

The *Redetrias*: Thucydides' Treatment of Nicias and Alcibiades

'Thucydides, the most authoritative of Greek historians' (Gell. *NA.*, 1.11.1) composed his account of the launching of the Sicilian expedition predominantly through the content of the *Redetrias*¹ and subsequent characterisation of the speakers: Nicias and Alcibiades. Nicias, a distinguished politician, rose to prominence after the death of Pericles, while the younger Alcibiades, respected for his heritage and upbringing, came into politics in the 420's BCE and sought to improve his stature through the Sicilian Expedition. The Expedition was brought about by a request for aid from Segesta against Selinus (Thuc., 6.6.2),² causing the Athenians to eagerly aim for victory over all Sicily (6.1) – the speeches of Nicias and Alcibiades forming the essential backdrop. These three speeches not only fulfil the immediate purpose of explaining the mood and events leading to the disastrous venture, but also act as evidence for the inner workings of Athenian democracy.³ Thucydides portrays two leading political figures in great contrast with each other – the excessively cautious Nicias juxtaposed against the ambitious and zealous Alcibiades. Through the development of these characters, Thucydides showcases the political rivalry which, in his view, ultimately led to Athens' demise (2.65.7). He employs a number of techniques, such as diction, structure, and selectivity, in the direct speech of both characters, to emphasise their importance in the subsequent events.

The interpretation of reported speech is cautioned by Thucydides himself – he cannot provide the *alethestaten prophasin* of the speakers themselves, even if he aims to retain their overall sense (1.22.1-3).⁴ On the surface, the speeches present with an apparent homogeneity, in Thucydides' distinctly complex style. However, further deconstruction illuminates differences of character.⁵ Alcibiades is portrayed in a comparatively simple manner of speech, employing paratactic construction, whereas Nicias is made to use hypotactic composition to high

¹ As German scholarship terms the triptych given by Nicias and Alcibiades at the Athenian assembly regarding the launching of the Sicilian Expedition (Thuc., 6.9.1-6.23.4). Hornblower, S., *A Commentary on Thucydides III: Books 5.25 – 8.109*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1991, p. 311.

² All citations herein relate to Thucydides, Book 6, unless otherwise indicated. For example, (Thuc., 6.6.1) is cited (6.1). Where ambiguity exists, the full reference will appear.

³ Hornblower, S., *A Commentary on Thucydides*, 1991, p. 312.

⁴ Adcock, F., *Thucydides and His History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1963, p. 27.

⁵ Crane, G., *The Blinded Eye: Thucydides and the New Written Word*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, 1996, p. 68; Gomme, A., Andrewes, A. & Dover, K., *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides*, vol. 4, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1970, p. 229; Stahl, H.-P., *Thucydides: Man's Place in History*, Classical Press of Wales, Swansea, 2003, p. 174; Tompkins, D., 'Stylistic Characterization in Thucydides: Nicias and Alcibiades', *Yale Classical Studies*, vol. 22, 1972, pp. 181 – 183. Gomme also notes that Thucydides must have heard and seen Nicias and Alcibiades in the assembly before his exile, in order to appreciate the similarities and differences in the style of each man. Crane possesses an alternative view to this, believing that the wording, style, and flavour of the speeches is derived from Thucydides. He concludes that Thucydides makes no attempt to depart from or conceal his own personal style, nor to mimic any peculiarities of the various speakers.

degree of complexity.⁶ Westlake continues this theme to conclude that the entire debate contrasts the conspicuous differences of Nicias and Alcibiades, in relation to both their personalities and policies – ‘nowhere else is the character of the speakers is reflected so strikingly’.⁷ Despite this, it must be noted that Thucydides’ personal subjectivity and interpretation lends itself to exaggeration and insinuation. For all appearances and claims to the contrary, the orators of the Athenian assembly had no professional position; the art of rhetoric was the primary driver behind every democratic decision.⁸ While the speeches of Thucydides may or may not be historically accurate, their prime purpose, when viewed as literary artworks, is to provide and develop examples of his wider themes.

