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THE DEATH OF NICIAS: NO LAUGHING MATTER

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Abstract: Thucydides' brief obituary for Nicias (7.86.2) is instructively challenging. Scholars largely agree that the historian 'respects', 'praises', 'endorses', or 'pities' Nicias, without 'scorn or irony': but their agreement is nervous, since its authors have also keenly noted Nicias' political, strategic and tactical mistakes. Thucydides' text is 'nervous', too. Surprises, double meanings, and incongruities permeate both the obituary and the broader arc of the Nicias narrative, creating a discursive zone or borderland that has structural similarities to comedy. The text is grim, not 'funny', but viewing it through a comic prism reveals new and important levels of meaning.

I. 'I Watch Thucydides': The Power of Language in Thucydides

Basil Gildersleeve's comment on Greek particles remains a model of Thucydidean scholarship:

> I try to learn Greek from my Thracian, and when there is question as to the significance of the particles … I watch Thucydides … *τοι* is an appeal for human sympathy, as *που* is a resigned submission to the merciless rerum natura—submission to the *ἀνάγκη* of life, the *ἀνάγκη* of death … *τοι* has been called the 'confidential' particle … Now turn to the three passages with *τοι* in Thucydides. One is in Perikles' funeral oration (2.41.4 [*μετὰ μεγάλων δὲ σημείων καὶ οὐ δή τοι ἀμάρτυρόν*]); one is in Kleon's harangue against the Lesbians … (3.40.4); and one in Nikias' final speech

> to his soldiers … (7.77.2). A quiver in the face of Thucydides is always worth noticing.[1]

'Quiver in the face' deftly alerts readers to tremulous passages in Thucydides that too often remain unexplored: just as many Homerists rejected tonal variation and individual motivation after Milman Parry revealed the extent of traditional formulae, K. J. Dover's dismissal of 'individual characterization' in Thucydidean speeches found few challengers.[2]

Remarkably, it was Parry's son, Adam Parry, who probed the tension between tradition and individual talent, between inherited formulae and authorial independence, that his father's work had seemed to discourage. Preternaturally alert to nuance, influenced in part by Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, Adam Parry brought to historical and epic texts a mind attuned to lyric. He responded to vivid moments in both Homer and Thucydides, to the jarring formulae, jagged narrative edges, and tiny particles, like γε at *Iliad* 16.61, that upended assumptions of authorial stolidity.[3] It was language, Parry argued, that elevated Achilles' complaint against Agamemnon into a challenge to the entire Homeric value system, and language, again, that transformed Thucydides' plague narrative from routine Hippocratic symptomatology into 'compassionate poetry': 'incommensurability', he said, the unexpected dynamism of words, complicated and enriched our reading of these texts.[4]

[1] Gildersleeve (1930) 257.

[2] Dover (1973) 21.

[3] On γε: personal conversation, 1965.

[4] Parry (1956), (1969) 176, and (1970). For brief but rewarding considerations of Adam Parry's use of his father's work, see Rose (1992) 46–8 and (2012) 112–14.

II. Single Words, Double Valences

Thucydides' 'incommensurables' derail expectations. Here is Pericles on the 'deathless memorials' Athenians established (2.41.4):

> πανταχοῦ δὲ μνημεῖα κακῶν τε καὶ ἀγαθῶν ἀίδια ξυγκατοικίσαντες.
>
> … jointly establishing—like colonies!—deathless memorials of good and bad things.[5]

But why κακῶν? What 'evils' does the city memorialise? Wilamowitz understands Pericles to be referring to Athenians whose efforts sometimes failed, bringing woes on themselves:

> Dass die Athener 455 bei Memphis untergegangen sind, beweist Athens Grosse nicht weniger, als dass sie am Eurymedon gesiegt haben.[6]
>
> The Athenian defeat at Memphis [Thuc. 1.109–10] reveals the city's greatness no less than the victory at Eurymedon.

On the other hand, Friedrich Nietzsche insisted, more brutally but with equal philological soundness, that the Athenians imposed κακά on their subjects:

> Das Raubtier, die prachtvolle nach Beute und Sieg lüstern schweifende blonde Bestie … Zum Beispiel wenn Perikles seinen Athenern sagt, in jener berühmten Leichenrede, 'zu allem Land und Meer hat

[5] I have tried here to draw attention to the imperializing metaphor in ξυγκατοικίσαντες. κακῶν τε καὶ ἀγαθῶν is the text preferred by Alberti (1972). Here and elsewhere in this essay, uncredited translations are the author's.

[6] Wilamowitz (1908) 98; the comment is also quoted by Müller (1958) 172.

> unsere Kühnheit sich den Weg gebrochen, unvergängliche Denkmale sich überall im Guten und Schlimmen aufrichtend'.[7]
>
> The carnivore, the roaming blond beast splendidly craving loot and triumph … For example, when Pericles says of his Athenians, in that well-known Funeral Speech, 'Our daring has cleared a trail to every land and sea, building imperishable memorials to itself for good and terrible things'.

No internal metric determines which interpretation to prefer. Undoubtedly, Athens causes suffering, just as Nietzsche suggests. At the same time, μνημεῖα … ἀίδια and Wilamowitz's gloss call to mind the sufferings of Athenians, as memorialised in the Athenian list of Erechtheid dead found in Cyprus, Egypt, and Phoenicia.[8]

Must we choose between these? Or might Nietzsche's exuberant endorsement of conquest coexist with Wilamowitz' emphasis on suffering? Pericles' single word, κακῶν, generates both outcomes, justifying both readings and creating a double valence of interpretation. That κακῶν τε καὶ ἀγαθῶν plays on a keystone of the Greek moral tradition, καλὸς κἀγαθός, raises its prominence and heightens the tension.[9]

Similar interpretative doubling occurs elsewhere in the text, both in speeches, where the speakers deploy it as a rhetorical device, and in narrative. The Corinthians at

[7] Nietzsche (1878) 1.11; Müller (1958) 171–2.

[8] Meiggs and Lewis (1969) 73–7. Christopher Pelling pointed this passage out to me.

[9] This passage has attracted some fine commentary. See particularly by Flashar (1969) 26–27 = Flashar (1989) 454–455, though Flashar seems to shift from initially rejecting Nietzsche to accepting what Nietzsche proposes: that the passage celebrates 'the proud imperial character of the conquering power'. Tobias Joho, Bernd Seidensticker, and Vincent J. Rosivach assisted me as I worked on the Nietzsche passage, which certainly invites a much fuller discussion. I am indebted here to comments by Freud and Susan Stewart on 'simultaneity' (*Gleichzeitigkeit*): Freud (1960) 155 or (1999) 248; Stewart (1979) 161, 168.

