

Perpetual War or Perpetual Peace? The Political Spirit in Thucydides and Kant

Jonathan Wensveen
001113222

For Prof. von Heyking
Political Science, 4995
Fall Semester, 2010

The political spirit, or *thumos*, which Plato and Aristotle were the first to consider systematically, is indicative of man's assertive nature as a political animal with a view to good and bad, justice and injustice alike. Moreover, the political spirit reveals itself through anger and indignation in response to a perceived injustice, and therefore, inevitably factors into our justifications for going to war and seeking peace. As such, this thesis examines the political spirit in the thought of Thucydides and Immanuel Kant, both of which were thinkers on war and peace and who recognized the essential problem of the political spirit in human affairs as something conducive to differing evaluations of justice, and therefore, as the starting point for human conflict.

Specifically, Chapter One will provide a theoretical framework for understanding how the political spirit factors into both of Thucydides and Kant, thus revealing where the two converge and diverge as thinkers on war on peace. In doing so, it will serve as a general statement of the problem, establishing the former as less of a realist than is generally supposed, and the latter as less of an idealist than is commonly thought. Following Chapter One, Chapter Two will examine the political spirit and man's thumotic nature as it relates to differing evaluations of justice in Thucydides' *History of The Peloponnesian War*. This will include an analysis of three dialogues: The Mytilenean Debate, The End of Plataea, and The Melian Dialogue, each of which point to Thucydides' concern for the essential problem of the political spirit in human affairs. Finally, Chapter Three will determine if and how Kant, in his *To Perpetual Peace* accounts for this problem as articulated by Thucydides in his *History of the Peloponnesian War*, and thus the extent to which his philosophical sketch is also a practical design for peace. After analysing the political spirit in both of Thucydides and Kant, it shall become apparent that, whereas Thucydides regarded the political spirit as something conducive

to perpetual war, Kant included it into his moral philosophy and progressive view of history as something ultimately conducive to the gradual evolution of perpetual peace; and furthermore, that as a result of their differing interpretations, Thucydides may inadvertently put forward his own case for peace, while Kant may inadvertently put forward one for war.

Chapter One
The Political Spirit in Thucydides and Kant

The Political Spirit

In the *Republic*, Socrates defines *thumos* as the spirited part of the human soul. Specifically, he likens it to the nobility of a dog whose character is “to be as gentle as possible with those” whom he or she is “accustomed to and knows,” and “the opposite” with those whom he or she “doesn’t know.”¹ For this reason, *thumos* is regarded as the outstanding feature of the guardian, or warrior class, whose responsibility it is to defend the perfectly just city. By virtue of a proper education, these warriors will be as gentle as possible towards their fellow citizens and the opposite towards their enemies, and like a dog willing to defend its turf on account of its master, *thumos* will enable these warriors to defend their city on account of its justice.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle discusses *thumos* in terms of an intuitive reaction that arises without forethought in response to a perceived injustice. Specifically, he says that “acts that arise out of spiritedness are not from forethought” because “it is not the one who acts with spirit who is the source of it, but the one who” makes “him angry.”² In other words, *thumos*, by nature, is reactionary and often reveals itself through anger, which signals an intuitive response to an attack on one’s being, physical or otherwise. Anger, then, “including indignation and vengefulness, is the passion especially associated with spiritedness so much so that it is natural to speak of anger—and in many different languages—as a ‘show of the spirit.’”³

One of the best examples of *thumos* as indignation or anger is the rage of Achilles in Homer’s epic, *The Iliad*. After having his slave girl, Briesies, taken from him, Achilles lashes out in a fit of uncontrollable rage—an intuitive reaction to a perceived injustice, done to him by

¹Plato, *The Republic*, trans. and ed. by Joe Sachs, (Newburyport MA: Focus Publishing 2007), 375e.

²Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. and ed. by Joe Sachs (Newburyport MA: Focus Publishing, 2002), 1135b.

³Leon Harold Craig, *The War Lover: A Study of Plato’s Republic* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 65.

Agamemnon. He insists that Agamemnon return Breisies to him so as to uphold the integrity of a justice, a principle, he believes in: namely, that the best warrior should receive what it is owed to him. As the best warrior, what is owed to Achilles is “recognition in the form” of goods for his “courage on the battlefield.”⁴ Accordingly, Agamemnon has trespassed against Achilles by taking away his recognition in the form of Breisies, thereby committing a grave injustice. Achilles’ passionate response is representative of his thumotic nature as a warrior willing to defend not merely what is his, but what is *rightfully* his; for “what is in dispute does not concern what did or did not happen, but the justice of it, since the anger is occasioned by an apparent injustice.”⁵

For this reason, in his book *The End of History and The Last Man*, Francis Fukuyama defines *thumos* as “something like an innate human sense of justice: people believe that they have a certain worth, and when other people act as though they are worth less—when they do not recognize their worth at its correct value—then they become angry.”⁶ Or, as Socrates explains in the *Republic*: “But what about when” one “regards himself as being treated unjustly? Doesn’t the spirit in him seethe and harden and ally itself with what seems just, and submitting to suffering through hunger and cold and all such things, it prevails and doesn’t stint its noble struggles until it gains its end or meets its death?”⁷

In his book *The War Lover: A Study of Plato’s Republic*, Leon Harold Craig defines *thumos*, or spiritedness, as “that basic something which makes a person courageous, aggressive,

⁴Andrew W. Saxonhouse, “Thymos, Justice, and Moderation of Anger in the Story of Achilles” in *Understanding the Political Spirit: Philosophical Investigations from Socrates to Nietzsche*, ed. Catherine H. Zuckert (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 31.

⁵Aristotle, 1135b.

⁶Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and The Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 181.

⁷Plato, 440d.

strong-willed, competitive (a lover of victory), tenacious, impervious to fear and bodily pain, but also inordinately sensitive to status.”⁸ While courage, aggression, and competitiveness are perhaps more easily recognized as having to do with the political spirit, less recognizable, but equally important to note, is the inordinate sensitivity to status. Because *thumos* is connected to one’s overall sense of pride and honour—what we, in contemporary society call self-esteem—it accounts for the emotional torment, i.e. shame, that comes from being rejected or ridiculed, as well as the emotional joy, i.e. pride that comes from laudable recognition.

Pride can be both a remedy for and indicator of low self-esteem, which is intimately connected to status. According to Craig, “insults and blame, then, and often even fair and well-intended criticism, pain the spirit; whereas praise and flattery, admiration, ‘popularity,’ and honour (including that implicit in others’ envy) placate the spirit and give it pleasure.”⁹ As a result, “having a modest sense of self-respect seems to be important to everybody, important to their ability to function in the world and the satisfaction they feel with their lives.”¹⁰ After all, part of being human is being able to take pride in oneself, which is largely dependent upon how one is perceived and recognized by others.

Important to note, however, is where one’s sense of self-worth and overall desire for recognition can lead. While *thumos* remains closely tied to one’s conception of justice, and therefore, one’s moral-self, “the existence of a moral dimension in the human personality that constantly evaluates both the self and others does not mean that there will be any agreement on the substantive content of morality.”¹¹ The fact is that in a world composed of thumotic moral

⁸Craig, *The War Lover*, 64.

⁹Ibid., 66.

¹⁰Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, 181.

¹¹Ibid., 182.

selves there will be constant disagreement over a whole host of questions, large and small.

“Hence *thumos* is, even in its most humble manifestations, the starting point for human conflict.”¹² As Fukuyama explains:

The desire for recognition remains a form of self-assertion, a projection of one’s own values on the outside world, and gives rise to feelings of anger when those values are not recognized by other people. There is no guarantee that the thumotic self’s sense of justice will correspond to that of other selves: what is just for the anti-apartheid activist, for example, is completely different for the pro-apartheid Afrikaner, based on differing evaluations of black dignity.¹³

In other words, when informed by differing evaluations of justice which are reflective of differing values and that derive from differing cultural particularities, *thumos* is the starting point for human conflict. Hence, whereas justice for the modern, liberal West, amounts to an often unwavering belief in universal human rights, progress, and individualism, justice for the modern day Jihadist amounts to an unwavering belief in literal Islam. Both define justice according to cultural particularities and subjective interests which account for the current ideological conflict between the two.

Therefore, contrary to Karl Marx, whose later theory held the division of labour and economic exploitation responsible for human conflict, Plato and Aristotle argued that *thumos* and the need to be recognized was “what lead human beings to attack the lands and lives of other human beings.”¹⁴ Principle trumps price because human beings care about more than mere producing and consuming; they are more than mere producers and consumers. Human beings and the nations they create define themselves according to what they are willing to fight and die for. They have an intangible and immeasurable worth transcendent of mere necessity, and as

¹²Fukuyama, *The End of History and The Last Man*, 181.

¹³Ibid., 172.

¹⁴Catherine H. Zuckert, “On the Role of Spiritedness in Politics” in *Understanding the Political Spirit: Philosophical Investigations from Socrates to Nietzsche*, 4.

such, long to be recognized for who they are as opposed to being recognized for what they need. As such, to explain human behaviour solely according to economics is to strip the human being of importance, and to ignore his or her metaphysical longings.