Thucydides focuses a great deal of historiographical attention to the first year of the Sicilian Expedition, developing the central theme of Athenian division. In choosing to provide direct speech, Thucydides draws awareness to the great differences of political leadership.⁹ The speeches supplied by Thucydides relate to the assembly at which the force to be sent to Sicily was to be reviewed, giving barely any mention of the assembly preceding this – where the actual decision was made, deeming this debate greater than the decision itself.¹⁰ Rawlings argues that Thucydides’ decision to dramatically portray the debate of the second Athenian assembly is intended to support his thesis that internal Athenian politics were crucial to not only the outcome of the war, but also dictated the course of events (2.65.7, 10-11). As Kagan notes, the brevity of Thucydides’ account does not lend itself to the conclusion that all Athenians were in agreement at the first assembly.¹¹ The debate

⁶ Stahl, H.-P., *Thucydides: Man's Place in History*, 2003, p. 174; Tompkins, D., ‘Stylistic Characterization in Thucydides’, 1972, pp. 184 – 188, 204 – 214. Parataxis or simple sentences ‘placed alongside’ without the use of conjunctions; hypotaxis being the opposite, referring to subordination. When compared to other speakers, Nicias’ complexity is incredibly high: he uses subordination much more consistently than any other, has frequent use of abstract nouns and adjectives, and impersonal constructions (which subsequently affects sentence-length). On the other hand, Alcibiades avoids complex subordination. These examples provide evidence for Thucydides’ characterisation in manner of speech, concordant with commentary and narrative.

⁷ Liebeschuetz, W., ‘Thucydides and the Sicilian Expedition’, *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, vol. 17, 3, 1968, p. 297; Westlake, H., *Individuals in Thucydides*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1968, p. 171. Liebeschuetz recognises the importance of the characterisation in the speeches, however, he also notes that when taken together, the speeches provide an analysis of the military problems facing Athens.

⁸ Gomme, A., Andrewes, A. & Dover, K., *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides*, vol. 4, 1970, p. 229. Interestingly, Plato develops this notion in his *Alcibiades*, suggesting that Alcibiades himself had little clue as to what defined justice, good or bad men, and who is both knowledgeable *and* in the best position to counsel the Athenian assembly – typical of politicians at this time (Pl. *Alc.*, 106c ff.). This may a criticism of the Athenian state and a hint at Plato’s ideal governance being a ‘Philosopher-King’ figure.

⁹ Rawlings, H., *The Structure of Thucydides’ History*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1981, pp. 59 – 61, 74, 76. Thucydides’ opinion is expressed in the narrative of Book 6. Rawlings also suggests that Thucydides intended Book 6 to act as an introduction in the manner of Book 1, that is, that the Sicilian Expedition was a significant turning point in the war, which Thucydides views as the first step in the decline and fall of the empire (2.65.11).

¹⁰ Liebeschuetz, W., ‘Thucydides and the Sicilian Expedition’, 1968, p. 299. Liebeschuetz notes that Thucydides, while emphasising the importance of the debate, also suggests the recall of Alcibiades and misjudgement of Nicias are underlying factors in the failure of the expedition (2.65.11, 7.42.3).

¹¹ Kagan, D., *The Peace of Nicias and the Sicilian Expedition*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1981, pp. 166 – 8; Hornblower, S., *A Commentary on Thucydides*, 1991, p. 311. We can assume that debates would have occurred at the first assembly from hints in Nicias’ speech: ‘It is true that this assembly was called to deal with the preparations to be made for

comprises two full speeches and an afterward reply: Nicias' first speech urges the Athenians to reconsider the Expedition, while Alcibiades' response invigorates the assembly and prompts Nicias to engage in a miscalculated attempt at bluff.¹² Thucydides preserves the attention drawn to the dichotomy between Nicias and Alcibiades by controlling the direct speech outside of the *Redetrias*. He utilises indirect speech to such an extent in his narrative that Nicias is again reported through this mechanism after the main debate has taken place – the vivid 'oratorical duel' retains prime position (25.2).¹³