Sparta, for instance, criticise the paradoxical Spartan practice of 'defending themselves by delay', *τῇ μελλήσει ἀμυνόμενοι* (1.69.4):

> *ἡσυχάζετε γάρ, μόνοι Ἑλλήνων, ὦ Λακεδαιμόνιοι, οὐ τῇ δυνάμει τινά, ἀλλὰ τῇ μελλήσει ἀμυνόμενοι, καὶ μόνοι οὐκ ἀρχομένην τὴν αὔξησιν τῶν ἐχθρῶν διπλασιουμένην δὲ καταλύοντες.*
>
> You, Spartans, alone among Greeks stay tranquil, repelling foes by delay rather than force, and you alone crush your enemies' growth not at the outset, but after it has doubled.

The speakers then exploit the adjective *ἀσφαλεῖς* to show that Sparta's behaviour has harmed both herself and her allies (1.69.5):

> *καίτοι ἐλέγεσθε ἀσφαλεῖς εἶναι, ὧν ἄρα ὁ λόγος τοῦ ἔργου ἐκράτει. τόν τε γὰρ Μῆδον αὐτοὶ ἴσμεν ἐκ περάτων γῆς πρότερον ἐπὶ τὴν Πελοπόννησον ἐλθόντα ἢ τὰ παρ' ὑμῶν ἀξίως προαπαντῆσαι, καὶ νῦν τοὺς Ἀθηναίους οὐχ ἑκάς, ὥσπερ ἐκεῖνον, ἀλλ' ἐγγὺς ὄντας περιορᾶτε, καὶ ἀντὶ τοῦ ἐπελθεῖν αὐτοὶ ἀμύνεσθαι βούλεσθε μᾶλλον ἐπιόντας, καὶ ἐς τύχας πρὸς πολλῷ δυνατωτέρους ἀγωνιζόμενοι καταστῆναι, ἐπιστάμενοι καὶ τὸν βάρβαρον αὐτὸν περὶ αὐτῷ τὰ πλείω σφαλέντα, καὶ πρὸς αὐτοὺς τοὺς Ἀθηναίους πολλὰ ἡμᾶς ἤδη τοῖς ἁμαρτήμασιν αὐτῶν μᾶλλον ἢ τῇ ἀφ' ὑμῶν τιμωρίᾳ περιγεγενημένους, ἐπεὶ αἵ γε ὑμέτεραι ἐλπίδες ἤδη τινάς που καὶ ἀπαρασκεύους διὰ τὸ πιστεῦσαι ἔφθειραν.*
>
> Too, you were called 'secure': the word did not match the deed. We know that Persia reached the Peloponnese from the end of the earth before you confronted her appropriately, and now you disregard Athens, which is not remote like Persia but a neighbour, and instead of attacking, you prefer to repel her when she is attacking, and pitting yourself against a

> more powerful opponent to rely on chance, despite your awareness that Persia's failure was self-inflicted, and that we have survived against the Athenians themselves more because of their own errors than thanks to aid from you, since hopes placed in you have destroyed men who were unprepared, owing to their trust in you.

For Gomme, ἀσφαλεῖς were '"men that can be relied upon" … not "cautious" (Stahl), or "safe" … The word points forward to αἵ γε ὑμέτεραι ἐλπίδες'.[10] That is: 'You have been called ἀσφαλεῖς, "reliable". But your ἀσφάλεια has tripped up your allies, whose trusting hopes in you have proved damaging'. ἀσφαλεῖς invokes both σφάλλω, in the active voice, and equally legitimately, σφάλλομαι in the middle voice, to implying that Sparta herself would be secure, would not trip up. In this sense, the sentence points not forward to the disappointed allies, but backward to τῇ μελλήσει ἀμυνόμενοι (1.69.4): You relied not on force but on delay to defend yourselves, allowing a far larger hostile force to attack….

The fecund ambiguity of ἀσφαλεῖς thus accommodates, or inspires, two divergent interpretations, and ἄρα in ὧν ἄρα ὁ λόγος τοῦ ἔργου ἐκράτει emphasises two truths that have long been ignored: in the Corinthians' λόγος, Sparta's reputation is an illusion or λόγος (of 'security') that endangers not only the allies but Sparta herself.[11]

'Double valences' appear in some but not all Thucydidean speeches. The Corinthians' use of ἀσφαλεῖς embarrasses the Spartans. Pericles' κακῶν τε καὶ ἀγαθῶν seems less cunning, less deliberate, but still meaningful, since it alerts us, the readers, to profoundly different outcomes of Athenian imperialism, as well as to the latent volatility of Thucydidean language.

[10] Gomme (1950) *ad loc.*

[11] On ἄρα: Denniston (1954) 36. Examples of Spartan λόγοι condemning λόγος: 1.84.3 and 1.86.3.

III. Nicias and 'Prudence' at Athens

'Incongruity', one critic remarks, 'can be regarded as a contradiction of the cognitive scheme; in Wittgensteinian terms, as a rule that has not been followed'.[12] For an example in Thucydides, consider the passage at 4.28.5. Contemporary Americans may find the Pylos expedition difficult to comprehend: who could imagine local grandees hoping for the failure of an expedition, with the inevitable loss of American lives, simply in order to be rid of the commander? But failure is precisely what Cleon's foes desired (4.28.5):

> *τοῖς δὲ Ἀθηναίοις ἐνέπεσε μέν τι καὶ γέλωτος τῇ κουφολογίᾳ αὐτοῦ, ἀσμένοις δ' ὅμως ἐγίγνετο τοῖς σώφροσι τῶν ἀνθρώπων, λογιζομένοις δυοῖν ἀγαθοῖν τοῦ ἑτέρου τεύξεσθαι, ἢ Κλέωνος ἀπαλλαγήσεσθαι, ὃ μᾶλλον ἤλπιζον, ἢ σφαλεῖσι γνώμης Λακεδαιμονίους σφίσι χειρώσεσθαι.*
>
> At his idle talk, a certain hilarity even overcame the Athenians, but the 'prudent' among them were delighted, reasoning that they would get one of two good things: be rid of Cleon, which they rather preferred, or, if they failed, to overcome the Spartans.[13]

Cleon's antics amused 'the prudent' (*τοῖς σώφροσι*), who savored the chance to be rid of him, or, as a second option, victory over Spartans.