Thumos, by contrast, combines human importance, the human longing for justice, with necessity and is thus indicative of a certain tension between the two. It is true that human beings need to satisfy their necessities. But they are nonetheless unsatisfied with mere necessity; they need to qualify their existence with a reason for living. As Harvey Mansfield explains:

Why did primitive peoples, desperately poor by our standards, living on the margin of existence, and subject to daily risks we can hardly imagine, waste their time and substance on religion? They wanted to know that they matter, that's why; and they were willing to spend heavily for the answer to that question from time and resources they might have saved for their material well-being. Other animal species seek to survive, humans want to survive with honor.¹⁵

Thumos strives for honour because honour is indicative of one's desire for recognition and importance. "Honour joins together private circumstance and public belief so that those who desire it feel entitled to act as they do" and "through the assertion of honour they surpass mindless aggression not devoted to a cause."¹⁶ In other words, honour gives *thumos* its legitimacy because to be honoured is to be recognized in a laudable and thus consensual fashion. It attaches a meaning, outside that of necessity, to aggression, assertiveness, and anger, and thus combines human importance with self-interest, which is also *thumos*.

Following Plato and Aristotle, Mansfield defines *thumos* as "a quality of spiritedness, shared by humans and animals, that induces humans, and especially manly men, to risk their lives in order to save their lives"—a "paradox familiar to all human beings who ever get

¹⁵Harvey Mansfield, *Manliness* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press), 59.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 65.

angry.”¹⁷ What Mansfield is referring to is a paradox that holds *thumos* responsible for one’s physical and moral defence. “In this animal quality,” he says, which puts one’s body or moral character at risk thus showing a “willingness to sacrifice” one’s body, “to die, for the sake of its defence,” we see “the transcendence of oneself.”¹⁸ In other words, in risking one’s life, one is not merely risking his or her own mortality, but doing so in connection to his or her own morality—that is, for a cause or principle transcendent of one’s own. As a result, *thumos* not only accounts for one’s passion and instinctive response to a perceived injustice, but, “with its paradoxical risking of what one wants to defend,” it also accounts for “the natural basis of “idealism” (transcendence) in human beings.”¹⁹

Connecting man’s animal nature to justice, his realism to his idealism, *thumos* connects mortal man to the immortal as it plays the role of intermediary between man’s nature as an instinctual animal bound by desire (*eros*) and moral being capable of reason (*logos*). Man, by nature, is a “political animal,” wrote Aristotle; for “it is peculiar to man as compared to the other animals that he alone has a perception of good and bad and just and unjust and other things of this sort”²⁰ Indeed, compared to other animals, humans beings are distinct in their capacity for reason with a view to what is just and unjust alike; for it is precisely our “attempt to reason,” to give meaning to our lives, that “renders us political animals.”²¹

The fact, however, is that “most humans use their reason, most of the time, to take pride in defending their prejudices.”²² Hence, “*thumos*, like politics, is about one’s own and the good.

¹⁷Mansfield, *Manliness*, 15.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 220.

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰Aristotle, 1253a.

²¹Mansfield, *Manliness*, 63.

²²Harvey Mansfield, *Tocqueville: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 48.

It is not just one or the other, as if one might suppose that politics is simply acting on behalf of what is one's own (realism), or simply advancing the good (idealism). It is about both together and in tension."²³ It is about justifying one's own by attaching it to some conception of the good. In short, *thumos* points to the ambiguity of trying to reconcile one's self-interest (necessity) with one's conception of the good (justice), rendering the moral the political, and the political the moral. Herein lies the problem of *thumos*, which makes prejudice seem reasonable as it enables us to justify (defend) what we perceive as necessary.

For human beings, confronting necessity requires justice because our actions demand justification. We are bound by our necessities and therefore must justify our satisfying them. Or as Mansfield puts it: "We have to accept our necessities, but we have a choice as to how."²⁴ That choice, reflective of our political nature as moral beings with a view to justice and injustice alike, is what we make as we are confronted by the problem of *thumos*, the tension between realism (our necessity and self-interest) and idealism (our concern for morality and justice) characteristic of human life, that impels us to act in certain ways and in response to certain events that either challenge or undermine our conception of the good, which is always and inextricably connected to our own.

This is why "virtually everyone who has thought seriously about politics and the problems of a just political order has had to contend with the moral ambiguities of *thumos*, trying to make use of its positive aspects and seeking a way to neutralize its dark side."²⁵ For just as Plato and Aristotle had to contend with the moral ambiguities of *thumos*, Machiavelli his *animo*,

²³Harvey Mansfield, "How to Understand Politics," *First Things* (August/September, 2007): 44.

²⁴Mansfield, *Manliness*, 71.

²⁵Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, 183.

Rousseau his amour-propre, Hobbes his vain-glory, and Nietzsche his will to power, so too did the American founders have to deal with the moral ambiguities of ambition.

Two more thinkers on politics who dealt with the moral ambiguities of *thumos* are Thucydides and Immanuel Kant, and while neither of them refer to it explicitly in their writings, both take into account and grapple with the tension between realism and idealism characteristic of human life. As a result, analysing *thumos* in the context of Thucydides, whose political teachings are known for focusing primarily on acting on behalf of one's own (realism), and Immanuel Kant, whose moral philosophy is known for focusing primarily on advancing the good (idealism), will enable us to examine more clearly the tension between the two as it relates to war and peace, and the possibility for perpetual peace in a world that has yet to escape from the reality of perpetual war.

Thucydidean Realism? The Political Spirit in Thucydides

Unlike Plato and Aristotle, whose philosophies focused on asking questions related to justice and of the “best regime,” Thucydides focuses primarily on pointing out the particularities of a cold realism, placing fear, honor, and self-interest at the root of human conflict. As Leo Strauss observes: “This is no longer the world of political philosophy, of the quest for the best regime which is possible, although it never was, is or will be actual, for the shining and pure temple built on a noble elevation, far away from vulgar clamor and everything else disharmonious.”²⁶ No, Thucydides writes from the street, and when we open his “pages, we

²⁶Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 139.

become at once immersed in political life at its most intense, in bloody war, both foreign and civil, in life and death struggles.”²⁷

As a result, it is often held that Thucydides avoids such questions—questions of justice and of the “best regime”—focusing instead on the “real world of power politics—a world of debate and decision, of victory and defeat, of glory and infamy.”²⁸ Put another way, Thucydidean thought opts for what is—focusing on the actual behavior of nations and individuals as experienced by those nations and individuals—leaving idealistic questions of what ought, to the realm of philosophy. In this view, Thucydides plays the role of a historian, whose “history” is “less easy to read” because it lacks a certain “romantic element.”²⁹

Or does it? Although Thucydides explicitly separates his own history from “that of the poets, who exaggerate the importance of their themes,” he nonetheless attributes to his history an immortal, and hence “romantic” or poetic-like quality, as it was designed not to meet “the tastes of an immediate public,” but rather, “to last forever.”³⁰ According to Strauss, underlying this romantic or poetic quality is history *and* philosophy, for “poetry is between history and philosophy.”³¹ Whereas “the historian presents what has happened” the poet presents the kind of things that might happen.”³² Hence, “poetry is more philosophic and more serious than history;” for it “states the universals” while “history states the singulars.”³³

²⁷Strauss, *The City and Man*, 139.

²⁸Thomas Pangle, Ahrens Dorf, Peter J. *Justice among Nations: On the Moral Basis of Power and Peace* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1999), 13

²⁹Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. By Rex Warner (New York: Penguin Books, 1954), 1.22.18.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 1.22.24.

³¹Strauss, *The City and Man*, 142.

³²*Ibid.*

³³*Ibid.*

Poetry is historical in that it focuses on singular events, but philosophical in that it seeks to extrapolate from singular events, universal truths. And, “by claiming that his book is a possession for all time and hence that it will benefit his readers long after the great empires of Athens and Sparta have perished, Thucydides suggests that the benefit that his book offers—the truth about political or human life—is far more enduring than the grandeur and the glories of imperial rule.”³⁴ Thus while Thucydides focuses on recounting the historical event that was the Peloponnesian War, he nonetheless “lets us see the universal in the individual event which he narrates through it.”³⁵ Indeed, “Thucydides stood on the edge on philosophy,” and on that edge “he was sufficiently a historian to feel compelled to establish the particulars, to present the data as accurately as he could,” but was “no less concerned to convey the general truths he had discovered.”³⁶

Accordingly, Thucydides’ concern for general or universal truth can also be understood in terms of a deeper or implicit concern for the problem of *thumos* in human affairs, which, giving weight to his claim, aids in enlightening us of his main purpose in recording the events that took place: to establish the essential problem of the political spirit as something that is inseparable from the human condition and as the starting point for human conflict. This underlying concern for the problem of *thumos* comes to the fore as he points to the thumotic tension between necessity and justice, realism and idealism, central to political life in Book One of *The Peloponnesian War*. As Strauss explains:

The first speech occurring in the work opens with “Just (Right)” and the second speech, which is a reply to the first, opens with “Necessary (Compulsory). The thought indicated by these two opening words taken together, the question of the relation of right and necessity, of the difference, tension, perhaps opposition between right and compulsion—a thought which is not the theme of either

³⁴Pangle, Ahrens Dorf, *Justice among Nations: On the Moral Basis of Power and Peace*, 30.

³⁵Strauss, *The City and Man*, 142.