Nicias' first speech outlines, in his view, the great risks Athens is taking by venturing to Sicily; leaving enemies on her doorstep and allowing for the creation of many more. Without action, he states, the peace treaty will remain intact (10.2-4). There is little reference to the causes of the expedition, although, on multiple occasions he scorns the alliance with Segesta, disregarding the 'exiles begging for assistance' who cannot help Athens in return, including the clause that 'even *if* we did conquer Sicily ... the real problem is to defend ourselves vigorously against the oligarchical machinations of Sparta' (10.5, 11.7, 12.1, 13.1-2).¹⁴ While his concerns are justified in Thucydides' narrative, Nicias mars his argument by launching a personal attack on his yet to be named opponent, Alcibiades (8.4, 12.2-13.1). The most ironic implication to arise from this passage is that, for purely personal reasons, Nicias seeks a reconsideration of the immediate problem – the exact vice for which he attacks Alcibiades.¹⁵ Thucydides notes that Alcibiades had never seen 'eye to eye in politics' with Nicias; rivalry between the two men extended to areas outside foreign policy (15.2). For all Nicias' attacks on the extravagance of Alcibiades, in reality, he too was very rich and used his private wealth to win public favour (12.2; Plut. *Nic.*, 1.1, 3.1-4.4, 5.4, 11.1-2; Xen. *Mem.*, 2.5.2; *Poroi.*, 4.14).¹⁶ Thucydides provides no evidence of this.¹⁷

sailing to Sicily. Yet I still think that this is a question that requires further thought' (9.1). Plutarch makes mention of both assemblies, the first where Nicias, Alcibiades and Lamachus were appointed to command (Plut. *Nic.*, 12.3). Care should be taken about concluding too much from Thucydides' evidence about the first assembly, since he often omits events. The omission is congruent with the main thrust of his narrative.

¹² cf. Nepos (*Alc.*, 3.1) who suggests that Alcibiades' influence alone led to the expedition.

¹³ Hornblower, S., *A Commentary on Thucydides*, 1991, pp. 35, 365. In this instance (25.2) Nicias speaks of the *actual* premise for the assembly: the forces *he* deems necessary for the expedition.

¹⁴ Edmunds, L., *Chance and Intelligence in Thucydides*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1975, p. 122; Kagan, D., *The Peace of Nicias and the Sicilian Expedition*, 1981, pp. 174 – 175. Indeed, as Kagan states, Nicias' speech ignores the mere possibility of an Athenian victory.

¹⁵ Connor, W., *Thucydides*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1984, p. 163. 'Nicias had not wanted to be chosen for the command; his view was that the city was making a mistake and, on a slight pretext which looked reasonable, was in fact aiming at conquering the whole of Sicily' (8.4). It must also be remembered that Nicias is arguing against a decision already made (8.2-3).

¹⁶ Rhodes, P., "What Alcibiades Did or What Happened to Him": *An Inaugural Lecture*, University of Durham, Durham, 1984, p. 7; Smith, D., 'Alcibiades, Athens and the Tyranny of Sicily (Thuc. 6.16)', *GRBS*, vol. 49, 3, 2009, p. 369. Arguably, Plutarch would not draw a 'true parallel between the lives of Nicias and Crassus', given that Crassus was an immensely wealthy Roman politician, unless supported by some hints of truth (Plut. *Nic.*, 1.1; *Sal. Cat.*, 48.5). Nicias is also said to have

The second speech of Nicias aims to rebut Alcibiades' eloquent reiteration of the expedition's worth. Nicias realises his previous arguments have failed and employs an ancient rhetoric technique – arguing that the action is simply too troublesome and expensive to undertake (19.2).¹⁸ He warns of the military power and isolation which will overcome them, emphasising the need of a vast force to overcome Sicily, and great supplies for the Athenians' well-being (20.1-23.4). Nicias concludes with the premise that his suggestions are safe and secure, and that he will personally lay down his command should anyone think otherwise (23.4). Predictably, Nicias fails to manage the temperament of the assembly, succeeding only in reigniting Athenian passion and instilling security in his audience – the expedition is rendered irresistible (24.2-4).¹⁹ Not only reassurance arises from Nicias' exaggeration: the Athenians' love of extravagance and their competitive spirit are encouraged and revealed (31.1). Rather than forfeiting his command, Nicias allows a greater and much more costly expedition to commence, committing himself to the overall goals in his haste to ensure his own safety; the Athenians expect nothing less than the conquest of all Sicily (24.2-3).²⁰