A. G. Woodhead (who says Athens was 'playing ducks and drakes' in this decision) and W. R. Connor point out the danger the expedition faced. Reviewing earlier scholarship, H. D. Westlake remarked, 'It has often been noted that the behaviour of Nicias is not at all creditable: he

[12] Vandaele (2002) 227.

[13] As Gomme notes on 1.70.6, *γνώμη* is 'all that is not *σῶμα*, intellect as well as will; if anything, intellect more than will'. The volitional element in *γνώμης* and the desiderative side of *ἤλπιζον* are both important here. Otherwise *δυοῖν ἀγαθοῖν* would have no force.

is seen to have been willing, even eager, to shirk his duty and resign his command … Thucydides neither condemns nor defends the attitude of Nicias: he ignores it'.[14] To say, 'He ignores it', however, misses a crucial incongruity, perhaps because *σώφροσι*, prosaic and uncoloured, flew beneath critics' radar. How, we must ask, could 'prudent' men hope for disaster, how can mission failure be deemed a 'good', *ἀγαθόν*, and victory a 'mistake', as signaled by *σφαλεῖσι γνώμης*?[15] All but one of the more than twenty occurrences of *σώφρων*, *σωφρόνως*, and *σωφροσύνη* in Thucydides concern restrained, oligarchic, or conservative, behaviour, often in international relations. Only here is *σώφρων* deployed ironically, tagging the real imprudence of 'safe-thinking' men who by selecting an apparent incompetent put Athenians at risk. Thucydides neither explicitly links Nicias with, nor distinguishes him from, these enemies of Cleon.

With *σώφροσι*, lexical prudence collides with imprudence on the level of action: the word emphasises that Thucydides is not 'ignoring' Nicias' attitude.

IV. Using and Avoiding Fortune

Four years after the Pylos affair, two motivations for signing the Peace of Nicias crystallise in the single word, *τύχη* (5.16.1):

[14] See Woodhead (1960) 315, Connor (1984) 115 n. 2, Gomme (1956) 469, Hornblower (1996) 188, Westlake (1968) 88. West (1924) 213 is less concerned, commenting with breathtakingly good sense: 'Demosthenes was a capable officer, and affairs would be well managed if he was second in command, nor would they probably go any better if Nicias was on the ground. There was no more need for the presence of Nicias than there was for the presence of Cleon.' But West is describing the military situation, while Thucydides at 4.28.5 emphasises the attitudes of some Athenians.

[15] Nicias worries constantly about 'tripping up': see 5.16.2, 6.10.2, 6.11.4, 6.11.6, 6.23.2.

> *Νικίας μὲν βουλόμενος, ἐν ᾧ ἀπαθὴς ἦν καὶ ἠξιοῦτο, διασώσασθαι τὴν εὐτυχίαν, καὶ ἔς τε τὸ αὐτίκα πόνων πεπαῦσθαι καὶ αὐτὸς καὶ τοὺς πολίτας παῦσαι καὶ τῷ μέλλοντι χρόνῳ καταλιπεῖν ὄνομα ὡς οὐδὲν σφήλας τὴν πόλιν διεγένετο, νομίζων ἐκ τοῦ ἀκινδύνου τοῦτο ξυμβαίνειν καὶ ὅστις ἐλάχιστα τύχῃ αὑτὸν παραδίδωσι, τὸ δὲ ἀκίνδυνον τὴν εἰρήνην παρέχειν* …
>
> Nicias desired, while he was still safe and esteemed, to preserve his good fortune, and to ease his own and the Athenians' labour for the present, and to leave a reputation for going through life without harming the city, because he thought that his would come from avoiding danger and taking the fewest risks, and that peace reduced risk …

'Fortune' can point to both future risk (*τύχῃ*) and past benefit (*εὐτυχίαν*). From this point forward in the narrative, 'fortune' joins 'prudence' as a Nician Leitmotif. Just as Nicias offers to surrender command in two later passages, he reveals his ambivalence about fortune on three additional occasions. First, debating Alcibiades, he says that good fortune will be essential in Sicily, but immediately adds that he does not want to trust himself to fortune (6.23.3):

> … *εἰδὼς πολλὰ μὲν ἡμᾶς δέον εὖ βουλεύσασθαι, ἔτι δὲ πλείω εὐτυχῆσαι … ὅτι ἐλάχιστα τῇ τύχῃ παραδοὺς ἐμαυτὸν βούλομαι ἐκπλεῖν* …
>
> Knowing that we must plan many things well, and even more, to have good luck … I wish to sail entrusting myself to fortune as little as possible …

Alcibiades himself noted that chance was generally kind to Nicias: *ἕως … ὁ Νικίας εὐτυχὴς δοκεῖ εἶναι*, 'as long as … Nicias seems fortunate' (6.17.1). Later, as the situation worsens, Nicias hopes fortune will be on his side (*τὸ τῆς τύχης κἂν μεθ' ἡμῶν ἐλπίσαντες στῆναι*, 7.61.3)—but

immediately disparages the good fortune of the enemy (7.63.4). Then his final speech, though certainly brave in the face of disaster, opens a cornucopia of jostling platitudes about suffering: the failure of 'luck', the futility of good works, the likelihood of divine *φθόνος* (see §X below). Nicias mentions that he's always previously been fortunate (*οὔτ' εὐτυχίᾳ δοκῶν που ὕστερός του εἶναι*, 7.77.2), but hopes that the enemy's string of luck has reached its limit (*ἱκανὰ γὰρ τοῖς τε πολεμίοις ηὐτύχηται*, 7.77.3).

No other Thucydidean character has so long a string of good fortune, but no other dwells so anxiously on the dangers of *τύχη*, a single Greek word that covers both 'mere chance' and 'good fortune'. Like *σώφροσι* and the other examples above, *τύχη* is a compound of connotations, primed with verbal potency. Both *σώφροσι* and *τύχη* reveal disjunctures, the first between a label and reality, the second, within Nicias' consciousness. They are not 'funny', but their impact comes in part from double entendres that have close comic cousins.

V. Voluntary Withdrawals

Arguing against the Sicilian invasion, Nicias offers to give up his command, using the same verb (*παρίημι*) he had employed at 4.28.3 (6.23.3):

> *ταῦτα γὰρ τῇ τε ξυμπάσῃ πόλει βεβαιότατα ἡγοῦμαι καὶ ἡμῖν τοῖς στρατευσομένοις σωτήρια. εἰ δέ τῳ ἄλλως δοκεῖ, παρίημι αὐτῷ τὴν ἀρχήν.*
>
> I deem these suggestions most secure for the city and safe for us commanders. If anyone thinks otherwise, I yield command to him.

