

## THUCYDIDES' MELIAN DIALOGUE AND ITS RECEPTION

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§ 1. Thucydides 5.84–116, especially 104–105: Μήλιοι: χαλεπὸν μὲν καὶ ἡμεῖς (εὖ ἴστε) νομίζομεν πρὸς δυνάμιν τε τὴν ὑμετέραν καὶ τὴν τύχην, εἰ μὴ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἴσου ἔσται, ἀγωνίζεσθαι: ὁμῶς δὲ πιστεύομεν τῇ μὲν τύχῃ ἐκ τοῦ θείου μὴ ἐλασσώσεσθαι, ὅτι ὅσοι πρὸς οὐ δικαίους ἰστάμεθα, τῆς δὲ δυνάμεως τῷ ἐλλείποντι τὴν Λακεδαιμονίων ἡμῖν ξυμμαχίαν προσέσεσθαι, ἀνάγκην ἔχουσαν, καὶ εἰ μὴ του ἄλλου, τῆς γε ξυγγενείας ἔνεκα καὶ αἰσχύνῃ βοηθεῖν. καὶ οὐ παντάπασιν οὕτως ἀλόγως θρασυνόμεθα.

Ἀθηναῖοι: [1] τῆς μὲν τοίνυν πρὸς τὸ θεῖον εὐμενείας οὐδ' ἡμεῖς οἴομεθα λελείψεσθαι: οὐδὲν γὰρ ἔξω τῆς ἀνθρωπείας τῶν μὲν ἐς τὸ θεῖον νομίσεως, τῶν δ' ἐς σφᾶς αὐτοὺς βουλήσεως δικαιοῦμεν ἢ πράσσομεν. [2] ἡγούμεθα γὰρ τό τε θεῖον δόξῃ τὸ ἀνθρώπειόν τε σαφῶς διὰ παντὸς ὑπὸ φύσεως ἀναγκαίας, οὗ ἂν κρατῆ, ἄρχειν: καὶ ἡμεῖς οὔτε θέντες τὸν νόμον οὔτε κειμένῳ πρῶτοι χρησάμενοι, ὄντα δὲ παραλαβόντες καὶ ἐσόμενον ἐς αἰεὶ καταλείψοντες χρώμεθα αὐτῷ, εἰδότες καὶ ὑμᾶς ἂν καὶ ἄλλους ἐν τῇ αὐτῇ δυνάμει ἡμῖν γενομένους δρῶντας ἂν ταυτό. [3] καὶ πρὸς μὲν τὸ θεῖον οὕτως ἐκ τοῦ εἰκότος οὐ φοβούμεθα ἐλασσώσεσθαι: τῆς δὲ ἐς Λακεδαιμονίους δόξης, ἣν διὰ τὸ αἰσχρὸν δὴ βοηθήσειν ὑμῖν πιστεύετε αὐτούς, μακαρίσαντες ὑμῶν τὸ ἀπειρόκακον οὐ ζηλοῦμεν τὸ ἄφρον.

(‘MELIANS: We can assure you that we do not underestimate the difficulty of facing your power and a possibly unequal fortune. Yet, as for fortune, we trust that our righteous stand against injustice will not disadvantage us in divine favour; and that Spartan help will make up for our deficiency in strength—if for no other reason, they will be bound to fight for us out of kinship and a sense of honour. So our confidence is not as completely illogical as you suggest.

ATHENIANS: [1] Well, we do not think that we shall be short of divine favour either. There is nothing in our claim or our conduct which goes beyond established human practice as shown in men's beliefs about the divine or their policy among themselves. [2] We believe it of the gods, and we know it for sure of men, that under some permanent compulsion of nature wherever they can rule, they will. We did not make this law; it was already laid down, and we are not the first to follow it; we inherited it as a fact, and we shall pass it on as a fact to remain true for ever; and we follow it in the knowledge that you and anyone else given the same power as us would do the same. [3] So as for divine favour, we can see no reason to fear disadvantage. As for your trusting fantasy about the Spartans, that a sense of honour, of all things, will bring them to your aid, we can only admire your innocence and pity your folly.’ Transl. M. Hammond, Oxford World's Classics)

