Athenians now appear to view themselves? And how do they now view Pericles?

How much responsibility does Pericles take for the current state of affairs?

What does he want Athenians to do in these new circumstances?

Do you think Pericles’ speech is effective?
Thucydides recreates the debate in Athens in 427 BC over how to deal with rebellious former allies in Mytilene: should Athens kill and enslave the rebels, or pardon them? The debate raises questions of morality versus expediency in foreign policy. Can a democracy rule an empire? Are the people wise and tough enough to do what needs to be done? Or should a democracy even try to run an empire? Does running an empire cause a democracy to lose its way?

The initial decision in the Assembly was to kill all the Mytilenean men and to enslave the women and children. But there was a sudden change in feeling and renewal of debate the next day as the Athenian people considered reversing the order for execution.

The speech of **Cleon** defends harsh punishment of the rebels by expressing:
- his concern that a democracy is incapable of ruling others;
- the danger that results from compassion and weakness;
- the importance of following the fixed laws;
- the danger in taking the advice of overly clever or corrupt speakers;
- the calculated aggression of Mytilene against Athens;
- that it is human nature to despise those who treat them well;
- that it is human natures is look up to those who make no concessions;
- that lenience will provoke future aggression;
- that Athens must either rule strictly or give up the empire;
- that Athenian self-interest demands harsh punishment.

The speech of **Diodotus** urges leniency and calling off the execution by expressing:
- the danger in decisions made in haste and anger;
- the importance of free and open debate;
- that the question now is not the guilt of Mytilene but the self-interest of Athens;
- that the death penalty is not in fact a deterrent;
- that the condition of rebels becomes more desperate when denied the possibility of repentance;
- that Athens suffers when opponents have no choice but to fight to the death;
- the need to cultivate democratic allies in all Athenian subject states.

Diodotus’ argument for pardoning many Mytileneans won in a close vote in the Assembly. The Athenians sent triremes out in a race to announce the new decision before the executions began. The news of reprieve reached Mytilene just moments before the executions began. The new orders did not execute all of the men, but rather “only” 1,000 of them. Mytilene became a subject state of Athens.

**Passages:**

**Cleon’s Arguments for Harsh Punishment**

1) **CLEON:** “For my part, I have often seen that a democracy is not capable of ruling an empire, and I see it most clearly now, in your change of heart concerning the Mytileneans.” [3.37] (67)

2) **CLEON:** “When you relent out of compassion, your softness puts you in danger and does not win you the affection of your allies; and you do not see that your empire is a tyranny, and that you have unwilling subjects who are continually plotting against you.” [3.37] (67)

3) **CLEON:** “[Your subjects] obey you not because of any good you might do them, and not because of any good will they might have, but only because you exceed them in power.” [3.37] (67)
4) CLEON: “But it will be the worst mischief of all if none of our decisions stand firm, and if we never realize that a city with inferior laws is better if they are never relaxed than a city with good laws that have no force.” [3.37] (67)

5) CLEON: “You consider proposals for the future on the basis of fine speeches, as if what they proposed were actually possible; and as for action in the past, you think that what was done right in front of your eyes is less certain than what you have heard in the speeches of clever fault-finders.” [3.38] (68)

6) CLEON: “For my part, I can forgive those cities that rebelled because they could not bear being ruled by us, or because they were compelled to do so by the enemy… [But the Mytileneans] should not have done this! What is it but a conspiracy or a betrayal? It is not a rebellion. For a rebellion can only come from people who have been violently oppressed, whereas these people have joined our bitterest enemies to destroy us!” [3.39] (69)

7) CLEON: For generally it is human nature to with contempt on those who serve your interests, and to admire those who never give in to you.” [3.39] (69)

8) CLEON: “[The Mytileneans] conspired against us in full knowledge and did us an injury of their own will, while only involuntary wrongs may be pardoned.” [3.40] (70)

9) CLEON: “You ought not to make the mistake of giving in to the three things that are most damaging to an empire: pity, delight in speeches, and a sense of fairness.” [3.40] (70)

10) CLEON: “It may be right to show pity to those who are like-minded, but not to those who will never have pity on us and who must necessarily be our enemies.” [3.40] (70)

11) CLEON: “And as for fairness, we should only show that towards people who will be our friends in the future, and not towards those who will still be as they are now: our enemies.” [3.40] (70)

12) CLEON: “In sum I say only this: if you follow my advice, you will do justice to the Mytileneans and promote you own interest at the same time.” [3.40] (70)

13) CLEON: But if you see the matter differently, you will not win their favor; instead you will be condemning yourselves: if they were right to rebel, you ought not to have been their rulers” [3.40] (70)