A year later, in Sicily, Nicias again offers to quit (7.15.1). Each time, he seeks to compel the assembly to replace him. His nephritis makes his final request more reasonable, but the pattern is by then established (7.15.1–2):

> *ἐπειδὴ δὲ Σικελία τε ἅπασα ξυνίσταται καὶ ἐκ Πελοποννήσου ἄλλη στρατιὰ προσδόκιμος αὐτοῖς, βουλεύεσθε ἤδη ὡς τῶν γ' ἐνθάδε μηδὲ τοῖς παροῦσιν ἀνταρκούντων, ἀλλ' ἢ τούτους μεταπέμπειν δέον ἢ ἄλλην στρατιὰν μὴ ἐλάσσω ἐπιπέμπειν καὶ πεζὴν καὶ ναυτικὴν καὶ χρήματα μὴ ὀλίγα, ἐμοὶ δὲ διάδοχόν τινα, ὡς ἀδύνατός εἰμι διὰ νόσον νεφρῖτιν παραμένειν. ἀξιῶ δ' ὑμῶν ξυγγνώμης τυγχάνειν.*
>
> Since all Sicily stands together and another army will arrive from the Peloponnese, plan now, realising that our supplies do not suffice for the force that is here, but that it is necessary to recall it or to send another of equal size: infantry, navy, substantial funds, and a successor for me, since my nephritis prevents me from staying. I think it appropriate to have your pardon.

'Merit' (cf. *ἀξιῶ* in the concluding sentence) is a constant concern of Nicias, ironically recurring in the necrology at 7.86 (*ἥκιστα δὴ ἄξιος ὢν … ἐς τοῦτο δυστυχίας*).

The assembly grants only one of Nicias' requests to be excused from service, at 4.28. The fact that no other Athenian commander, in the entire history of Athenian democracy (508–323 BCE), even once attempted to withdraw from command points up how exceptional Nicias' effort is: 'prudential' is a word with many facets.[16]

[16] Xenophon once offers to stand aside during a crisis, but the situation is different: Xen. *Anab.* 5.7.10. I am grateful to Donald Lateiner for this suggestion. Kant, in a slightly different context, underlines the ambiguity of 'prudence' ((2012) 60–1): 'wer in der erstern Art klug ist, nicht aber in der zweyten, von dem könnte man besser sagen: er ist gescheut und verschlagen, im Ganzen aber doch unklug.' ('someone who is prudent in the former sense, but not in the second, of him one might better say: he is clever and crafty, and yet on the whole imprudent.')

VI. Rhetoric and Character (7.48)

After disastrous defeat on Epipolae drastically reduced Athenian options (7.42–5), Nicias debated these with Demosthenes and Eurymedon, briefly but emphatically opposing open withdrawal (7.47.3–49.4). He distrusts both the Athenians at home, who will be motivated not by the military situation but by slander, and the troops in Sicily, who will, he avers, turn on their generals once home. 'Knowing the nature of the Athenians' (*τὰς φύσεις ἐπιστάμενος ὑμῶν*), he prefers battle in Sicily to shameful and unjust punishment in Athens, adding that Syracuse, burdened by pay for mercenaries, fortifications and a fleet, is financially weaker than Athens (7.48.4–5).

Tim Rood and Simon Hornblower have clarified important issues in this passage, rightly rejecting Dover's claim that Nicias is cowardly. Rood keenly insists that Nicias conceals his real concern about the dangers of staying in Sicily, emphasising 'the [negative] reaction of the Athenians at home' instead:

> Thucydides is telling a story about Nikias' rhetoric rather than his character … The paradox is that he spoke with a vehemence at odds with his uncertainty; and that this vehemence ensured that his own uncertainty prevailed on his colleagues.[17]

Rood and Hornblower acknowledge Nicias' disingenuousness, insincerity, and 'inability to control the changeableness of the demos'. Rood adds that that Nicias' colleagues understood Athenian volatility.[18] His distinction between 'rhetoric' and 'character' comes under strain, however, in 7.48.4 since, on inspection, Nicias' words there reflect real, not feigned, anxieties and recall earlier moments including his surrender of leadership in Pylos (4.28), requests for huge forces in Sicily (6.19, 6.24), and his letter to Athens (7.14.2, 7.14.4):

[17] Rood (1998) 187–8.

[18] Rood as in preceding note; cf. Hornblower (2008) 634.

> *χαλεπαὶ γὰρ αἱ ὑμέτεραι φύσεις ἄρξαι.*
>
> Your natures are difficult to control.
>
> *τὰς φύσεις ἐπιστάμενος ὑμῶν, βουλομένων μὲν τὰ ἥδιστα ἀκούειν, αἰτιωμένων δὲ ὕστερον.*
>
> I know your natures: you wish to hear pleasant news, and you later place blame.

Passages like those make it difficult to dismiss Nicias' distrust of the Athenian assembly as insincere or 'rhetorical'. Nicias insists that he 'knows' that the assembly's 'nature' is unmanageable. Tracing his disastrous reversals, Thucydides complicates and challenges the Greek moral tradition, upsetting categories like 'heroism' or 'virtue' and preparing the reader to interpret the ambiguities of the final eulogy for Nicias.

Because he 'knows the Athenians' natures', Nicias says he prefers death at the hands of enemies to unjust and shameful execution at home (7.48.4):

> *… ἐπ' αἰσχρᾷ τε αἰτίᾳ καὶ ἀδίκως ὑπ' Ἀθηναίων ἀπολέσθαι μᾶλλον ἢ ὑπὸ τῶν πολεμίων, εἰ δεῖ, κινδυνεύσας τοῦτο παθεῖν ἰδίᾳ.*

Shame, of course, is central in heroic deaths (Hom. *Il.* 22.105; Soph. *Antig.* 5, *Ajax* 472).[19] Nicias aspires to *ἀρετή*, the 'heroic virtue' that marks the Sophoclean hero in particular as a surly isolate, crucially at odds with those around him: 'To the rest of the world, the hero's angry, stubborn temper seems "thoughtless, ill-counselled".'[20] But whether he attains it remains in question. Nicias reminds us of the long-standing cultural imperatives that motivated Greek

[19] Adkins (1975); see also the discussion in Rood (1998) 185 n. 9.