The two aforementioned passages greatly illuminate Nicias' personality, as is wont by Thucydides, for Nicias has maximum effect on the outcome. While the arguments Nicias presents are sound, they enhance the impression of his overwhelming tendency to caution – the crucial element of his character is his non-committal attitude and avoidance of taking risks, for which Aristophanes satirises him (*Ar. Av.*, 363, 640; *Eq.*, 10-35, 356-357).²¹ While he is blessed with political popularity (*Diod. Sic.*, 12.83.5-6),²² he lacks the confident judgements

been the leader of the Athenian deputation to the festival of Apollo (*Plut. Nic.*, 3.4-4.1) prior to Alcibiades entering a competitive, indulgent and self-centred display of seven chariots in the Olympic races (16.2; *Plut. Alc.*, 11.1-12.1).

¹⁷ Hornblower, S., *A Commentary on Thucydides*, 1991, p. 334. Hornblower suggests that this conforms to Thucydides' technique; items are mentioned only when most necessary, in this instance, it would complicate the underlying purpose of the *Redetrias*.

¹⁸ Connor, W., *Thucydides*, 1984, p. 162 – 163, 166; Edmunds, L., *Chance and Intelligence in Thucydides*, 1975, p. 128, 130; Kallet, L., *Money and the Corrosion of Power in Thucydides: The Sicilian Expedition and its Aftermath*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2001, p. 31. This device has failed him before in the assembly, against Cleon, when Nicias' offer to lay down his command is unintentionally accepted (4.28.1-5). Connor also likens Nicias to a wise advisor, speaking honestly without concealing his own views, even though they are in conflict with his audience. Edmunds enjoys the possibility of Nicias as a choral figure, insisting moderation in the face of Athenian heroism, however he stands as an actor in the tragedy rather than the outsider. Kallet, however, feels the reality is more complex, while he seeks to dissuade the Athenians from a ultimately tragic enterprise, the arguments Nicias uses are inappropriate and ill-timed.

¹⁹ Connor, W., *Thucydides*, 1984, pp. 166 – 7; Edmunds, L., *Chance and Intelligence in Thucydides*, 1975, p. 128; Orwin, C., *The Humanity of Thucydides*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1994, p. 120.

²⁰ Kallet, L., *Money and the Corrosion of Power in Thucydides*, 2001, p. 152; Orwin, C., *The Humanity of Thucydides*, 1994, p. 120. Kallet argues that Nicias is inherently irresponsible in doing this: forfeiting the wealth of the city in order to make a rhetorical point.

²¹ Edmunds, L., *Chance and Intelligence in Thucydides*, 1975, p. 124; Kallet, L., *Money and the Corrosion of Power in Thucydides*, 2001, pp. 42 – 43; de Ste. Croix, G., *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War*, Duckworth, London, 1972, pp. 361 – 362; Westlake, H., *Individuals in Thucydides*, 1968, pp. 171 – 172. Edmunds likens Nicias' position to that of Archidamus in the Allied Congress at Sparta. Neither are persuaded by hasty decisions and recommend preservation of the current empire in an attempt for moderation, distinguishing the old and young members of the assembly (cf. 1.83.1-85.2, 6.10.4-14.1, 25.1).

required of him, his inappropriate rhetoric, coupled with complete misjudgement of the Athenian assembly proves to have dire consequences. Thucydides, in his favourable manner towards Nicias, is ‘too charitable to comment’ on the startling irony that Nicias’ precaution amplifies the expedition to such a scale that failure – which Thucydides and Nicias believe is likely – would significantly impact the prestige of empire (1.1, 8.4, 11.1).²³ Thucydides’ opinion appears to run parallel with that of Nicias throughout this section, as exemplified in their descriptions of Sicily and obvious disapproval of Alcibiades’ personal motivations (cf. 1.1-6.3, 10.1-11.7, 15.2-4, 20.1-4).²⁴ Plutarch allows for the suggestion that an underlying reason for Thucydides’ affinity to Nicias lay in his position as the obvious successor, in temperament and training, to continue Pericles’ defensive strategy, and minimise Cleon’s influence (Plut. *Nic.*, 2.2).²⁵