14) CLEON: “But then suppose that your empire is not justified: if you resolve to hold it anyway, then you must give these people an unreasonable punishment for the benefit of the empire, or else stop having an empire so that you can give charity without taking any risks.” [3.40] (70)

15) CLEON: “Give these people the punishment they deserve, and set up a clear example for our other allies, to show that the penalty for rebellion is death. Once they know this, you will less often have occasion to neglect your enemies and fight against your own allies.” [3.40] (71)
Diodotus’ Arguments for Leniency

16) Diodotus: “Nothing is more contrary to good judgment than haste and anger. Of these, haste is usually thoughtless, while anger is ill-informed and narrow-minded.” [3.42] (71)

17) Diodotus: “Our dispute, if we are sensible, will concern not their injustice to us, but our judgment as to what is best for us.” [3.44] (72)

18) Diodotus: “In my opinion, what we are discussing concerns the future more than the present. And as for Cleon’s point that the death penalty will be to our advantage in the future, by keeping the others from rebelling—I maintain exactly the opposite view.” [3.44] (72)

19) Diodotus: “Both men and cities have it by nature to do wrong, and there is no law that will prevent that. People have gone through all possible penalties…and still the laws are violated.” [3.45] (73)

20) Diodotus: “Either some greater terror than death must be found, therefore, or else punishment will not deter crime.” [3.45] (73)

21) Diodotus: “Poverty compels the poor to be daring, while the powerful are led by pride and arrogance into taking more than their share. Each human condition is dominated by some great and incurable passion that impels people to danger.” [3.45] (73)

22) Diodotus: “Hope and passionate desire dominate every situation, with desire as the leader and hope as the companion, desire thinking out a plan, and hope promising a wealth of good fortune, these two cause the greatest mischief, and because they are invisible, they are more dangerous than the evils we see. [3.45] (73)

23) Diodotus: “In a word it is an impossible thing—you would have to be simple-minded to believe that people can be deterred by the law or by anything else that is frightening, from doing what human nature is earnestly bent on doing.” [3.45] (73)

24) Diodotus: “We should plan to keep our subjects in check by the rigor of laws, but by watching their actions closely… What we ought to do in the case of a city of free men is not to impose extreme penalties after they rebel, but to be extremely watchful before they rebel, and to take care that the idea of rebellion never crosses their minds.” [3.46] (74)

25) Diodotus: “Consider what a mistake you will be making on this score if you follow Cleon’s advice… If you destroy the democrats at Mytilene, who had no part in the rebellion…you will commit an injustice by killing those who have done you good service, and you will accomplish what oligarchs everywhere most want.” [3.47] (74)

26) Diodotus: “And even if the democrats are guilty, we should pretend that they were not, so that the only party still allied with us will not become our enemy. And in order to keep our empire intact, I think it is much more advantageous for us to put up with an injustice willingly, than for us justly to destroy people we ought not to destroy.” [3.47] (74)
Mytilenean Debate: The Conclusion:

In a narrow vote, the Athenian assembly supported the proposal of Diodotus to spare the lives of the innocent. Word reached Mytilene just moments before the scheduled execution. On the motion of Cleon, however, 1,000 men directly involved in the revolt were put to death. Athens took over Mytilene as a subject state and required the payment of tribute.

Consider:

Why would the Athenian Assembly have felt torn over its treatment of the rebels in Mytilene?

Do you agree that a city (or a school or a dorm) is better off with bad laws that remain fixed than with good laws that are always changing?

Why does Cleon believe that harsh punishment makes Athens safer?

What does he observe about human nature?

Why does Diodotus value continued debate?

Why is leniency in the best interest of Athens?

Do you believe that the death penalty works effectively to deter crimes or rebellions?

What do we learn about the character of Athens from this debate?
Ancient Studies History -- Unit 3 -- Thucydides

Thucydides – Civil War in Corcyra - The Effects of War on Human Nature (89-95) Due: S 10/22

Thucydides gives an account of the civil war in Corcyra between democrats and aristocrats in 427 BC; this was one of many bloody disputes unleashed during the broader conflict between Athens and Sparta. Thucydides makes many sharp observations about human nature in times of war. The democrats of Corcyra massacred many aristocrats while the Athenian navy provided cover. The democrats killed aristocrats because of either personal hatred or debt, and committed many atrocities. Many similar horrors spread throughout Greece whenever one side thought it had help from Athens or Sparta.

According to Thucydides:

- War is a stern teacher and allows people to act with savagery.
- Words change their meanings and morality is forgotten as people put the interests of themselves and their party first.
- Love of power, operating through greed and personal ambition, causes evils.
- Violent fanaticism makes the evils worse.
- No room is left for moderation between competing parties.
- Greek character deteriorates as society divides between ideologically hostile camps.
- Human nature reveals its true colors during war, and is incapable of restraining passions.
- Men repeal the general laws of humanity when seeking revenge.