³⁶Donald Kagan, *Thucydides: The Reinvention of History* (New York: Viking Press, 2009), 19.

speech—is Thucydides’ thought. This thought so unobtrusively and so subtly indicated illuminates everything which preceded the two speeches and everything which follows them. These two opening words indicate the point of view from which Thucydides looks at the Peloponnesian war.³⁷

The opening words of each speech therefore establish the problem of *thumos* the political spirit—that is, the tension between realism (defending one’s own) and idealism (advancing the good), characteristic of the human condition as a major theme throughout the Peloponnesian War. The realism and idealism of man as a political animal, who is bound by a self-interested desire to fulfill his necessities, or act on behalf of his self-interest, but who nonetheless must justify his doing so, is in essence, how Thucydides understood political life, and as Strauss observes, is the point of view from which he looks at the entirety of the war.

Evaluated through this lens, his main causes of war—namely, fear, honour, and self-interest—become causes that, when taken together, point to the ambiguity of trying to reconcile the human desire for justice with necessity, and the hypocrisy that ensues. Not simply fear (Hobbes) nor self-interest (Locke) and not simply honour (Nietzsche); but fear combined with self-interest, both in connection to one’s honour—in other words, necessity justified—is the Thucydidean insight. Reflective of the realism, but also, the idealism (longing for justice) characteristic of human beings, this insight accounts for the subsequent tension between the two in both the human soul and politics in general. In doing so, it takes into account the hypocrisy of those who defend their own, by attributing to some conception of the good, a cause, that transcends mere necessity.

In this view, the contrast between Sparta and Athens, the former as a model of moderation and piety, the latter as an aggressive innovator, is, to a certain extent representative

³⁷Strauss, *The City and Man*, 174.

of the Platonic/Aristotelian concept of *thumos*, in the sense that both pursue an otherwise self-interested foreign policy in the name of right, or justice, in order to justify their respective necessities as great powers. Whereas for Athens, aggression and innovation is seen as essential to and thus necessary for the continued prosperity and prowess (and as the Athenian envoys at Sparta argue, justice) of her empire, for Sparta, liberating Hellenes from Athenian tyranny is not only seen as just and pious, but compelled, and hence deemed necessary insofar as it relates to securing Sparta's immediate self-interest.

Seen in this light, the Athenian thesis, which argues that there is no justice in international relations, is challenged when one takes into account the fact that they defend their empire, their imperialism, their own, by attributing to it a certain a justice that comes from compulsion. And, "as those envoys to Melos remind us, it is not only the Athenian position which is ultimately ambiguous. Sparta, the exponent of piety and of human responsibility to act justly, proves in fact to be deeply mired in necessity."³⁸ "In practice the Spartans equate justice with the advantage of Sparta, that is to say, with whatever is required to meet the necessities that anchor their regime."³⁹ Just as the Spartan concern for justice, for advancing the good, remains inextricably connected to necessity, so too does the Athenian concern for necessity, remain inextricably connected to justice.

Thus while Thucydides claims to offer an otherwise unromantic and realistic account of human behavior, he is also keen to point out the influence of justice—that is, the idealism of human beings—as something inseparable from the human condition and hence as it relates to a world of debate and decision, victory and defeat, glory and infamy. In effect, "contemporary

³⁸Clifford Orwin, *The Humanity of Thucydides* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), 194.

³⁹Ibid.

interpreters of Thucydides who are perceptive note the presence in his thought of that which transcends ‘power politics,’ of what they may call the human or the humane.”⁴⁰ Unlike contemporary realists and neo-realists, who either ignore or reject altogether the significance of metaphysical, or “value-normative” considerations in Thucydidean realism, and therefore, evaluate Thucydidean thought, entirely from the perspective of necessity (realism), these interpreters recognize a tension within his thought, reflective of the human condition.⁴¹ They are keen to point out a certain humanity reflective of man’s thumotic nature as a political animal concerned with the good (idealism) and one’s own (realism); for “Thucydidean realism sees through the moralism of states that claim to fight for justice, but that realism simultaneously discerns the benefits of, and truth hidden in, such moralism.”⁴²

Thucydides thus offers an indirect account of how the problem of *thumos*, articulated in terms of a tension between necessity and justice characteristic of human life, relates to international politics, and in doing so, offers a more profound account of political action than contemporary interpreters of Realpolitik. Whereas both of contemporary realists and neorealists, including Hans Morgenthau and Kenneth Waltz focus solely on the power of necessity in human affairs and the behavior of nations in terms of self-interest, Thucydides recognizes both of necessity and justice, the power of realism and idealism over the minds of men as they seek to justify what is necessary, rendering him less of a realist than generally supposed.

⁴⁰Strauss, *The City and Man*, 150.

⁴¹Hans J. Morgenthau. *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf), 33

⁴²Pangle, Ahrens Dorf, *Justice among Nations: On the Moral Basis of Power and Peace*, 31.

Kantian Idealism? The Political Spirit in Kant

Enter into the world of Immanuel Kant, and almost immediately one has exited almost entirely that of Thucydides. Indeed, whereas conventional wisdom in the contemporary field of international relations is quick to label Thucydides the “founding father of realism,” it is equally quick to label Kant the “founding father of idealism.” Kant’s philosophy is idealistic for the simple reason that it focuses on the advancement of morality and justice in the world, and therefore addresses questions of what ought in a world that functions largely according to what is. Like Plato and Aristotle, Kant too was interested in questions of justice and of the best regime, and therefore, unlike Thucydides who wrote from the street, wrote from the realm of philosophy.

Or did he? Unlike Plato and Aristotle, who were content merely to contemplate the ideal, or, the best impossible regime, Kant, in contrast, thought about the best possible regime. “Kant’s idealism thus goes hand in hand with a realism foreign to the spirit of ancient political philosophy, which did not subject ideas to the litmus test of their effectual truth.”⁴³ As a result, because Kant was determined to remain, as much as possible, practical in his theoretical approach, Kantian idealism, “both in its origins and in its goals, has a more complicated relation to realism that is generally supposed.”⁴⁴

This often overlooked relation to realism suggests that while Kant remained devoted in his philosophy to moving beyond what is into the realm of what ought, he did so without making the mistake of making empty promises. As Susan Shell observes:

⁴³Susan Shell, “Kantian Idealism” in *Educating the Prince: Essays in Honor of Harvey Mansfield*, eds. Mark Blitz and William Kristol (Boston: Rowan and Littlefield, 2000), 139.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 129

Kant called himself both “a transcendental idealist and an empirical realist”—an unsteady compromise that represented, as he believed, the only possible solution to the rationally seated conflict between dogmatic idealism and the sceptical realism that necessarily calls it into question. If he demands the seemingly impossible (e.g. no lying whatever the circumstances) he does not expect it.⁴⁵

Having recognized the inescapable tension, or conflict in the human dimension between realism and idealism, Kant consistently qualified his hope for humanity with certain doubt, and thus remained more realistic in his approach as a philosopher than is commonly thought.

In fact, like Thucydides, who understood human nature and man’s political spirit in terms of an unresolved tension between necessity and justice (i.e. who understood the human being as an Aristotelian “political animal”), Kant understood human nature in terms of an unresolved tension between nature and reason—that is, a tension between what he called the phenomenal and the noumenal. In the phenomenal, man is “a creature of the senses, of impulse and desire.”⁴⁶ In the noumenal, he is a creature of reason, of justice and morality. As a result, although his categorical imperative relies on a certain faith in the capacity of reason to solve mankind’s moral problems, in *To Perpetual Peace*, Kant nonetheless acknowledges the limits of reason in governing human affairs when he states that “reason is not sufficiently enlightened to survey the series of predetermining causes which would make it possible for us to predict with certainty the good or bad results of human action, as they follow from the mechanical laws of nature.”⁴⁷ Or, as Shell explains: Kant assumes theoretically “a noumenal world accessible to God alone and in

⁴⁵Shell, “Kantian Idealism,” 139.

⁴⁶Kenneth Waltz, “Kant, Liberalism, and War,” *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 56, No. 2 (Jun., 1962): 335.

⁴⁷Immanuel Kant, *To Perpetual Peace*, trans. by. Mary Campbell Smith (New York: Cosimo Inc., 2005), 32.

relation to which human reason is found wanting. Practically,” he “projects the noumenal world as a moral ideal, approachable by man but unattainable—in this life at any rate.”⁴⁸

As such, in the first appendix of *To Perpetual Peace*, titled “On the Disagreement between Morals and Politics with Reference to Perpetual Peace,” Kant discusses the ambiguity of trying to reconcile the phenomenal with the noumenal, necessity with justice, in terms of trying to reconcile morals with politics. According to Kant, politics says “be wise as serpents”, while morals adds the limiting condition, “and guileless as doves.”⁴⁹ Hence “if these precepts cannot stand together in one command, then there is a real quarrel between politics and morals.”⁵⁰ The quarrel between the two is reflective of our condition as beings, caught between the phenomenal and the noumenal as the former encourages us to be wise as serpents, while the latter demands that we be guileless as doves.