[20] Knox (1964) 57, 21. Knox notes that the noun *ἀρετή* is rare in Sophocles.

decision-making, but the tension between individual and society is magnified here, since Nicias' decision, unlike those of Ajax and Antigone, helps to destroy an entire army. (We cannot forget Nicias' readiness to hand the reins to Cleon at 4.28.)

Nicias 'heroic' commitment is short-lived: within sixty-five lines he reneges, allowing a retreat (7.50.3)—only to change his mind yet again after an eclipse (7.50.4). If his initial resistance to withdrawal was Sophoclean, these later shifts recall the 'complete change of atmosphere' that Bernard Knox discerned in Euripidean tragedy.[21]

In these grim chapters, Nicias speaks three times: twice before the final battle (once indirectly) and then during the final march. The speeches are packed with changes of direction, qualifications, failed efforts to explain, and recurrent, sometimes baffling, references to himself, all of which put the line of thought at risk.[22] In his final speech, Nicias uses two of the particles mentioned by Gildersleeve in the introduction to this essay: *τοι*, 'an appeal for human sympathy', and *που*, 'a resigned submission to the merciless rerum natura', as well as δή with a verb (ὁρᾶτε), a usage 'hardly to be found' in 'the austerer style of Thucydides and the orators', Denniston says.[23] This is a dramatic world, rich in language (sentence structure, word choice), action, character and thought: every word matters.[24]

I have discussed the direct speeches of Nicias elsewhere and will not comment further on these at this point.[25] Three additional passages require commentary: Nicias' indirect speech before the battle in the harbour, 7.69; Hermocrates' trickery, 7.73; and Thucydides' necrology for Nicias, 7.86.

[21] See Knox (1966), (1970), and especially (1978) 345–8.

[22] See Dover in Gomme–Andrewes–Dover (1970) on 7.14.2.

[23] Denniston (1959) 214. δή occurs with verbs in Thucydides only eight times. In emotional passages like 7.77.2, it carries more emotional force than Denniston (216) acknowledges. The comments above draw on the fuller discussion at Tompkins (1972) 197–8.

[24] Cf. Arist. *Poet.* 1450a.

[25] See also Tompkins (1972).

VII. Nicias at 7.69

Nicias' appeal to his trierarchs (7.69) reveals that he is outmatched by the circumstances he had helped to create. Although he had just warned his troops not to be 'overly stunned by events', *ἐκπεπλῆχθαί τι ταῖς ξυμφοραῖς ἄγαν* (7.63.3), Nicias himself is 'stunned', *ἐκπεπληγμένος*, at the plight of his forces (7.69.2).[26] Lateiner pointed out Nicias' 'inability to adapt his words and actions to new circumstances', mentioning his 'passive, reactive themes of uncertain hope, present necessity, and general inadequacy' and his 'retreat' to 'futile clichés about chance and hope … absence of tactical advice and effective encouragement'.[27] Nicias is portrayed as 'saying what men might say when not on guard against seeming to *ἀρχαιολογεῖν*':

> *ἄλλα τε λέγων ὅσα ἐν τῷ τοιούτῳ ἤδη τοῦ καιροῦ ὄντες ἄνθρωποι οὐ πρὸς τὸ δοκεῖν τινὶ ἀρχαιολογεῖν φυλαξάμενοι … ἐπιβοῶνται.*
>
> And saying everything that men in such a moment, dropping their guard against seeming to use antiquated language … call out.

Lateiner offers the translation 'speak time-worn clichés', connoting 'failure to recognize [new] conditions and inability to conceive new approaches to more complex problems'. Nicias' words, he says, are a foil to earlier utterances by Pericles and by the Athenians at Melos, signs of the 'failure of nerve that Pericles had warned against (2.63.3) … indecision, bad luck, and mistakes'. Nicias' 'moralistic rhetoric … accorded poorly with empire'; his 'private superstition', 'confused' understanding of politics,

[26] Nicias also used this verb at 6.11.4. The sequence of uses charts his and the Athenians' reversal. The adverb *ἄγαν*, 'excessively, overly', repeated at 7.77.1 and 7.77.4, is revealing. Here it seems pleonastic.

[27] Lateiner (1985) 201–2.

his 'archaic concept of *aretê*', and 'unwavering belief in his own merit' made him ineffective.[28]

Rood counters: Nicias' 'generalizing remarks mark the greatness of the encounter, … most men would speak as Nikias does'. The final words of Thucydides' summary, ἀρχαιολογεῖν … ὠφέλιμα νομίζοντες ἐπιβοῶνται, he adds, 'derive pathos from the contrast between belief and reality: the cries are a prelude to destruction; there is no answering signal from the gods…'. Hornblower considers it 'wrong to diminish Th.'s word *archaiologein* as censure of Nikias for 'inadequate' encouragement; [it is not] some sort of snooty distancing device'.[29]

Reader responses to Nicias do indeed vary. For Hornblower and Rood, Nicias behaves 'as men do' and speaks 'as most men speak'. They dismiss, without extended analysis, efforts like Lateiner's to connect Nicias' speech with his previous utterances. But it is precisely those previous utterances that clarify the gap between Nicias and 'most men' and make him so compelling a character. Although I did not treat indirect speeches in an earlier study of Nicias, the subordination, qualification, occasional self-contradiction, and sentence length that distinguished Nicias' direct speeches are present here as well.[30]

Karl Maurer says that 7.69.2 is 'one of the greatest, most truly beautiful periods' in Thucydides, praising its 'prodigious symmetry':[31]

> ὁ δὲ Νικίας ὑπὸ τῶν παρόντων ἐκπεπληγμένος καὶ ὁρῶν οἷος ὁ κίνδυνος καὶ ὡς ἐγγὺς ἤδη ἦν, ἐπειδὴ καὶ ὅσον οὐκ ἔμελλον ἀνάγεσθαι, καὶ νομίσας, ὅπερ πάσχουσιν ἐν τοῖς μεγάλοις ἀγῶσι, πάντα τε ἔργῳ ἔτι σφίσιν ἐνδεᾶ εἶναι καὶ λόγῳ αὐτοῖς οὔπω ἱκανὰ εἰρῆσθαι, αὖθις τῶν τριηράρχων ἕνα ἕκαστον ἀνεκάλει, πατρόθεν τε

[28] Lateiner (1985) 204–7, 211, 211–13, respectively.

[29] Rood (1998) 194–5; Hornblower (2008) 690.