Alcibiades’ speech follows the first of Nicias, opening his response with direct mention of his rival, and self-assurance of his worthiness (16.1). Reference to the nobility of his ancestors, his military prowess, and his private wealth, drawing a magnificent and honourable picture of Athens, supports his claim. Alcibiades’ self-indulgent arrogance extends to the level of suggesting that people will proclaim relationships with him, where none exist, simply to be associated with a doer of great deeds (16.5). He gracefully suggests cooperation with Nicias whilst refuting the arguments against both himself and the expedition – albeit falsely, disagreeing with Thucydides and Nicias on the power and ability of the Sicilians (17.1-8). The strongest points lie in his observation that (at this stage) the fleet they are sending allows a considerable reserve force to protect Athens, and they hold an oath of obligation to protect their allies – this should not be overlooked simply because of their weakness; allies were created to prevent broad-scale attacks (18.1-2). Perhaps the most compelling argument of Alcibiades is: ‘this is the way we won our empire, and this is the way all empires have been won – by coming vigorously to the help of who ask for it, irrespective of whether they are Hellenes or not’, conjuring up images

Nicias’ timidity, a likely result of his indecisiveness, is also exemplified in later events and proves costly to the outcome of multiple battles (7.8.2-3; Plin. *Nat.* 2.9). The pair, Nicias and Alcibiades, are treated remarkably gently by the comic playwrights, suffering from only minor references.

²² Perhaps resulting from his lavish expenditure of private wealth, as noted earlier; or his ability to offset the insolent Cleon – at least as hoped by the prominent Athenians who promoted him (Plut. *Nic.*, 2.1-3, 4.1).

²³ Hornblower, S., *A Commentary on Thucydides*, 1991, p. 140; Liebeschuetz, W., ‘Thucydides and the Sicilian Expedition’, 1968, p. 306. Thucydides’ favouring of Nicias is recognised by Liebeschuetz, who concludes that we are led to believe the blame for the disaster lies in the hands of the Athenians and their leaders, rather than indecision of Nicias.

²⁴ de Romilly, J., *Thucydides and Athenian Imperialism*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1963, pp. 207 – 208, 210; Stahl, H.-P., *Thucydides: Man’s place in History*, 2003, p. 177. Nicias’ ability to appear to foresee the future in the possible outcomes he describes in his speech prove interesting. de Romilly notes that Nicias insists that Sparta will aid Syracuse and vice-versa, while Alcibiades maintains the opposite – Alcibiades himself eventually confirms Nicias’ reasoning.

²⁵ Scott-Kilvert, I., *The Rise and Fall of Athens: Nine Greek Lives*, Penguin, London, 1960, p. 209, n. 2. Modern scholarship debates this and other possibilities of successors. Thucydides is very favourable to Pericles throughout his *Histories*, and considerably less favourable towards Cleon, with whom he had a personal dislike.

of the loss of empire if these values are overlooked (18.2).²⁶ To conclude, he calls for unity amongst Athenians in the venture to conquer Sicily (18.6).

As Westlake appropriately remarks, the central character emerging from this speech is one of a confident, youthful and ambition-driven man whose judgement is unequal to his enthusiasm.²⁷ His personality alone is powerful enough to induce eagerness akin to his own within the Athenians, despite his reckless desire for personal reward (Diod. Sic., 12.84.1).²⁸ His main theses are that the Athenians have a duty to respect the needs of her allies, and that Athens by nature is an active city, emphasising his ability to accurately manipulate his audience (Plut. *Alc.*, 10.1-3).²⁹ Thucydides glosses over Alcibiades' valid reference to the Athenian alliances in Sicily and Southern Italy, formed well before 415 BCE, choosing instead to emphasise the invalidities of the expedition and Alcibiades' subsequent misplaced passion.³⁰ The brilliance of his speech lies not in the forceful, and false, arguments presented for the expedition, but in his obvious understanding and illumination of Athenian character – a character which Nicias' speeches are counter to. He is representative of Athenian imperialism at its most reckless and potentially destructive, even as it is at its most energetic and powerful. In contrast, Nicias is presented as carefully rational and cognisant of public duty, but also of democratic gridlock and the weakness of rule by negotiation.³¹ Alcibiades is portrayed as an individual figure, with frequent use of the first person singular pronoun in the first sentence alone, his selfish charisma demonstrating how one dominant personality can have such an influence on multiple events. This provides background to the analogy of Alcibiades as a