§ 2. Xenophon, *Hellenica*, 2.2.3–4: ἐν δὲ ταῖς Ἀθήναις τῆς Παράλου ἀφικομένης νυκτὸς ἐλέγετο ἡ συμφορά, καὶ οἰμωγὴ ἐκ τοῦ Πειραιῶς διὰ τῶν μακρῶν τειχῶν εἰς ἄστὺ διήκεν, ὁ ἕτερος τῷ ἑτέρῳ παραγγέλλων· ὥστ' ἐκείνης τῆς νυκτὸς οὐδεὶς ἐκοιμήθη, οὐ μόνον τοὺς ἀπολωλότας πενθοῦντες, ἀλλὰ πολὺ μᾶλλον ἔτι αὐτοὶ ἑαυτούς, πείσεσθαι νομίζοντες οἷα ἐποίησαν Μηλίους τε Λακεδαιμονίων ἀποίκους ὄντας, κρατήσαντες πολιορκία, καὶ Ἰστιαίας καὶ Σκιωναίους καὶ Τορωναίους καὶ Αἰγινήτας καὶ ἄλλους πολλοὺς τῶν Ἑλλήνων. τῇ δ' ὑστεραία ἐκκλησίαν ἐποίησαν, ἐν ἣ ἔδοξε τοὺς τε λιμένας ἀποχῶσαι πλὴν

ένος καὶ τὰ τείχη εὐτρεπίζειν καὶ φυλακὰς ἐφιστάναι καὶ τᾶλλα πάντα ὡς εἰς πολιορκίαν παρασκευάζειν τὴν πόλιν. καὶ οὗτοι μὲν περὶ ταῦτα ἦσαν. ('It was at night that the Paralus arrived at Athens with tidings of the disaster, and a sound of wailing ran from Piraeus through the long walls to the city, one man passing on the news to another; and during that night no one slept, all mourning, not for the lost alone, but far more for their own selves, thinking that they would suffer such treatment as they had visited upon the Melians, colonists of the Lacedaemonians, after reducing them by siege, and upon the Histiaeans and Scionaeans and Toronaeans and Aeginetans<sup>1</sup> and many other Greek peoples. On the following day they convened an Assembly, at which it was resolved to block up all the harbours except one, to repair the walls, to station guards, and in all other respects to get the city ready for a siege. They busied themselves, accordingly, with these matters.' Transl. C.L. Brownson, Loeb)

§ 3. Xenophon, *Hellenica*, 2.2.9: Λύσανδρος δὲ ἀφικόμενος εἰς Αἴγινα ἀπέδωκε τὴν πόλιν Αἰγινήταις, ὅσους ἐδύνατο πλείστους αὐτῶν ἀθροίσας, ὡς δ' αὐτως καὶ Μηλίοις καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ὅσοι τῆς αὐτῶν ἐστέροντο. ('Meantime Lysander, upon reaching Aegina, restored the state to the Aeginetans, gathering together as many of them as he could, and he did the same thing for the Melians also and for all the others who had been deprived of their native states.' Transl. C.L. Brownson, Loeb)