[30] Tompkins (1972). Lateiner (1985) 212 n. 38 credits Tompkins (1974), unpublished.

[31] Maurer (1995) 120–1 with n. 32.

> *ἐπονομάζων καὶ αὐτοὺς ὀνομαστὶ καὶ φυλήν, ἀξιῶν τό τε καθ' ἑαυτόν, ᾧ ὑπῆρχε λαμπρότητός τι, μὴ προδιδόναι τινὰ καὶ τὰς πατρικὰς ἀρετάς, ὧν ἐπιφανεῖς ἦσαν οἱ πρόγονοι, μὴ ἀφανίζειν, πατρίδος τε τῆς ἐλευθερωτάτης ὑπομιμνῄσκων καὶ τῆς ἐν αὐτῇ ἀνεπιτάκτου πᾶσιν ἐς τὴν δίαιταν ἐξουσίας, ἄλλα τε λέγων ὅσα ἐν τῷ τοιούτῳ ἤδη τοῦ καιροῦ ὄντες ἄνθρωποι οὐ πρὸς τὸ δοκεῖν τινὶ ἀρχαιολογεῖν φυλαξάμενοι εἴποιεν ἄν, καὶ ὑπὲρ ἁπάντων παραπλήσια ἔς τε γυναῖκας καὶ παῖδας καὶ θεοὺς πατρῴους προφερόμενα, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ τῇ παρούσῃ ἐκπλήξει ὠφέλιμα νομίζοντες ἐπιβοῶνται.*
>
> Stunned by what had occurred, discerning the danger's nature and proximity, at the moment of launching, because he thought, as men do in great struggles, that all they had done was insufficient and that they had not yet said enough, he began once again to call on each, by his father's, his own, and his tribe's name, requesting that no one betray his personal quality, through which he had any fame, or inherited virtues, if his forefathers were famous, and reminding them of their freest of all fatherlands and of its absolute freedom of daily life for all, and saying those things that men in such a point of crisis might say, careless about seeming to someone to speak time-worn clichés—and on behalf of all, similar things referring to women and children and household deities—but actually do cry out, considering them useful in the present astonishment.[32]

Readers wondering whether Nicias is 'speaking as most men speak' might compare the indirect speech of Pericles (2.13). No sentence there is as long (138 words) or labyrinthine. Indeed, no sentence in any direct speech in Thucydides is this long.[33] *ἀρχαιολογεῖν*, which appears only

[32] Maurer's argument ((1995) 120–1) for deleting *εἴποιεν ἄν* is tempting, but I have not followed it here.

[33] Of the 26 sentences in Thucydides' speeches with 60 words or more, eleven are spoken by Nicias (6.10.2, 6.12.2, 6.13.1, 6.14, 6.21, 6.22, 6.68.2, 7.13.2, 7.63.3, 7.64.2, 7.77.4): far more than we might expect from

here in Greek texts of the fifth or fourth century BCE, appears to be colorful and distinctive indeed, and to fit Nicias' way of speaking.

VIII. Approaching Thucydides with Comedy in Mind

At whom did ancient Greeks—at whom does anyone—laugh, and why? In Greek culture in particular, as Stephen Halliwell remarks, humour was often condescending or critical (we recall Nietzsche's *Raubtier*):

> Laughter is invariably regarded in Greek texts as having a human object or target, and it is the intended or likely effect of 'pain', 'shame', or 'harm' on this target (either in person or through his reputation and social standing) which is the primary determinant of its significance.
>
> Laughter … is an uncertain and dangerous force, because of its propensity to express, or produce, some degree of human opposition or antagonism. This is especially so in a society with a strong sense of shame and social position, for the laughter of denigration and scorn is a powerful means of conveying dishonour …[34]

Niall Slater adds:

> Fifth-century audiences seem to have had a somewhat crueler sense of humor than we do. The starving Megarian in *Acharnians*, willing to sell his daughters for food, gives us some pause today, but we must assume the original audience found it quite entertaining …[35]

a man who speaks, in toto, only 401 of the 3,693 total lines of direct speeches in the text. Even Demosthenes' *On the Crown* has no sentence this long.

[34] Halliwell (1991) 283, 285. See also Lateiner in this volume.

[35] Slater (1999) 358.

There is nothing 'hilarious' about Nicias' plight, and his personal bravery is certainly evident. Nevertheless, in Nicias' darkest hour, his actions—his verbosity, his reversion to cliché, his reliance on religious tradition—might spark Halliwell's 'laughter of denigration and scorn'. Nicias, deciding that nothing he has said is adequate, approaches his commanders for a second time with appeals about fatherland, family, freedom, women, children, household deities, and everything else a man might say when he ceases to worry about speaking tired clichés.

One benefit of approaching Thucydides with comedy in mind is that doing so complicates judgement. Our dominant response to the Athenian catastrophe will likely remain gloomy and 'tragic'. But Thucydides' 'framing' of Nicias—the empty variations, overdone triads (*πατρόθεν, αὐτοὺς, φυλήν; γυναῖκας, παῖδας, θεούς*), repetitions (*-ὀνομα-* and the fourfold *πατρ-*), the empty synonymy of *ἐνδεᾶ* … *οὔπω ἱκανὰ*, the whole catalogue-like verbal inundation—may expose him, in a world socialised to laugh contemptuously at failure and weakness, not to open malice, shame, denigration and scorn, but to uneasy feelings. Like all catalogues, Nicias' risked seeming overdone even without a nudge from Thucydides (*ὅπερ πάσχουσιν ἐν τοῖς μεγάλοις ἀγῶσι*). Nicias, whose illness and relative age have been mentioned (7.15, 6.13.1), is weak and vulnerable. Both his situation and his language complicate the scene immensely, emphasising the pathetic side of this character without depriving him of his strengths. Pondering the sources of Greek laughter, we may sense that Nicias is only a step or two away from savage ridicule.[36]

[36] 'Savage ridicule' is a feature of Nietzsche's comments on comedy, particularly the humiliations of Don Quixote in Part II of Cervantes' novel, which shock us but, Nietzsche ((1878) 1.7) claims, delighted early audiences: 'Leiden-sehn thut wohl, Leiden-machen noch wohler... Ohne Grausamkeit kein Fest: so lehrt es die älteste, längste Geschichte des Menschen …' ('To see suffering is pleasant, to inflict it more so … Without cruelty, no celebration: so says the oldest, longest human history …').