Likewise, in his essay “Idea for a Universal History From a Cosmopolitan Point of View,” Kant acknowledges human nature as something incomplete when he laments the fact that progress in terms of culture and civilization does not necessarily point to progress in terms of morality. According to Kant,

to a high degree we are, through art and science, cultured. We are civilized—perhaps too much for our own good—in all sorts of social grace and decorum. But to consider ourselves as having reached morality—for that, much is lacking. The ideal of morality belongs to culture; its use for simulacrum of morality in the love of honor and outward decorum constitutes mere civilization. So long as states waste their forces on violent self-expansion, and thereby constantly thwart the slow efforts to improve the minds of their citizens by even withdrawing all support from them, nothing in the way of moral order is to be expected. For such an end, a long internal working of each political body toward the education of its citizens is required. Everything good that is not based on a morally good disposition, however, is nothing but pretense and glittering misery. In such a condition the human species will no

⁴⁸Susan Shell, “Fukuyama and the End of History,” in *After History? Francis Fukuyama and His Critics* ed. Timothy Burns (Boston: Rowan and Littlefield, 1994), 40.

⁴⁹Immanuel Kant, *To Perpetual Peace*, 33.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*

doubt remain until, in the way I have described, it works its way out of the chaotic conditions of its international relations.⁵¹

In other words, Kant's idea for a universal history on which his idea for perpetual peace is predicated, is and remains an idea that may or may not come to fruition, due to the fact that man is and has remained in a state of moral imperfection. In this state, morality as a mask for the love of honor "is used by states in ways leading to only the simulacra of virtue," which is not virtue in the Kantian or moral sense.⁵²

In this view, Kant seems to echo if not agree with Thucydides' conception of progress as that which begins at Barbarism and ends at Greekness. As Strauss explains:

There surely has taken place a progress of the arts (and hence power and wealth); but it would be wrong to believe that that progress is simply a progress in mildness. The progress of art is accompanied by a progress of *nomos*—of law doing violence to nature, if only by concealing nature. Men are not simply milder now when Greekness is at its peak as is shown abundantly by Thucydides.⁵³

In the same vein, men are not simply more moral when culture or civilization is at its peak as is shown by Kant. For just as the otherwise civilized nations of Athens and Sparta fought in what is now referred to as the Peloponnesian War, so too did England and France, "the two most civilized nations on earth" according to Kant, engage in "constant feuds."⁵⁴ In short, "Kant's progressivism is always tempered by a certain pessimism as to the gap between cultural improvement and moral betterment."⁵⁵

⁵¹Immanuel Kant, "Idea for a Universal History From a Cosmopolitan Point of View," in *On History*, trans. Lewis White Beck (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1963), 21.

⁵²Susan Shell, *The Embodiment of Reason: Kant on Spirit, Generation and Community* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 171.

⁵³Strauss, *The City and Man*, 235.

⁵⁴Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. trans. Mary J. Gregor (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 174.

⁵⁵Shell, "Kantian Idealism," 136.

For Kant as for Thucydides, then, the tension between necessity and justice, “the tension between nature and reason—and with it man’s hybrid or bastard status, his failure to conform to type—cannot fully be resolved.”⁵⁶ Man remains, if not bound by necessity, at the very least, disposed to it. This mutual awareness of man’s “bastard status,” as Shell describes it, is, paradoxically, what prevents Thucydides as a realist from ignoring entirely the power of idealism in human affairs, and what prevents Kant as an idealist from discounting the hold that realism has over human life. Just as no human being is capable of living a completely self-interested life, and hence of living according to his or her realism thus understood, no human being is capable of living a completely selfless life, and hence of living according to his or her idealism thus understood. Alas, the thumotic tension between necessity and justice which effectively sees human beings attach their own (realism) to some conception of the good (idealism) and which is conducive to differing and conflicting evaluations of justice in the world, i.e. “simulacrum of virtue,” is where Thucydides and Kant converge as thinkers on war and peace.

It is also, however, and again, paradoxically, where Thucydides and Kant diverge as thinkers on war and peace. Whereas for Thucydides this thumotic tension is constant and reflective of an unchanging human nature rendering war an inevitable and permanent feature of the human condition, for Kant, this tension, although conducive to war, is also seen as integral to the gradual evolution of perpetual peace. As a result, in the chapters that follow this divergence in thought over the essential problem of the political spirit in human affairs will enable us to examine more clearly the difference between the two as the former makes his case for perpetual war, and the latter for perpetual peace.

⁵⁶Shell, *The Embodiment of Reason*, 177.

Chapter Two
The Case for Perpetual War: The Political Spirit in Thucydides

The Mytilenean Debate

As indicated in Chapter One, the essential problem of the political spirit which sees human beings attach their own (realism) to some conception of the good (idealism), emerges in Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* in terms of an unresolved tension between necessity and justice characteristic of human life. Nowhere is this tension more apparent than in the Mytilenean Debate. Indeed, it is in this debate that "Thucydides offers his richest treatment of the question of right and necessity."⁵⁷ By contrasting the impatient and spirited Cleon with the wise and patient Diodotus, this debate, combined with Thucydides' subsequent, albeit implicit, endorsement of Diodotus' world view, establishes Thucydides' concern for the essential problem of the political spirit in human affairs; for as Diodotus will argue and "Thucydides will eventually show, even during the most calamitous times of lawless extravagance, men do not simply rid themselves of their concern for what is just, honourable" and "courageous."⁵⁸

The debate itself is over whether or not—and to what extent—the Mytileneans as a people should be punished for carrying out a premeditated revolt against Athens. According to Thucydides, what Athens found particularly unnerving "was the fact that [Mytilene] had revolted even though she was not a subject state."⁵⁹ Indeed, "almost alone among the allies" Mytilene "had never been reduced to subjection and tribute but had retained her walls and fleet."⁶⁰ Moreover, because a "Peloponnesian fleet had actually dared to cross over into Ionia" and in support of Mytilene, the revolt itself seemed to have been "long premeditated."⁶¹ For this reason,

⁵⁷Orwin, *The Humanity of Thucydides*, 142.

⁵⁸Christopher Lewis Lauriello, "Diodotus and Thucydides," *Interpretation: a Journal of Political Philosophy*, vol.36, Issue 3 (2009): 305.

⁵⁹Thucydides, 3.36.9.

⁶⁰Orwin, *The Humanity of Thucydides*, 143.

⁶¹Thucydides, 3.36.12.

“retributive justice [became] the Athenian concern, [and] premeditated treason the verdict.”⁶² “In their angry mood” writes Thucydides, the Athenians had “decided to put to death” the entire adult male population “and to make slaves of the women and children.”⁶³ Alas, in response to a perceived injustice done to them, the Athenians give into a blinding rage indicative of an overwhelming desire for justice, a desire to right a wrong deserving of a harsh punishment.

According to Thucydides, however, the next day brought with it “a sudden change of feeling” as the Athenians “began to think of how cruel and unprecedented such a decision was—to destroy not only the guilty, but the entire population of a state.”⁶⁴ In other words, they began to realize that retributive justice on this scale, might, in fact, be unjust, and therefore, called for an assembly to discuss the matter.

The first to speak at this assembly was Cleon, who, according to Thucydides, was “remarkable among the Athenians for the violence of his character,” and yet, who held “the greatest influence over the people.”⁶⁵ Arguing almost entirely from the perspective of retributive justice, Cleon argues for capital punishment and in favor of their initial decision. According to Cleon, not only did Mytilene revolt, but she had committed an act of “calculated aggression, of deliberately taking sides with [Athens’] bitterest enemies in order to destroy [her empire].”⁶⁶ In effect, not only was it just but also necessary to “punish them as they [deserved]” in order to make an example out of them, “plainly showing that” the crime of “revolt will be punished by death.”⁶⁷

⁶²Orwin, *The Humanity of Thucydides*, 143

⁶³ Thucydides, 3.36.5.

⁶⁴Ibid., 3.36.17.

⁶⁵Ibid., 3.36.33.

⁶⁶Ibid., 3.39.10.

⁶⁷Ibid., 3.40.

Like Achilles, Cleon embodies *thumos*. In his spirited defense of Athens, and in response to a perceived injustice done to her, Cleon demands immediate retribution. According to Cleon, “the best punishment and the one most fitted to the crime is when reprisals follow immediately,” otherwise, “the injured party will lose the edge of his anger when he comes to act against those who have wronged him.”⁶⁸ Moreover, like *thumos*, which attaches one’s own to the good, Cleon attaches necessity to justice by arguing that in this punishment, justice and necessity are necessarily aligned. Not only is it right, or just, to punish the Mytilenians, but also necessary insofar as it will prove that Athens is worthy of her empire. Retribution thus satisfies both the Athenian concern for justice and necessity insofar as it will send a clear message to her subjects that rebellion, or, as Cleon argues, acts of aggression, will not be tolerated. Alas, without forethought and in response to a perceived injustice, as Aristotle put it, Cleon insists on delivering a harsh punishment so as to uphold the integrity of a principle, a justice he believes in—that of Athenian imperialism.

In response and in contrast to Cleon, Diodotus argues from the perspective of necessity. Worried that his argument might be seen as more of a justification for Mytilene’s unjust actions than a prudent argument arguing in favor of Athenian self-interest, Diodotus begins his speech by offering a certain disclaimer:

If we [Athenians] are sensible, we shall see that the question is not so much whether they are guilty as whether we are making the right decision for ourselves. I might prove that they are the most guilty people in the world, but it does not follow that I shall propose the death penalty, unless that is in your interests; I might argue that they deserve to be forgiven, but should not recommend forgiveness unless that seemed to me the best thing for the state.⁶⁹

⁶⁸Thucydides, 3.38.4.