²⁶ Edmunds, L., *Chance and Intelligence in Thucydides*, 1975, p. 126; Proctor, D., *The Experience of Thucydides*, Aris & Phillips, Warminster, 1980, p. 63.

²⁷ de Ste. Croix, G., *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War*, 1972, p. 223. Compare Thucydides' account: where he attributes the desire to conquer Sicily to Athens, and then states that it was Alcibiades' personal motivation to conquer Sicily and Carthage, before redistributing the notion to the Athenians (6.1.1, 15.2-4, 90.2-3).

²⁸ Westlake, H., *Individuals in Thucydides*, 1968, pp. 9 – 10, 219 – 221. Interestingly, nowhere else does Thucydides devote so much attention to the private life of an individual – Alcibiades' personal situation is allowed to be an underlying factor in the course of history.

²⁹ Adcock, F., *Thucydides and His History*, 1963, p. 133; Brunt, P., 'Thucydides and Alcibiades', *Rev. Ét. Grec.*, 65, 1952, pp. 59 – 96; Hornblower, S., *A Commentary on Thucydides*, 1991, p. 142. Brunt convincingly argues that Alcibiades may have been an informant of Thucydides, which accounts for the discrepancies of the account. As Hornblower notes, Thucydides' evaluation is puzzling: Alcibiades is valued, but Thucydides disagrees with him in his narrative assessment. Alcibiades is portrayed as brilliant, yet tyrannic, and perhaps Thucydides' stance that Alcibiades was an essential component of Athens' potential success is a misguided result of falling under his charm, or composing the account after Alcibiades' later successes. Thus, Thucydides is inclined to magnify his importance and the influence he imposed on events (Nep. *Alc.*, 11.1-6).

³⁰ Hornblower, S., *A Commentary on Thucydides*, 1991, p. 311.

³¹ Connor, W., *The New Politicians of the Fifth Century*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1971, pp. 140 – 141; Connor, W., *Thucydides*, 1984, p. 165. Smith, D., 'Alcibiades, Athens and the Tyranny of Sicily (Thuc. 6.16)', 2009, pp. 387 – 388. Connor develops this notion by stating that Alcibiades addresses the Athenian tendency toward constant expansion, aggression and activity. The speech shows awareness of the impossibility to place limits on Athens' empire. In mastering the new brand of politics which enveloped Athens, Alcibiades' employs a technique similar to Cleon's, and Athenian politics never recovered from the prominence of Cleon. Smith notes that Alcibiades' character and motivations reflect those of the Athenian empire, and causes of the Peloponnesian War.

potential tyrant, and the deep-seated terror associated with such a possibility.³² Crane goes so far as to say that Thucydides' Alcibiades is a typical figure of the archaic Greek world, subordinating the state for personal benefit – Thucydides' focus on his individualism reflects the broader notion of a decline in leadership in post-Periclean Athens.³³ The speech displays brilliant manipulation, and awareness by both Alcibiades and Thucydides himself of the value of traditional symbolism, a strong link to Cleisthenes and to a lesser extent, Pericles, an appreciation often dismissed by Thucydidean characters. While the appearance of power is a useful tool, Thucydides emphasises its failure to adhere with the current political era.³⁴ In these speeches, Thucydides illuminates the character of Athenian democracy through contrasting it with that of Nicias and Alcibiades. In doing so, he reveals the broad spectrum of democratic Athens and its imperial politics.