§ 4. Isocrates, *Panegyricus*, 100–102: Μέχρι μὲν οὖν τούτων οἶδ' ὅτι πάντες ἂν ὁμολογήσειαν πλείστων ἀγαθῶν τὴν πόλιν τὴν ἡμετέραν αἰτίαν γεγενῆσθαι, καὶ δικαίως ἂν αὐτῆς τὴν ἡγεμονίαν εἶναι· μετὰ δὲ ταῦτ' ἤδη τινὲς ἡμῶν κατηγοροῦσιν, ὡς ἐπειδὴ τὴν ἀρχὴν τῆς θαλάττης παρελάβομεν, πολλῶν κακῶν αἴτιοι τοῖς Ἕλλησι κατέστημεν, καὶ τὸν τε Μηλίῶν ἀνδραποδισμόν καὶ τὸν Σκιωναίων ὄλεθρον ἐν τούτοις τοῖς λόγοις ἡμῖν προφέρουσιν. [101] ἐγὼ δ' ἠγοῦμαι πρῶτον μὲν οὐδὲν εἶναι τοῦτο σημεῖον ὡς κακῶς ἤρχομεν, εἴ τινες τῶν πολεμισάντων ἡμῖν σφόδρα φαίνονται κολασθέντες, ἀλλὰ πολὺ τόδε μείζον τεκμήριον ὡς καλῶς διωκοῦμεν τὰ τῶν συμμάχων, ὅτι τῶν πόλεων τῶν ὑφ' ἡμῖν οὐσῶν οὐδεμία ταύταις ταῖς συμφοραῖς περιέπεσεν. [102] ἔπειτ' εἰ μὲν ἄλλοι τινὲς τῶν αὐτῶν πραγμάτων πραότερον ἐπεμελήθησαν, εἰκότως ἂν ἡμῖν ἐπιτιμῶεν· εἰ δὲ μήτε τοῦτο γέγονε μήθ' οἷόντ' ἐστὶ τοσοῦτων πόλεων τὸ πλῆθος κρατεῖν, ἢν μὴ τις κολάζῃ τοὺς ἔξαμαρτάνοντας, πῶς οὐκ ἤδη δίκαιόν ἐστιν ἡμᾶς ἐπαινεῖν, οἳ τινες ἐλαχίστοις χαλεπήναντες πλείστον χρόνον τὴν ἀρχὴν κατασχεῖν ἠδυνήθημεν;

('Now up to this point I am sure that all men would acknowledge that our city has been the author of the greatest number of blessings, and that she should in fairness be entitled to the hegemony. But from this point on some take us to task, urging that after we succeeded to the sovereignty of the sea we brought many evils upon the Hellenes; and, in these speeches of theirs, they cast it in our teeth that we enslaved the Melians and destroyed the people of Scione. [101] I, however, take the view, in the first place, that it is no sign that we ruled badly if some of those who were at war with us are shown to have been severely disciplined, but that a much clearer proof that we administered the affairs of our allies wisely is seen in the fact that among the states which remained our loyal subjects not one experienced these disasters. [102] In the second place, if other states had dealt more leniently with the same circumstances, they might reasonably censure us; but since that is not the

case, and it is impossible to control so great a multitude of states without disciplining those who offend, does it not follow that we deserve praise because we acted harshly in the fewest possible cases and were yet able to hold our dominion for the greatest length of time?’ Translation G. Norlin, Loeb)

§ 5. Flavius Josephus, *Jewish War*, 5.365–368: εἰ γὰρ δὴ καὶ πολεμεῖν ὑπὲρ ἐλευθερίας καλόν, χρῆναι τὸ πρῶτον· τὸ δ’ ἄπαξ ὑποπεσόντας καὶ μακροῖς εἴξαντας χρόνοις ἔπειτα ἀποσεῖσθαι τὸν ζυγὸν δυσθανατούντων, οὐ φιλελευθέρων εἶναι. [366] δεῖν μέντοι καὶ δεσπότης ἀδοξεῖν ταπεινοτέρους, οὐχ οἷς ὑποχείρια τὰ πάντα. τί γὰρ Ῥωμαίους διαπεφευγέναι, πλὴν εἰ μή τι διὰ θάλλπος ἢ κρύος ἄχρηστον; [367] μεταβῆναι γὰρ πρὸς αὐτοὺς πάντοθεν τὴν τύχην, καὶ κατὰ ἔθνος τὸν θεὸν ἐμπεριάγοντα τὴν ἀρχὴν νῦν ἐπὶ τῆς Ἰταλίας εἶναι. νόμον γε μὴν ὠρίσθαι καὶ παρὰ θηρσὶν ἰσχυρότατον καὶ παρ’ ἀνθρώποις, εἴκειν τοῖς δυνατωτέροις καὶ τὸ κρατεῖν παρ’ οἷς ἀκμὴ τῶν ὄπλων εἶναι. [368] διὰ τοῦτο καὶ τοὺς προγόνους αὐτῶν [πολὺ] καὶ ταῖς ψυχαῖς καὶ τοῖς σώμασιν ἔτι δὲ καὶ ταῖς ἄλλαις ἀφορμαῖς ἀμείνους ὄντας, εἴξαι Ῥωμαίοις, οὐκ ἂν εἰ μὴ τὸν θεὸν ἤδεσαν σὺν αὐτοῖς τοῦθ’ ὑπομείναντας. (‘Be it granted that it was noble to fight for freedom, they should have done so at first; but, after having once succumbed and submitted for so long, to seek then to shake off the yoke was the part of men madly courting death, not of lovers of liberty. [366] To scorn meaner masters might, indeed, be legitimate, but not those to whom the universe was subject. For what was there that had escaped the Romans, save maybe some spot useless through heat or cold? [367] Fortune, indeed, had from all quarters passed over to them, and God who went the round of the nations, bringing to each in turn the rod of empire, now rested over Italy. There was, in fact, an established law, as supreme among brutes as among men, “Yield to the stronger” and “The mastery is for those pre-eminent in arms.” [368] That was why their forefathers, men who in soul and body, aye and in resources to boot, were by far their superiors, had yielded to the Romans—a thing intolerable to them, had they not known that God was on the Roman side.’ Translation H. St. J. Thackeray, Loeb)