Passages:

1) “The democrats on Corcyra killed all the opposing faction they could get their hands on… They accused their opponents of subverting the democracy, but some of their victims were killed on account of private hatred, and some by their debtors who for the money they had lent them. Every form of death was seen at this time; and (as tends to happen in such cases), there was nothing people would not do, and more: fathers killed their sons; men were dragged out of the temples and then killed nearby; and some who were walled up in the temple of Dionysus died inside it.” [3.81] (90)

2) “Because it was war, and allies were to be had for either party to hurt their enemies and strengthen themselves at the same time, invitations to intervene came readily from those who wanted a new government. Civil war brought many hardships to the cities, such as happen and will always happen as long as human nature is the same.” [3.82] (90)

3) “In times of peace and prosperity cities and individuals alike follow higher standards… But war is a violent teacher: it gives most people impulses that are as bad as their situation when it takes away the easy supply of what they need for daily life.” [3.82] (90)

4) “To fit in with the change of events, words, too, had to change their meaning:

- Ill-considered boldness was counted as loyal manliness;
- Prudent hesitation was held to be cowardice in disguise;
- Moderation was merely the cloak of an unmanly nature;
- A mind that grasp the good of the whole was considered wholly lazy;
- Sudden fury was accepted as part of manly valor;
- Plotting for one’s own security was thought a reasonable excuse for delaying action;
- A man who started a quarrel was always to be trusted;
- While one who opposed him was under suspicion

In brief, a man was praised if he could commit some evil action before anyone else did, or if he could cheer on another person who had never meant to do such a thing.” [3.82] (90-91)
5) “Parties were not formed under existing laws for the good, but for avarice in violation of established law.” [3.82] (91)

6) “The cause of all this was the desire to rule out of avarice and ambition, and the zeal for winning that proceeds from these two.” [3.82] (92)

7) “Those who led their parties promoted their policies under decent-sounding names: ‘equality for ordinary citizens’ on one side, and ‘moderate aristocracy’ on the other. And though they pretended to serve the public in their speeches, they actually treated it as the prize for their competition.” [3.82] (92)

8) “Striving by whatever means to win, both sides ventured on most horrible outrages and extracted even greater revenge, without any regard for justice or the public good.” [3.82] (92)

9) “Thus was every kindness of wickedness afoot throughout all Greece because of civil wars… Citizens were sharply divided into opposing camps, and, without trust, their thoughts were in battle array.” [3.83] (92)

10) “For the most part, those with the weakest minds had the greatest success, since a sense of their inferiority and the subtlety of their opponents put them into great fear that they would be overcome in debate or by schemes due to their enemies’ intelligence. They therefore went immediately to work against them in action, while their more intelligent opponents, scornful and confident that they could foresee any attack, thought that they had no need to take by force what might be gotten by wit. They were therefore unprotected, and so more easily killed.” [3.83] (92-93)

11) “Now that life had been thrown into confusion in the city, human nature—which is accustomed to violate justice and the laws—came to dominate law altogether, and showed itself with delight to be the slave of anger, the master of justice, and the enemy of anyone superior.” [3.84] (93)

**Consider:**

How did the broader war between Athens and Sparta contribute to civil wars in Corcyra and elsewhere?

How do political opponents treat each other when they believe they have a free hand to do so?

Does one side deserve more blame than the other for the atrocities that arise in war?

Which words take on new meanings during times of war?

What happens to concepts of morality and justice?

How much faith does Thucydides show in human nature?

Do you believe he is correct in his assessment?
Thucydides recreates a debate between Athenians and the Spartan colony of Melos in 416 BC over whether Melos should submit to the greater power of Athens.

The Situation: Athens planned to attack and subjugate the island of Melos, a colony of Sparta, but agreed first to debate the merits of peaceful surrender with the Melians. Melos, a colony of Sparta, had refused to join the Athenian empire like the other islanders, and at first remained neutral without helping either side; but afterwards, when the Athenians brought force to bear on them by laying waste their land, they became open enemies of Athens.

In Thucydides’ recreation, the Athenians propose that each side put forth its arguments in a free exchange, but the Melians suspect that the Athenians will do whatever they want in the end.

The Athenian envoys:
- acknowledge that they do not have right on their own side;
- assert that the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept;
- argue that Melos can save itself from disaster by submitting, and Athens can profit as a result;
- reveal their concern about other islands that might revolt;
- declare the law of nature to rule whatever one can;
- deny that the Spartans will come to the aid of Melos;
- urge the Melians to look out for their own practical self-interest;
- proclaim the ‘safe rule’ - to stand up to one’s equals, to behave with deference to one’s superiors, and to treat one’s inferiors with moderation.