Plato's *Symposium* and *Philebus* testify to the ancient debate over whether genres are rigidly separate or can be merged. One argument of the present essay is that tragedy, comedy, and historiography share a conceptual and discursive zone or borderland that teems with ambiguities, irony, and double valences. The shared terrain also reflects common social norms concerning, for instance, weakness and ridicule. Even when not explicit, these lurk in the deep structure of the work, influencing actors and readers alike, particularly when Nicias risks becoming merely pathetic in 7.69. (Note that word, 'risks'. The pathos remains implicit and potential.)

IX. Hermocrates πονηρός

After the defeat in the Syracusan harbour, the army rejects Nicias' proposal to fight the next day, so the commanders prepare a nocturnal march away from Syracuse. Realising that the Syracusans, celebrating their victory as well as a festival, would not take up arms that night, Hermocrates instead deceived Nicias with the lie that the roads were blocked. Nicias, believing him, put off his departure till the next day, when the Syracusans were ready (7.72–3).

Hermocrates' ruse has comic antecedents. From the *Odyssey* onward, the πονηρός—the clever rogue—was a staple of Greek literature. Cedric Whitman provided a general overview of this tradition.[37] Relying not on brute strength but verbal skill and trickery, the πονηρός makes his opponent appear unskilled or hamfisted.

It's as a πονηρός that Themistocles outfoxes both Persians and Spartans in Herodotus and Thucydides (Hdt. 8.75; Thuc. 1.90–1, 1.135–8).[38] Thucydides' Hermocrates

[37] Whitman (1964) 29–36.

[38] At 1.90–1, after the Persian defeat, when Spartan envoys urged Athens not to rebuild her walls, Themistocles instructed the Athenians to send him alone to Sparta and commence reconstruction. Arriving in Sparta, he not only temporised but, after persuading Sparta to send inspectors to Athens, arranged to have these men detained until his own return, and then, finally, announced to his hosts that Athens, now defensible, would deal with other Greek states in the only way possible:

thinks equally fast and instinctively, and his stratagem (Thuc. 7.73) recalls Themistocles' in Book 1. The reversal is profound: Athenians have lost their franchise on πονηρία, a Syracusan is 'running the con', and Nicias the Athenian is his 'mark'. As Thucydides later remarked, it was the Syracusans, antitypes of Spartans, who proved Athens' deadliest foe (8.96.5):

> μάλιστα … ὁμοιότροποι γενόμενοι ἄριστα καὶ προσ-επολέμησαν.
>
> Because their ways of life were most similar, they were also Athens' best opponents.

We recall Dicaeopolis getting the upper hand over Lamachus in Aristophanes' *Acharnians*, or Freud's comment on reversals:

> Die Schlagfertigkeit besteht ja im Eingehen der Abwehr auf die Aggression, im 'Umkehren des Spiesses', im 'Bezahlen mit gleicher Münze' …[39]
>
> Repartée ['quick-wittedness' may be more apt] consists in the defense going to meet the aggression, in 'turning the tables on someone' or 'paying someone back in his own coin' …[40]

Of all the reversals Athens encounters in Sicily, this turnaround in cunning is one of the most striking. Like Odysseus facing the Cyclops and other models of πονηρία, Hermocrates can rely only on his wits: his ruse, though not 'comedy', gains in resonance from its comic associations.[41]

as an equal. In 1.135–8, Themistocles escapes from Athens to Persia relying primarily on his wits.

[39] Freud (1999) 83, cf. 68.

[40] Freud (1960) 68, cf. 52.

[41] For more on Thucydides' Hermocrates, see Tompkins (2015).

X. The Death of Nicias

The most important passage to consider in this study, however, is Thucydides' necrology for Nicias (7.86.5):

> *καὶ ὁ μὲν τοιαύτῃ ἢ ὅτι ἐγγύτατα τούτων αἰτίᾳ ἐτεθνήκει, ἥκιστα δὴ ἄξιος ὢν τῶν γε ἐπ' ἐμοῦ Ἑλλήνων ἐς τοῦτο δυστυχίας ἀφικέσθαι διὰ τὴν πᾶσαν ἐς ἀρετὴν νενομισμένην ἐπιτήδευσιν.*
>
> He perished for such a reason or close to it, though least worthy of the Greeks of my day to arrive at this bad fate, given his way of life completely directed toward conventional virtue.

Nearly every recent commentator sees commendation in these lines: Zadorojnyi concludes that Thucydides 'respects' Nicias' effort and 'endorses' his *ἀρετή*; Rood, that the passage contains 'pity' but 'no scorn or irony' about Nicias' 'lack of intelligence' (Nicias is 'more a Kutuzov than a Kassandra').[42] Hornblower concedes that 'perhaps the present statement contains some studied ambiguity', but immediately cites the 'robust commonsense protest of Nisbet and Rudd … against modern critical tendencies to see ambiguity all over the place'.[43] Finally, Adkins insisted that 'Thucydides is praising Nicias'.[44] As a group, these statements argue that Nicias' leadership, while not perfect, was laudable and free of irony and ambiguity.

These scholars have enriched our understanding of Thucydides, and one demurs only with care. But the thread

[42] Zadorojnyi (1998) 302; Rood (1998) 198. Kutuzov seems an odd choice since he, more like Hermocrates than Nicias, harried Napoleon's troops on their retreat from Moscow.

[43] Hornblower (2008) 741. Hornblower is not on an anti-ambiguity crusade, as his careful comment on 8.97.2 at p. 1036 indicates.

[44] Rood (1998) 183–4, 198; Hornblower (2008) 741; Connor (1984) 205; Adkins (1975). Rood (1998) 183–5 efficiently summarises recent comments on 7.86.

of 'praise', 'conventional virtue', and lack of irony requires challenge because it so drastically filtrates the implications in Thucydides' language, attenuating the force of his words. This is apparent if we look closely at three words in the sentence: ἄξιος, δυστυχία, and ἀρετή. On the surface, each seems to express praise. When examined, however, each cues the reader to an accumulation of problems.

ἄξιος, for instance, was one of Nicias' favourite words, occurring eight times in his speeches, always with emphasis but with a shift in focus over time. Nicias initially emphasised the need to do one's duty, to live up to a reputation (ἄξιον τῆς διανοίας δρᾶν, 6.21.1; cf. 6.12.1, 6.68.4, 7.61.3): this is ἄξιος in its active sense. Later, as danger loomed, Nicias' discourse became more passive and pathetic. From its initial orientation toward 'duty', i.e. 'doing what we must', ἄξιος shifts toward 'desert', or 'getting what we are owed' (7.77.4):

> οἴκτου γὰρ ἀπ' αὐτῶν ἀξιώτεροι ἤδη ἐσμὲν ἢ φθόνου.
>
> We deserve pity more than envy.