§ 6. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches: Ein Buch Fuer Freie Geister*, vol. 1, Leipzig 1886, nr. 92: Ursprung der Gerechtigkeit. - Die Gerechtigkeit (Billigkeit) nimmt ihren Ursprung unter ungefähr gleich Mächtigen, wie dies Thukydides (in dem furchtbaren Gespräche der athenischen und melischen Gesandten) richtig begriffen hat; wo es keine deutlich erkennbare Übergewalt gibt und ein Kampf zum erfolglosen, gegenseitigen Schädigen würde, da entsteht der Gedanke, sich zu verständigen und über die beiderseitigen Ansprüche zu verhandeln: der Charakter des *Tausches* ist der anfängliche Charakter der Gerechtigkeit. (‘Origin of justice. – Justice (fairness) originates between parties of approximately *equal power*, as Thucydides correctly grasped (in the terrible colloquy between Athenian and Melian ambassadors): where there is no clearly recognizable superiority of force and a contest would result in mutual injury producing no decisive outcome the idea arises of coming to an understanding and negotiating over one another’s demands: the characteristic of *exchange* is the original characteristic of justice.’ Transl. R. J. Hollingdale: F. Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, Cambridge 1986, 49)

§ 7. John Enoch Powell, 'The War and its Aftermath in their Influence upon Thucydidean Studies' (1936) published in I. Matijašić, 'John Enoch Powell, Thucydides, and Historical Analogy', in L. Iori & I. Matijašić (eds), *Thucydides in the 'Age of Extremes' and Beyond. Academia and Politics (History of Classical Scholarship Supplementary Volume 5)*, 2022, 89-124:

<https://www.hcsjournal.org/ojs/index.php/hcs/article/view/SV05>):

'The central point on which any moral estimate of Thucydides must always turn is the Melian dialogue. And in the opinions expressed about the purpose of this dialogue the change of attitude since the War has been most marked.' (...) 'Those signs of Thucydides' moral disapprobation of Athenian policy, which before had been so evident to everyone, could now no longer be found. Instead, the student now saw the two irreconcilable principles of imperialism and nationalism expounded, without *hybris* on either side, in a language of striking power and beauty.'

§ 8. J. Enoch Powell, *The Moral and Historical Principles of Thucydides and their Influence in Later Antiquity* (Cambridge Fellowship Dissertation, Churchill Archives Center, Churchill College, Cambridge, POLL 1/6/24), 1934, 75: 'If, now, Thucydides represents nations in any moment of action as but following out logically the consequences of their positions, and that position itself as brought about by the natural forces of human nature, it follows that he believed moral rules inapplicable to the conduct of nations or communities. Often we hear that Thucydides suppresses moral judgments, rather is moral judgment absent from the outset: for his standpoint is Realpolitik, which considers what is, not what ought to be, and views morality and sentiment themselves as but a single force among the many whose interplay makes up the grand, un-moral, or indeed super-moral, sweep of history.'