⁶⁹Ibid., 3.44.3.

Hence, although the Athenian people may find Cleon's speech more attractive "because it fits in better with [their] present angry feelings," Diodotus argues that this is not a court of law "where we have to consider what is fit and just." Rather, "it is a political assembly, and the question is how Mytilene can be most useful to Athens."⁷⁰

For Diodotus, haste and anger are the two greatest obstacles to wise counsel.⁷¹ In other words, when left unto itself, man's thumotic or spirited nature revealed through anger is the greatest obstacle to reason. As a result, Diodotus suggests placing necessity, or expediency ahead of their concern for justice. By bringing some forethought into the equation, Diodotus attempts to bring the thumotic nature of the Athenian people in line with reason. Before they act solely according to their instinctual desire for vengeance and justice, Diodotus has them reflect on the potential unintended consequences of doing such.

Of course, in order actually to convince the Athenian people of his argument, he will also have to refute Cleon's previous contention that, not only is it just but it is also necessary to kill the Mytileneans. He does this by calling into question the overall wisdom of capital punishment: "in order to be wise, capital punishment must have a deterring effect."⁷² According to Diodotus, it does not. "Cities and individuals alike, all are by nature disposed to do wrong, and there is no law that will prevent it, as is shown by the fact that men have tried every kind of punishment, constantly adding to the list, in the attempt to find greater security from criminals."⁷³ Men continue to break laws regardless of the consequences. Simply put, experience seems to indicate that "it is impossible (and only the most simple-minded will deny this) for human nature, when

⁷⁰Thucydides, 3.44.16.

⁷¹Ibid., 3.42.4.

⁷²Strauss, *The City and Man*, 233.

⁷³Thucydides, 3.45.7

once seriously set upon a certain course, to be prevented from following that course by the force of law or by any other means of intimidation whatever.”⁷⁴ Or, as Strauss explains: “men do not realize that punishment does not deter men from crimes because nature compels men to commit crimes or because *nomos* is powerless against *physis*.”⁷⁵ Law, and the human capacity for reason from which it is derived, is, no matter how coercive, powerless against nature.

Important to note, is the irony underlying his argument. After having injected reason or forethought into the equation—indeed, after having presented his case as a kind of sober second thought—Diodotus nonetheless ends his speech by admitting that human nature, is, for the most part, ungovernable by reason. Specifically, he laments the fact that entire peoples seem to be drawn towards invisible factors such as hope and fortune which, more often than not, lead them to ruin. As Diodotus explains:

Hope and desire persist throughout and cause the greatest calamities—one leading and the other following, one conceiving the enterprise, and the other suggesting that it will be successful—invisible factors, but more powerful than the terrors that are obvious to our eyes. Then too, the idea that fortune will be on one’s side plays as big a part as anything else in creating a mood of over-confidence; for sometimes she does come unexpectedly to one’s aid, and so she tempts men to run risks for which they are inadequately prepared. And this is particularly true in the case of whole peoples, because they are playing for the highest stakes—either for their own freedom or for the power to control others—and each individual, when acting as part of a community, has the irrational opinion that his powers are greater than in fact they are.⁷⁶

Even the reasonable Diodotus who argues primarily from the perspective of necessity (realism) pays homage to relative power of justice (idealism) in human affairs. Human beings do not always act in self-interested ways. Rather, they have a tendency to delude themselves into thinking that they are more powerful than they are, and that what they feel they deserve or what they assume they need, indeed, what they think is right, will eventually come to them by way of

⁷⁴Thucydides, 3.45.35.

⁷⁵Strauss, *The City and Man*, 234.

⁷⁶Thucydides, 3.45.22

luck. For this reason, hope, desire, and fortune, reflective of what people think is just is but a siren's song of invisible factors that inflate the ego of entire peoples and tempt them to run foolish risks. Or, as Orwin puts it: "the human presumption of the favor of fortune turns out (not surprisingly) to rest on a presumption of the power of justice. Not only does the prospect of doing injustice fail to restrain cities from encroachment, but the fact of having suffered it inflames them to run foolish risks. People's professions of justice are not merely hypocritical; their actions confirm their faith in its power."⁷⁷

Thucydides himself endorses this view when he points to the example of Brasidas, a Spartan general, who "was behaving with great moderation and was constantly declaring wherever he went that his mission was the liberation of Hellas."⁷⁸ According to Thucydides, those cities already subject to Athenian imperialism "eagerly embraced the idea of change" and "made overtures to [Brasidas], begging him to march into their territory."⁷⁹ Indeed, "they fancied that this was a perfectly safe thing to do, though, as was proved later on, the power of Athens was as great as had been their mistake in underestimating it."⁸⁰ Excited by the prospect of change, of liberation, "their judgment" was thus "based more on wishful thinking than on a sound calculation of probabilities;" for "the usual thing among men is that when they want something they will, without any reflection, leave that to hope, while they will employ the full force of reason in rejecting what they find unpalatable."⁸¹

More powerful than the fear of violent death, these factors impel men to act on behalf of what they think is right, regardless of the consequences. Laws exist, but are constantly broken.

⁷⁷Orwin, *The Humanity of Thucydides*, 168.

⁷⁸Thucydides, 4.108.10.

⁷⁹Ibid., 4.108.14

⁸⁰Ibid., 4.108.18.

⁸¹Ibid., 4.108.22.

“Therefore,” says Diodotus, “we must discover some fear more potent than the fear of death, or we must admit that here certainly we have not got an adequate deterrent.”⁸² War is therefore “a violent teacher not because it teaches a rational fear of violent death but rather because it teaches humans a violent, angry, seemingly selfless but actually self-interested passion for justice.”⁸³ Life may be brutish, nasty, and short. It may be simply a matter of doing what is necessary. But living with meaning and purpose requires more than mere necessity, and is thus a matter of transcending one’s animal nature as a moral being with a view to justice and injustice alike.

Herein lies the essential problem of the political spirit in human affairs: By tempting fate and risking one’s life for a cause, human beings transcend their mortal nature by engaging in immortal acts. Accordingly, the seemingly selfless but actually self-interested passion for justice, as Peter Ahrensdorf describes it, is but a reflection of man’s thumotic nature as a political animal bound by necessity yet demanding of justice. The experience of war is especially revealing of this nature, because in times of war human beings are forced to contend with the reality of life and death, and are therefore forced to define themselves according to what kind of life they are willing to fight and die for. “Revenge was more important than self-preservation” writes Thucydides. Principle was more important than price. “By thus soliciting from his reader the need to combine the greater desire for revenge rather than safety with a lasting fear of impermanence, Thucydides ultimately points to man’s hidden or misunderstood desire to somehow justify obtaining something more for himself, particularly when faced with the prospect of his own impending death.”⁸⁴

⁸²Thucydides, 3.45.15

⁸³ Peter, J. Ahrensdorf, “The Fear of Death and the Longing for Immortality: Hobbes and Thucydides on Human Nature and the Problem of Anarchy,” *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 94, No. 3 (September, 2000): 588.

⁸⁴Lauriello, “Diodotus and Thucydides,” 313.

It is not wholly surprising, then, that Brasidas is regarded as the Spartan counterpart of Cleon.⁸⁵ Both share in the conviction and ability to persuade entire peoples by appealing to justice. In fact, according to Thucydides, it is precisely because of spirited men like Brasidas who instil in people a sense of hope and fortune that colonies such as Mytilene revolt, while it is on account of spirited men like Cleon that they are punished mercilessly for doing so. Perhaps this why Thucydides labels them “the two people who on each side had been most opposed to peace—Brasidas because of the success and honour which had come to him through war, Cleon because he thought that in a time of peace and quiet people would be more likely to notice his evil doings.”⁸⁶ Peace, or rest, would effectively see the demise of both. War and motion would continue to reward them for their spiritedness.

Thucydides ends his account of the Mytilenean Debate by telling us that after hearing both of Cleon and Diodotus speak, and “in spite of the recent change of feeling,” the Athenians still held conflicting opinions.⁸⁷ At the show of hands the votes were nearly equal; Cleon had managed to change “more minds than Diodotus had changed back.”⁸⁸ And although Diodotus’ motion is passed, justice is nonetheless served: “The other Mytilenians whom Paches had send to Athens as being the ones chiefly responsible for the revolt were, on the motion of Cleon, put to death by the Athenians. There were rather more than 1000 of them.”⁸⁹ It seems, then, that regardless of Diodotus’ more reasonable stance the desire for revenge, indeed the desire for retributive, on the part of the Athenian people, nonetheless prevailed.

⁸⁵Strauss, *The City and Man*, 213.

⁸⁶Thucydides, 4.16.2

⁸⁷Ibid., 3.49.3

⁸⁸Orwin, *The Humanity of Thucydides*, 154.

⁸⁹Thucydides, 3.50.3.