As with τοῖς σώφροσι (4.28.5), this unsignaled reorientation may elude editors. In Thucydides' hands, the adjective cannot fail to remind us of Nicias' conflicted, ultimately pathetic, notions about the role of 'merit' in shaping events. Next, consider the difficult statement about Nicias' 'virtue' at the end of 7.86.5:

> διὰ τὴν πᾶσαν ἐς ἀρετὴν νενομισμένην ἐπιτήδευσιν.

One challenge here concerns the modifiers πᾶσαν and νενομισμένην. I believe that Hornblower and Rood (among others) correctly link them with ἐπιτήδευσιν: 'Because his intense concern was directed toward virtue'.[45] This reminds us that Nicias' very personalised 'competitiveness' proved,

[45] Hornblower (2008) 741; Rood (1998) 184 n. 9.

in the end, to be ruinous.[46] Foregrounding ἀρετή, Thucydides forces readers to ask whether and how this value serves the city as a whole. Finally, Nicias' fate was a δυστυχία. Nicias' Doric and conservative policy of shunning danger and fortune had been evident from the start of his career. Rood perceptively notes that δυστυχίας at 7.86.5 reverses εὐτυχίαν at 5.16.1.[47] As the full account of Nicias' 'good fortune' makes clear that from the start, his leadership suffered from instability, belying his 'conservative' reputation. More than any other Thucydidean leader's, Nicias' fate is determined by 'luck'.

Virtue, desert, and fortune: the man who so strongly believed in merit, strove for 'virtue', and assiduously avoided fortune, has the bad fortune to meet an unmerited death that his own espousal of ἀρετή and avoidance of τὸ αἰσχρόν brought about. With stunning ease, the lexicon of commendation is inverted, revealing undue reliance on luck, stubborn adherence to ethical codes, inability to realise that merely 'deserving' something does not achieve it.[48] Ambiguity or *Doppelsinn*, the distinctive element that distinguished jokes in Freud's eyes, is thus a constant in Nicias' career, without becoming truly 'comic'. Thucydides reminds us of this at 7.86, but the reminder is less one of 'respect', 'endorsement', or 'praise' than a complex and ironic appraisal of a life that ended sadly, partly through the victim's agency.

[46] Adkins (1975) 388.

[47] Rood (1998) 199 n. 76.

[48] This interpretation differs from Rood's cogent argument ((1998) 185): 'My analysis of Nikias' character as a whole will seek to show that there is no scorn or irony in Thucydides' closing words—only the same sense of pity that the reader is invited to feel for the inhabitants of Mykalessos'.

XI. Conclusion

Nicias is often described as a 'tragic warner'.[49] Like Persian advisors in Herodotus, he alludes to the unintended consequences of poor decisions. But Nicias differs from these models by being not only a warner but an agent, himself responsible for crucial and destructive choices. These include urging a very large force for the Sicilian campaign (6.20–4), refusing to withdraw when possible (7.48), then allowing an eclipse to slow the retreat (7.51.4). No other Athenian leader played so large a role in decision-making during the expedition.[50] Further complicating the picture, Nicias, unlike the warners in Homer and Herodotus, becomes a victim, his throat unceremoniously slit, partly at the urging of allies who feared detection (7.86.3).

Combining the roles of warner, agent, and victim, Nicias incorporates, encapsulates, and confuses categories of character. Vladimir Propp, who pioneered the study of 'functions among dramatis personae', would not have been surprised. Propp categorised 'spheres of action' ('villain', 'donor', 'helper', 'princess', 'hero' and so on) but added at once that a single character can be 'involved in several spheres of action'.[51] Classicists may be misled by the fact that Poulydamas in the *Iliad* (e.g. 18.254–83) is a warner and nothing more. Nicias, on the other hand, was largely responsible for his army's annihilation and his own death.

Repeatedly in this narrative, Thucydides uses words and narrative elements that have 'comic' qualities: the double or multiple connotations of *τοῖς σώφροσι* and *τύχη* at 5.16.1, et al., the use of surprise, of trickery by a *πονηρός*, of the 'tragic warner' and the bumbling leader. But they are not 'funny' and we never laugh: cumulatively, they lead to disaster.

[49] Rood (1998) 184: 'a "tragic warner", a Kassandra figure'. Marinatos (1980) treats Nicias' role as warner, but not as agent or victim.

[50] In the complex decision-making process in Herodotus Book 7, Artabanus also becomes an agent as Xerxes decides to invade Greece. See the discussion by Pelling (1991) 130–42. I am grateful to Emily Baragwanath for assistance on this point.

[51] Propp (1968) 79–81.

Non-comic narratives use comic incongruity more than we suppose: in Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*, a boy's senseless death verges on hilarity: the 'rainlike fall of [Stevie's] mangled limbs' and the lad's decapitated head in mid-air 'fad[e] out slowly like the last star of a pyrotechnic display'.[52] Deaths from tuberculosis litter Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain*, but he was capable of calling it a work of 'humoristische Nihilismus'.[53]

Jokes exemplify the power of language to express the co-existence of opposite tendencies, or the underlying negative potential of a seemingly positive statement. In the Nicias narrative, joke-like language reveals deeper meanings in situations that are definitely not funny.

Considering historiography from the vantage-point of comedy thus has the powerful, liberating effect of opening rather than restricting interpretive options. The reader is invited not to choose between alternatives, but to accept compelling contradictions. Nicias was both victim and agent; Athenians left memorials both of evils they had suffered, and evils they had done.[54]

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[52] Conrad (1907) 313.

[53] For a sophisticated treatment of 'humour' in *Magic Mountain*, see Shookman (2008).

[54] I owe thanks to several scholars for assistance in the long genesis of this essay: Donald Lateiner, Christopher Pelling, Emily Baragwanath, Edith Foster, Tobias Joho, John Marincola, Paul Cartledge and Simon Hornblower. See also the credits at individual footnotes, especially note 10. It is also worthwhile to note that Baragwanath has written well about syntactical and other forms of ambiguity in Herodotus, in Baragwanath (2008) 168, 200, 209–10, and, with Mathieu de Bakker, in Baragwanath and de Bakker (2012) 25 and 44 n.

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