The Melians:
- insist on justice and fair play;
- ask for neutrality and friendship rather than slavery and submission;
- argue that Athens will make enemies of all other neutrals if it enslaves Melos;
- refuse to show cowardice and accept slavery;
- maintain the hope for good fortune and trust in the support of the gods;
- decide to rely on the aid of the Spartans.

The Melians ultimately refuse to submit. After two summers of siege operations, the Athenians seize the city, execute the men, and sell the women and children as slaves.

Passages:

1) MELIANS: “We see that you have come to be the judges of this proceeding, so we expect the result to be this: if we make the better case for justice and do not surrender because of that, we will have war; but if you win the argument, we will have servitude.” [5.86] (103)

2) ATHENIANS: “Decisions about justice are made in human discussions only when both sides are under equal compulsion; but when one side is stronger it gets as much as it can, and the weak must accept that.”

“The standard of justice depends on the equality of power to compel, and in fact the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept.” [5.89] (103)

3) ATHENIANS: “Those who rile over others are not as cruel to those they conquer as are a subject people who attack their rulers and overcome them.” [5.91] (104)
Ancient Studies History -- Unit 3 -- Thucydides

4) MELIANS: “But how could it be as much to our advantage to serve, as it is yours to rule?”

ATHENIANS: “Because if you obey, you will save yourselves from a very cruel fate, and we will reap a benefit from you if we don’t destroy you.”

MELIANS: “So you would not accept a peaceful solution? We could be friends rather than enemies, and fight with neither side.”

ATHENIANS: “No. Your hatred does not hurt us as much as your friendship would. That would be a sign of our weakness to those we rule; but your hatred would prove our power.” [5.92-95] (104)

5) MELIANS: “But don’t you think there is safety in our proposal of neutrality? Here again, since you have driven us away from an argument about justice, and are telling us to surrender to whatever is in your interest, we must show you what would be good for us, and try to persuade you that your interests coincide with ours. Won’t this turn the people who are now neutral into your enemies?” [5.98] (104)

6) MELIANS: “If you would face such extreme danger to retain your empire, and if your subjects would do so to get free of you, then wouldn’t it be great weakness and cowardice on our part, since we are still free, not to go to every extreme rather than be your subjects?”

ATHENIANS: No, not if you think sensibly. Your contest with us is not an equal match of courage against courage; no honor is lost if you submit.” [5.100-101] (105)

7) MELIANS: “It is hard for us to contend against your power and good fortune… Nevertheless, we trust that our good fortune will be no less than yours. The gods are on our side, because we stand innocent against men who are unjust. And as for power, we what we lack will be supplied by by the alliance we will make with the Spartans.” [5.104] (106)

8) ATHENIANS: “Well, the favor of the gods should be as much on our side as yours. Neither our principles nor our actions are contrary to what the men believe about the gods, or would want for themselves. Nature always compels gods (we believe) and men (we are certain) to rule over anyone they can control… We know that you would do the same if you had the power” [5.105] (106)

9) ATHENIANS: “Don’t you realize that advantage lies with safety, and that the pursuit of justice and honor brings danger?” [5.107] (106)

10) ATHENIANS: “Do not be distracted by a sense of honor; this destroys people all too often, when dishonor and death stand before their eyes. Many have been so overcome by the power of this seductive word, ‘honor,’ that even when they foresee the dangers to which it carries them, they are drawn by a mere word into an irreparable disaster.” [5.111] (107)

10) ATHENIANS: “You must not think it unseemly for you to submit to a city of such great power, which offers such reasonable conditions—to be our allies, and to enjoy your own prosperity under tribute to us.” [5.111] (108)

11) ATHENIANS: “Remember what is usually the best course: do not give way to equals, but have the right attitude towards your superiors and use moderation towards your inferiors.” [5.111] (108)
Melian Dialogu: The Conclusion:

The Melians refused to surrender to the Athenian ambassadors. After failing to receive sufficient help from the Spartans, the Melians found themselves besieged by the Athenians. At last necessity Melians forced the Melians to surrender unconditionally. The Athenians put to death all men of military age and sold the women and children as slaves.

Consider:

Why do the Athenians not make an argument about right or wrong?

What definition of justice do the Athenians now set forth?

Why is it so important to the Athenians to punish Melos? What do they fear would happen if they do not?

How does this argument compare with what Pericles asserted in his Funeral Oration?

How does this argument compare with what Pericles asserted in his speech on the Burdens of Empire?

How would the Athenians of Themistocles’ day have responded to these arguments had they come from the Persian king?

How have Athenian attitudes changed as the city has grown in power?

Which side do you believe gets the better of this argument?

And which side got the better of the military conflict? Does might make right?