The tension between necessity and justice as articulated in this particular debate therefore, points to an awareness and concern underlying Thucydides' thought, for the universal truth that is the problem of the political spirit in human affairs. This concern is revealed most notably in the Mytilenean Debate as Thucydides points to Cleon as an example of *thumos* run amuck—a disordered soul driven by passion and desire, willing to play off of the passions of the people—and Diodotus as the voice of reason, whose speech is indicative of how weak that reason is in its persuasiveness. After having Cleon's passionate concern for justice checked by the relative wisdom of Diodotus, both Diodotus and Thucydides nonetheless point to the inherent weakness of that wisdom in the world. For both, the thumotic tension between necessity and justice characteristic of human life, coupled by this weakness, impels men to act in certain ways and in response to certain events that either undermine or challenge their conception of the good, which is always and inextricably connected to their own. "Thucydidean wisdom thus perceives folly, willfulness, and perversity as the rule for human beings, and as volcanic in their power when aroused."⁹⁰ Thucydidean wisdom provides an implicit account of the problem of the political spirit in human affairs.

The End of Plataea

After having established his concern for the thumotic tension between necessity and justice in the Mytilenean Debate, and hence his concern for the universal problem of the political spirit in human affairs, Thucydides then recounts the story of Plataea, whereby this unresolved tension effectively sees five Spartan judges sanction its "end." Specifically, the Plataeans are put on trial and charged with the crime of having injured Sparta for having collaborated with Athens. In response to a perceived injustice done to them, the Spartans give in to their thumotic anger as

⁹⁰Orwin, *The Humanity of Thucydides*, 203.

a nation betrayed, and in defense of a justice they believe in: the freedom of all Greeks from Athenian tyranny. And, finding them guilty for having undermined this noble cause, they sentence the Plataeans to death, one by one.

According to Thucydides, Plataea had been loyal to Athens, but after running out of provisions during a siege against the Spartans, she had become unable to put up any further resistance, and quickly surrendered. In response to her surrender, the Spartans claim that they are concerned, above all, with justice. They declare that the guilty will be punished, but only after they have been granted a “fair trial.”⁹¹ As a result, “the issue of necessity or of expediency, as distinguished from that of right,” of justice, “and in particular whether it is expedient for the Spartans and their allies to kill the Plataeans is not raised.”⁹² Rather, the “issue debated before the Spartan tribunal is exclusively whether the Plataeans were just or unjust, guilty or innocent.”⁹³ The issue is over whether or not the Plataeans have done anything to help Sparta and her cause: liberating the Greek world from Athenian tyranny.

Naturally, the Plataeans hold certain reservations regarding the partiality of such a trial. Due to the fact that “no accusation has been brought forward [for them] to answer,” it seems “that the issue at stake is nothing less than life or death,” and moreover, “that [the Spartans] are not going to act impartially.”⁹⁴ From the perspective of the Plataeans, they have been given “the kind of trial in which the verdict has already been decided in advance.”⁹⁵ And, in light these circumstances, decide that the “safest thing” to do is “to speak [their] minds at all costs.”⁹⁶

⁹¹Thucydides, 3.52.13.

⁹²Strauss, *The City and Man*, 190.

⁹³Ibid., 215.

⁹⁴Thucydides, 3.53.7.

⁹⁵Ibid., 3.53.25.

⁹⁶Ibid., 3.53.12.

Specifically, the Plataeans argue that they were compelled to side with Athens on account of the fact that Thebes had committed frequent acts of aggression against them. Accordingly, they “have acted towards Sparta as well as circumstances have permitted.”⁹⁷ Moreover, according to the Plataeans, the Athenians had helped them against Thebes at a time when Sparta was unwilling to do the same.⁹⁸ In fact, Plataea had approached Sparta, asking for protection long before she felt it necessary to approach Athens. In effect, they had no choice—they were compelled to side with Athens so as to ward off frequent acts of aggression from Thebes. Their justification for siding with Athens is thus indicative of the justice that comes from compulsion. They “have a *right* to do as their *need* impels them.”⁹⁹ (Italics mine)

But the issue remains. What have they done for Sparta? Have they done anything to help Sparta and her cause? The judges demand an answer but receive only excuses in reply:

If you are going to take as your standards of justice your own immediate advantage, and their hatred for us, you will stand confessed as people who are more interested in pursuing you own interests than in judging sincerely between right and wrong.¹⁰⁰

Alas, in their defense, the Plataeans suggest what Thucydides himself later confirms: that “it was largely because of Thebes that the Spartans acted so mercilessly towards the Plataeans; they considered that at this stage of the war the Thebans were useful to them.”¹⁰¹ The Plataeans are brought forward one by one and again, asked the same question: “Have you done anything to help the Spartans and their allies in the war?” According to Thucydides, “as each man replied ‘No,’ he was taken away and put to death, no exceptions being made.”¹⁰² The Plataeans are thus

⁹⁷Orwin, *The Humanity of Thucydides*, 71.

⁹⁸Thucydides, 3.55.9.

⁹⁹Ibid., 3.59.12.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 3.56.8.

¹⁰¹Ibid., 3.68.28.

¹⁰²Ibid., 3.65.15

killed, “the Spartans having identified, according to the Plataeans’ contention, the just with what is immediately profitable to them, for it was profitable to them to give in to the Thebans’ savage hatred for the Plataeans.”¹⁰³ It seems, then, that the Spartan judges, in what can only be regarded as an act of blatant hypocrisy, dispense of their concern for justice entirely, opting instead for mere necessity. They “interpret what is advantageous to them as just.”¹⁰⁴

Important to note, however, is that those who are most hypocritical, tend also to be the most sincere; for instances of blatant hypocrisy often spring from those who genuinely believe in the justice of their actions. Hence, “it would be a gross exaggeration to say that the Spartans’ concern with justice or piety was merely hypocritical.”¹⁰⁵ Indeed, “the judges are judges at least in this: they have not discussed whether extinguishing Plataea would be useful, but only whether it would be just.”¹⁰⁶ Accordingly, because the issue of necessity or expedience is not discussed, it seems to suggest that, regardless of their blatant hypocrisy as judges, they are not cynics as human beings: they genuinely believe in the justice of their position.

To be sure, then, they are concerned, above all, with justice. But their concern for justice is partial insofar as their conception of it is prejudiced. Their conception of the good, of justice, is seen as universal insofar as liberating the Greek world from Athenian tyranny is reflective of the common good of all Greeks. Hence “the crime of which the Spartans judge is Plataea’s loyalty to Athens, i.e. a line of conduct which is criminal only on the basis of the assumption” that “the cause of Sparta is identical with the cause of justice.”¹⁰⁷ It may be in their self-interest to side

¹⁰³ Strauss, *The City and Man*, 190.

¹⁰⁴ Orwin, *The Humanity of Thucydides*, 84.

¹⁰⁵ Strauss, *The City and Man*, 217.

¹⁰⁶ Orwin, *The Humanity of Thucydides*, 78.

¹⁰⁷ Strauss, *The City and Man*, 215.

with Thebes, but they do so first and foremost out of a sincere concern for justice, however partial that concern for and conception of it may be.

According to Thucydides, “their grounds were that, in accordance with the original treaty made with Pausanias after the Persian War, they had all the time (so they said) counted on Plataean neutrality.” Moreover “just before the recent siege, they had offered [the Plataeans] the same conditions of neutrality implied by the treaty, and this offer had not been accepted.” As a result, “the justice of their intentions had, they considered, released them from their obligations under the treaty, and it was at this point that they had suffered injury from Plataea.”¹⁰⁸ In other words, after having offered Plataea neutrality and having Plataea reject their offer, Sparta became an injured party and thus exempt from having to fulfill any previous commitments. She had already been betrayed when Plataea decided to join Athens, and having her offer of neutrality rejected added insult to injury.

When taken into account, sincerity on the part of the Spartan judges seems to suggest that their decision to effectively “end” Plataea, to find guilty and condemn the Plataeans for having collaborated with Athens, was motivated, perhaps not entirely, but primarily out of a blinding desire for justice—revenge for an obvious wrongdoing. By collaborating with Athens, the Plataeans were in effect guilty of not only conspiring against Sparta, but Sparta’s cause. They have not merely wronged Sparta, which, given their circumstances and when taken by itself, might have been justifiable. No, they have wronged Sparta’s cause which is universal and have thereby committed a grave injustice. “It is not then surprising that the Spartans pander to Theban vindictiveness without recognizing that they are preferring the expedient to the just. Long

¹⁰⁸Thucydides, 3.68.1.

habituated to act as their interests seem to require, they do so as smugly as if meting out impeccable justice.”¹⁰⁹

Due to the thumotic tension between necessity and justice, the Spartan judges opt for the former at the expense of the latter by attaching the former to the latter. They therefore justify their own in terms of advancing the good on behalf of the entire Greek world. Having undermined this noble cause, Plataea had in effect, undermined Spartan justice, and for this reason, the Spartan judges saw themselves as justified in sanctioning its end, for allowing Theban vengeance to act on behalf of Sparta as an injured party. In short, they distribute justice on a scale indicative of their thumotic anger as a nation betrayed, and allow their Theban allies to take vengeance on Plataea for choosing to side with Athens, “with whom she must stand or fall.”¹¹⁰

The Melian Dialogue

Notorious among scholars for its cold, calculating, and hence “realistic” tone, read more closely, The Melian Dialogue also points to the problem of the political spirit in human affairs, as the inescapable tension between necessity and justice, realism and idealism, characteristic of human life emerges from both an Athenian and Melian perspective. Indeed, “the tension between justice and the moral necessity constituted by the human concern with self-preservation and self-interest, first suggested by the exchange between the Corcyraens and the Corinthians at Athens remains unresolved.”¹¹¹ And just as in the case of Plataea before it, the failure to resolve this tension ushers in the end of Melos as well.