It has been noted that both Nicias and Alcibiades appear to display a remarkably similar ideology to that of Pericles throughout this debate, and both are potential 'successors'. The crux of Nicias' argument is an honest assessment of the Athenian position: her strategy should allow consolidation of the current empire, an ideal which runs parallel with Pericles' advice (1.144.1).³⁵ However, as de Romilly points out, it is much easier to draw relationships between Alcibiades and Pericles than the shared prudence of Nicias and Pericles.³⁶ Alcibiades exhibits a similar imperialistic attitude: invoking traditional Athenian dominance and obliging the perusal of imperial policies (cf. 2.63.1-64.6, 6.18.2).³⁷ His dynamism in defending the expedition is a modification of Pericles' stance on honour, applied to his own career rather than the benefit of the state (1.144.1, 2.64.6), the weaknesses of Sicily mimic those of the Peloponnese (cf. 1.141.3-7, 6.17.2-6), and the necessity of

³² Crane, G., *Thucydides and the Ancient Simplicity: The Limits of Political Realism*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1998, pp. 305 – 306; Forde, S., *The Ambition to Rule: Alcibiades and the Politics of Imperialism in Thucydides*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1989, p. 78; Reeve, C. (ed.), *Plato on Love*, Hackett Publishing, Indianapolis, 2006, p. xxiv; Sommerstein, A., *Frogs*, Aris & Phillips, Warminster, 1996, pp. 285 – 286; Woodhead, A., *Thucydides on the Nature of Power*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1970, p. 80. Thucydides has Alcibiades say: 'It is proper for me, more than others, to rule (*arche*), and I believe I am worthy of it' (16.1). Plato's Alcibiades takes the easiest and familiar path towards power, offering attractions for which he is already respected – he is not concerned with truth, justice, good or bad, simply what will ensure him supremacy, his greatest ambition to show Athens that he deserved to be honoured more than Pericles or anyone else who ever was, and be the greatest man on the continent (cf. *Pl. Alc.*, 105b). Aristophanes also alludes to Alcibiades' tyrannical position: 'Alcibiades is slow to help Athens and quick to do her harm, profiting himself and not the state', and compares him to a lion cub, which has symbolic value (*Ar. Ach.*, 716; *Ran.*, 1422 ff.). Plutarch also lists a variety of "virtues" for which the Athenians forgave Alcibiades: all associated with tyranny (*Plut. Alc.*, 16.1-6).

³³ Crane, G., *Thucydides and the Ancient Simplicity*, 1998, pp. 305 – 306, 308 – 309; Forde, S., *The Ambition to Rule*, 1989, p. 79. Although, the individualistic and private nature of Alcibiades is not as integral to his position as Thucydides leads us to believe. His alliances and friendship, and more notably his family heritage – the crucial sources of his power – are hardly recognised. Alcibiades' diction does pay homage to his ancestors, however, they appear as his dead, and not living kin. Comparison with Plato's Alcibiades suggests that his power was derived entirely from family, allies and wealth (*Pl. Alc.*, 104a-104c). Furthermore, Alcibiades may use Athens to increase his personal fortune, but not at the expense of citizens as a tyrant would, but at the expense of Sicily.

³⁴ Crane, G., *The Blinded Eye*, 1996, p. 125.

³⁵ Kagan, D., *The Peace of Nicias and the Sicilian Expedition*, 1981, p. 178.

³⁶ de Romilly, J., *Thucydides and Athenian Imperialism*, 1963, pp. 210 – 213; Kallet, L., *Money and the Corrosion of Power in Thucydides*, 2001, p. 182. Kallet suggests instead that Nicias is the antithesis of Pericles, as he demonstrates a lack of intelligent judgment when accorded the financial resources of the city.

³⁷ This could be a by-product of Alcibiades' up-bringing in the house of Pericles (*Nep. Alc.*, 2.1; *Plut. Alc.*, 1.1).