¹⁰⁹Orwin, *The Humanity of Thucydides*, 78.

¹¹⁰Thucydides, 3.64.7

¹¹¹Paul A. Rahe, “Thucydides’ Critique of Realpolitik,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Winter, 1995): 125.

Unlike the Spartans at Plataea, who, in determining the fate of the Plataeans, were concerned, above all, with justice, the Athenians at Melos are concerned, above all, with necessity. As such, there is a tendency within academic circles to treat the Melian Dialogue as nothing more than a obvious display of political realism at its finest, a realism whereby the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must.¹¹² But, just as the Spartan judges at Plataea, who, at the expense of justice, found themselves incapable of ignoring necessity, so too do the Athenians at Melos find themselves incapable of ignoring justice entirely. As a result, this exchange is “no more a dialogue than the Plataean debate was a trial; nothing the Melians can say will alter the outcome.”¹¹³ And as we shall see, because of the thumotic tension between necessity and justice, indeed, the inability of the Athenians to dispense of their concern for justice, the strong do what they can and more, while the weak suffer more than what they must.

According to Thucydides, the Melians were an island colony from Sparta, who, unlike other islanders, had refused to join the Athenian empire. For this reason, it became particularly important for the empire to capture the island of Melos so as to prevent other islander nations already subject to Athenian rule from rebelling in the future; for, if they were to remain on friendly or neutral terms with the Melians, their other subjects “would regard [it] as a sign of [Athenian] weakness.”¹¹⁴ As a result, the Athenians sent a group of envoys to Melos in order to negotiate its peaceful surrender.

Almost immediately, the Athenian envoys “determine the principle of deliberation.”¹¹⁵ They will deliberate over the principle of necessity. “We on our side,” explain the envoys, “will

¹¹²See Chapter One, footnote 40.

¹¹³Thucydides, 124.

¹¹⁴Ibid., 5.95.3.

¹¹⁵Strauss, *The City and Man*, 185.

use no fine phrases saying, for example, that we have a right to our empire because we defeated the Persians, or that we have come against you now because of the injuries you have done us—a great mass of words nobody would believe.”¹¹⁶ Rather, “we recommend that you should try to get what is possible for you to get, taking into consideration what we both really do think,” namely, “that the standard of justice depends on the equality of power to compel and that in fact the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept.”¹¹⁷ Seen in this light, reason or rationality articulated in terms of mere self-interest render questions of justice irrelevant. The issue is not what is just but what is feasible, and what is feasible for both parties, according to the Athenians, is for the Melians to comply.

Having dispensed of their concern for justice, the Athenians proceed to argue from the perspective of necessity articulating Melian necessity in terms of mere survival and their own in terms of profit: “What we shall do now is to show you that it is for the good of our empire that we are here and that it is for the preservation of your city that we shall say what we are going to say. We do not want any trouble in bringing you into our empire, and we want you to be spared for the good both of yourselves and of ourselves.”¹¹⁸ What is necessary is for the strong to rule and for the weak to obey. “By giving in,” then, the Melians “would save [themselves] from disaster;” while the Athenians, “by not destroying [them],” would profit from their continued existence as tribute paying subjects of Athens.¹¹⁹

Important to note, however, is that although the Athenians argue that justice is irrelevant, they nonetheless attribute to their world view a certain universal quality, and in doing so,

¹¹⁶Thucydides, 5.89.1.

¹¹⁷Ibid., 5.98.8.

¹¹⁸Ibid., 5.91.8.

¹¹⁹Ibid., 5.92.1.

implicitly attach to it a certain air of justice reflective of their own position. Their “assertion of what one may call the natural right of the stronger” is “not a doctrine of Athenian imperialism; it is a universal doctrine; it applies to Sparta, for instance, as well as to Athens.”¹²⁰ As a result, their behaviour, in a sense, qualifies as just behaviour insofar as they are acting according to a universal principle, the truth of which is known by all. Or, As the Athenian envoys at Melos explain: “This is not a law that we made ourselves. Nor were we the first to act upon it when it was made.” Rather, we “found it already in existence,” and hence “are merely acting in accordance with it, and we know that you or anybody else with the same power as ours would be acting in precisely the same way.”¹²¹ So it follows that what might otherwise be regarded as unjust—namely, imperialism—is in fact justifiable given its universal appeal among the strong, and universal repugnance among the weak.

Not only is their behaviour justifiable in terms of a universal principle, however. It is also justifiable insofar as it coincides with their belief in the gods. According to the envoys, their “aims” and “actions” are “perfectly consistent with the beliefs men hold about the gods and with the principles which govern their own conduct”¹²² Hence, by associating their “opinion of the gods” to “a general and necessary law of nature,” which says “rule whatever one can,” the Athenians essentially define justice according to natural law (which the gods endorse) in order to justify their behavior as an imperial power.

Accordingly, although the Athenians proclaim that it is not a “fair fight, with honor on one side and shame on the other,” they nonetheless treat it as such by making the argument that a

¹²⁰Strauss, *The City and Man*, 191.

¹²¹Thucydides, 5.105.7.

¹²²Ibid., 5.105.2.

world without justice is in and of itself just, and moreover, that the gods agree.¹²³ The natural world may in fact be indifferent to justice as the Athenian envoys insist, but as political animals with a view to justice and injustice alike, human beings are not. And so, despite their otherwise amoral claim and amoral worldview, neither are they. They too, must justify their behavior in terms of a justice, reflective of what they regard as their own necessity, and not surprisingly, invoke the gods in doing so.

The Melians, however, also seek the favor of the gods as they seek to justify their own necessity, which, according to them, consists not merely of surviving, but of surviving as a free and proud people—in other words, surviving with honor. “Obedience from fear is acting out of urgent necessity,” but it “degrades the soul because” people “feel the shame of their base surrender to authority” and simply cannot “respect themselves or think themselves free.”¹²⁴ Unable to think themselves free as tribute paying subjects of Athens, the Melians decide that they would rather put their faith in fortune and the gods: “we trust that the gods will give us fortune” because “we are standing for what is right against what is wrong”¹²⁵ Hence, not only do they reject the Athenian claim that justice is irrelevant (equivalent to natural law) but instead, argue that justice is and of itself a universal principle reflective of “the general good of all men” because it ensures fair play for those who “fall into danger” and ensures that such people can “profit from arguments that fall short of mathematical accuracy.”¹²⁶ Simply put, justice precludes the strong from doing what they can so as to protect weak from suffering what they must. Justice plays the role of an intangible arbiter in disputes that might otherwise be arbitrated according to tangible, cold, and unforgiving calculations of power.

¹²³Thucydides, 5.101.2.

¹²⁴Harvey Mansfield, *Tocqueville: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 36.

¹²⁵Thucydides, 5.404.3.

¹²⁶*Ibid.*, 5.90.3.

Accordingly, the thumotic tension between necessity and justice sees both of the Athenians and the Melians look to the gods as they seek to justify what they regard as necessary in light of their own respective positions. Each evaluate justice in its own, prejudiced way. As a result, both define justice according to their own advantage—that is, with a view to what they regard as necessary—and hence put forth differing evaluations of justice that necessarily conflict. For the Athenians, it is advantageous to dispense of justice altogether, to equate justice with natural law, so as to justify their otherwise unjust behavior as an imperial power; for the Melians, it is advantageous to retain justice as a universal and noble principle, to hold it above natural law, so as to justify or defend their freedom and honor as a people. Each defend their own by attaching it to a particular conception of the good, shedding light on the thumotic tension between necessity and justice characteristic of human life and the problem of the political spirit in human affairs.

Unwilling to “give up in a short moment the liberty” they enjoy, the Melians decide to put their “trust in the fortune of the gods.”¹²⁷ Behind this decision lies an implicit claim to justice: namely, that they “are standing for what is right against what is wrong.”¹²⁸ Recognizing this thumotic claim to justice, the Athenians respond by offering the Melians some patronizing advice:

Do not be led astray by a false sense of honour,” they argue—“a thing which often brings men to ruin when they are faced with an obvious danger that somehow affects their pride. For in many cases men have still been able to the dangers ahead of them, but this thing called dishonor, this word, by its own force of seduction, has drawn them into a state where they have surrendered to an idea, while in fact they have fallen voluntarily into irrevocable disaster, in dishonor that is all the more dishonourable because it has come to them from their own folly rather than their misfortune.¹²⁹

¹²⁷Thucydides, 5.113.7.

¹²⁸Ibid., 5.104.3.

¹²⁹Ibid., 5.111.14.