empire has greatest impact on his audience (as with 1.76.1-2, 2.63.1-3).³⁸ The real difference lies in their situations – Pericles’ argument is that Athens must go to war to defend her position, Alcibiades’ is simply that Athens must go to war and conquer new lands, else perish at her own expense.³⁹ What prevents the conclusion that either Nicias or Alcibiades is more of a ‘successor’ to Pericles than the other lies in the internal composition of Athenian politics at this time. Periclean Athens saw the leadership of the first citizen: in 415 BCE the situation is entirely different (2.65.9). Competing politicians, with conflicting interests, sought favour from the masses to win control: their position depended entirely on the support of the *demos*.⁴⁰ Thucydides, in his broader aim to describe the decline of Athenian politics, uses the debate of the Sicilian Expedition to demonstrate the devastating results this caused Athens (cf. 2.65.11). Indeed, in Thucydides’ evaluation of the Expedition, he suggests that the absence of a leader such as that of Pericles and the resulting internal conflict ultimately culminates in disaster (2.65.7-8, 10-12). While Nicias and Alcibiades exhibit underlying Periclean attitudes, neither can dominate politics in the same way: the evolution in political and cultural thought calls for the promotion of self-interested policies over the best action for the state.⁴¹

The complexity of the *Redetrias*, coupled with Thucydides’ narrative, allow for numerous interpretations. The differences in character between Nicias and Alcibiades become startlingly obvious, through their syntax, diction and policies. On surface level, it appears that Alcibiades is the driving force behind the disastrous decision, promoted through the narrative, however, Nicias’ hesitance, poor rhetoric and misjudgement of the assembly lead him to over-compensate for the risks. Thucydides’ choice to focus on the enlargement of the forces designated to the expedition, rather than the original decision to venture to Sicily, allows him to explore the internal conflicts of leading figures and their effects. The contrast of the character of Athenian democracy in general with those of Nicias and Alcibiades illuminates and represents the dichotomy inherent in the Athenian political system. Alcibiades embodies Athens at her most imperialistic, whereas Nicias exemplifies rational

³⁸ Cogan, M., *The Human Thing: The Speeches and Principles of Thucydides’ History*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1981, pp. 97 – 98; Edmunds, L., *Chance and Intelligence in Thucydides*, 1975, pp. 125 – 126; Forde, S., *The Ambition to Rule*, 1989, pp. 90 – 91; Proctor, D., *The Experience of Thucydides*, 1980, p. 66.

³⁹ Cogan, M., *The Human Thing*, 1981, pp. 278 – 279; Kallet, L., *Money and the Corrosion of Power in Thucydides*, 2001, pp. 40 – 41; de Romilly, J., *Thucydides and Athenian Imperialism*, 1963, pp. 210 – 213. However, Pericles does state that Athens can have unlimited expansion over the sea, given her sea power, but never claims that it is necessary for her survival (2.62.2). de Romilly further develops this notion to conclude that there is no deliberate attempt by Thucydides to contrast the ideas of Pericles with those of Alcibiades: Alcibiades may be connected with Pericles’ final speech, but they are constructed with independent intentions.

⁴⁰ Cogan, M., *The Human Thing*, 1981, p. 95; Kallet, L., *Money and the Corrosion of Power in Thucydides*, 2001, p. 289; Orwin, C., *The Humanity of Thucydides*, 1994, p. 124; Rawlings, H., *The Structure of Thucydides’ History*, 1981, p. 75. Rawlings notes the emphasis on the contrast between the Athens of 433 BCE and the much changed picture of 415 BCE – the former unified under the ‘wise, strong guidance of capable leader, with no glimpse of political debate or controversy’.

⁴¹ Cogan, M., *The Human Thing*, 1981, pp. 99 – 100; Forde, S., *The Ambition to Rule*, 1989, p. 75; Gribble, D., *Alcibiades and Athens: A Study in Literary Presentation*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1999, pp. 170 – 171, 177, 207 – 212; Kallet, L., *Money and the Corrosion of Power in Thucydides*, 2001, p. 32, 36, 39.

compromise. While these two notions are in conflict, they are both required in order to achieve balance. This supports Thucydides' views on the overall decline of post-Periclean politics: Athenian politics were now guided by a ruinous rivalry. Subsequently, neither can be deemed to be adequately similar to Pericles – the changed structure of political life prevented this from being so. Because Thucydides' treatment of the speeches and speakers is coloured by his own political stance and to some extent his writing style, the emerging characters of Nicias and Alcibiades are perhaps more explained, in private and public life, than any other in his *Histories*. The *Redetrials* are not simply an account of one political encounter, however important, but are emblematic of the wider theme of the decline of Athenian politics.

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