Completely deluded, the Melians decide that surrendering to the idea of justice and dying as free men is more honorable than surrendering to the yoke of Athenian imperialism. They would rather risk their lives in order to save their lives as a proud and free people, than forfeit their pride and honor as subjects of Athens. “For with honor goes the shame of dishonor.”¹³⁰

Deaf to the voice of reason, which places their concern for survival or necessity ahead of their concern for justice, the Melians’ unwavering commitment to honor, to justice, infuriates the Athenians to a point where even they are no long capable of suppressing their all-too human concern for it. As a result, when they “subdue the stubborn Melians, they do not calmly calculate how they should treat these conquered people in accordance with their self-interest; instead, they give in to indignant anger and satisfy their desire for retribution by slaughtering and enslaving the people who they suppose have done them an injustice.”¹³¹ Or, as Orwin explains:

The envoys have claimed to banish all concern for justice from the conversation, but they have not banished it from their hearts. In their anger they display a peculiar kind of retributiveness, that of the debunker of justice (and thus of retribution) angry because his debunking has been rejected.¹³²

Alas, the desire for retribution motivated by indignant anger is but a claim to justice on the part of the Athenians who feel that their self-worth, supported by their physical and moral superiority as an imperial power, has not been recognized or appraised at the value set by themselves, but instead been undermined by those physically and morally inferior Melians.

A spirited and thumotic resistance on the part of the Melians thus evokes a proportionate and equally thumotic response from the Athenians and justice as defined by Cleon during the Mytilenean Debate is distributed without forethought on the island of Melos. Frustrated with

¹³⁰Harvey Mansfield, “How to Understand Politics,” *First Things* (August/September, 2007), 44.

¹³¹Pangle, Ahrens Dorf, *Justice among Nations: On the Moral Basis of Power and Peace*, 24.

¹³²Orwin, *The Humanity of Thucydides*, 117.

what can only be regarded as an irrational resolve on the part of the Melians, the Athenians respond irrationally and “put to death all the men of military age whom they took, and sell the women and children into slavery.”¹³³ The thumotic tension between necessity and justice again reveals itself through indignant anger as the self-proclaimed realistic Athenians give in to their all too-human concern for justice.

The Case for Perpetual War

When taken together, all three of The Mytilenean Debate, The End of Plataea, and The Melian Dialogue point to the essential problem of the political spirit in human affairs—a general truth extrapolated from the particular events that took place in each of Athens, Plataea, and Melos, during the Peloponnesian War. In the Mytilenean Debate, Thucydides establishes the relative weakness of reason in the world and an unresolved tension between necessity and justice as something that will inevitably lead human beings to defend and fight on behalf of differing evaluations of justice, which are always and inextricably connected to their own. Whereas in the case of Plataea, this tension reveals the Spartans as a people less concerned with justice than with necessity; in the case of the Melians, it reveals the Athenians as a people less concerned with necessity than with justice. Hence, all three reveal the fact that “man’s constant need to justify his actions in light of virtue thereby elicits his attempt to do so” which “implies he has an understanding of what is ultimately right for man as man.”¹³⁴ Accordingly, as long as man continues to live in this tension and therefore continues disagree over what is “ultimately right for man as man,” conflict between human beings will continue to occur, and war will, presumably, remain a permanent feature of the human condition.

¹³³Thucydides, 5.116.12

¹³⁴Lauriello, “Diodotus and Thucydides,” 306.

Chapter Three
The Case for Perpetual Peace: The Political Spirit in Kant

Nature as Purposive: History as Progressive

Like Thucydides before him, Kant too grappled with the thumotic tension between realism and idealism, necessity and justice, characteristic of human life. However, whereas Thucydides was content merely to point out the problem of the political spirit in human affairs, Kant included it into his moral philosophy and idea for a progressive history as something in fact integral to the gradual evolution of perpetual peace. In contrast to Thucydides, Kant argued that peace is guaranteed insofar as man's thumotic nature, or "asocial-sociability" (his selfish antagonisms (necessity) juxtaposed by his desire for recognition (justice)) will bring otherwise asocial human beings and the nations they create, together into social harmony. In effect, whereas Thucydides in his *History of the Peloponnesian War* regarded man's thumotic nature as something conducive to motion, or war, and in particular, the greatest motion known to him, Kant, in his *To Perpetual Peace*, interpreted man's thumotic nature as something ultimately conducive to rest, to peace, and in particular, the greatest rest ever known to man. Simply put, where Thucydides sees perpetual war, Kant sees perpetual peace.

Key to understanding Kant's *To Perpetual Peace*, however, is a wider understanding of Kant's progressive view of history. Like Thucydides before him, Kant understood the human condition in terms of an unresolved tension between necessity and justice. For Kant, however, this tension is articulated in terms of an unresolved tension between nature and reason, or what he referred to as the phenomenal and noumenal. Whereas the phenomenal is a realm in which human beings exist as mere creatures of the senses, the noumenal is a realm in which they live as free beings, capable of reason. Hence, whereas the phenomenal accounts for man's animal nature

as an instinctual being bound by necessity, the noumenal accounts for man's nature as a free being, demanding of justice.

Unlike Thucydides, however, who points to this tension as the starting point for human conflict, Kant regards this tension as the starting point for historical and thus human progress. Specifically, in his essay "Idea for Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View," Kant acknowledges that any historical plan or attempt to establish peace set forth by man will be lacking because human nature remains morally incomplete. Human beings remain subjective in their reasoning due to their participation in both a phenomenal and noumenal world. Therefore, unlike animals who function solely according to instinct and in accordance with some kind of pre-determined end, "men in their endeavors behave, on the whole, not just instinctively, like the brutes, nor yet like rational citizens of the world according to some agreed-on plan."¹³⁵ In their endeavors, men are subject to both necessity and justice, phenomenal and noumenal, which is why "no history of man conceived according to a plan seems to be possible, as it might be possible to have such a history of bees or beavers."¹³⁶

Kant's proposed solution to this dilemma of being subject to both a phenomenal and noumenal existence is to conceive of "a philosophic history that will discover a natural plan for creatures who have no plan of their own."¹³⁷ According to Kant, this natural plan depends on none other than Nature herself, thereby placing progress, or historical purposiveness, into the hands of Nature and out of the hands of morally imperfect human beings.

¹³⁵Kant, *On History*, 12.

¹³⁶Ibid.

¹³⁷Ibid.

For Kant, the reason is simple: nothing in Nature is vain or without purpose. “An organ, writes Kant, “that is of no use, an arrangement that does not achieve its purpose, are contradictions in the teleological theory of nature.”¹³⁸ In accordance with this view, neither is the human condition, which is incomplete or imperfect, vain. Rather, the thumotic tension between necessity and justice, phenomenal and noumenal, must exist for a reason and thus have a purpose beyond itself. It must be a means to some intelligible end; it must be more than an end in itself. To err is human, but to be human is not simply to err. Rather, to be human is to be free, and in being free, fulfill some kind of purpose that transcends mere existence. Otherwise, writes Kant, “Nature, whose wisdom must serve as the fundamental principle in judging all her other offspring, would thereby make man alone a contemptible plaything.”¹³⁹

In short, if Nature is purposive History is necessarily progressive. Nature as something purposive presupposes an intelligible end or historical plan for those “creatures” who have no plan of their own, rendering the course of history progressive and history itself, more than a series of random events. Accordingly, it is Nature’s purpose and humanity’s natural end to achieve a state of peace, a “lawful order among men.”¹⁴⁰ Due to his reason and on account of his freedom, man is destined to fulfill the end of peace by way of establishing a perfectly just constitution. Or as Kant puts it: “the greatest problem for the human race, to the solution of which Nature drives man, is the achievement of a universal civic society which administers law among men.”¹⁴¹

¹³⁸Kant, *On History*, 13.

¹³⁹Ibid.

¹⁴⁰Ibid.

¹⁴¹Ibid., 16.

According to Kant, the mechanism responsible for the evolution of peace is none other than man's asocial-sociability. "Man," writes Kant "has an inclination to associate with others because in society he feels himself to be more than man i.e. as more than the developed form of his natural capacities."¹⁴² In other words, man has an inclination to associate with others insofar as he desires to be recognized as something more than a mere solitary and instinctual being. As Fukuyama explains: "The desire for recognition is the most specifically political part of the human personality because it is what drives men to want to assert themselves over other men, and thereby into Kant's condition of asocial-sociability."¹⁴³ Despite the fact that man has a strong propensity to isolate himself from others, in order to be recognized, to feel himself as more than man, he is forced by his very nature to associate with others. Hence the mechanism for Kant, is, surprisingly, "not reason, but rather reason's opposite: the selfish antagonism created by man's asocial-sociability which leads men to leave the war of all against all and join together in community."¹⁴⁴

Accordingly, the asocial-social nature of man speaks to the essential problem of the political spirit in human affairs, which sees human beings attach their own to some conception of the good, leading differing evaluations of the good to conflict. A self-interested desire for recognition (honor) guarantees both political concord and discord insofar as it forces us to compete against one another, in what Hegel would later refer to as a "struggle for recognition." "This opposition," writes Kant, "awakens all [of man's] powers, brings him to conquer his inclination to laziness and, propelled by vain-glory, lust for power, and avarice, to achieve a rank

¹⁴²Kant, *On History*, 15.

¹⁴³Fukuyama, *The End of History and The Last Man*, 163.

¹⁴⁴Ibid.

among his fellows whom he cannot tolerate but from he cannot withdraw.”¹⁴⁵ Thanks Be to Nature, writes Kant,

...for the incompatibility, for heartless competitive vanity, for the insatiable desire to possess and to rule! Without them, all the excellent natural capacities of humanity would forever sleep, undeveloped...The natural urges to this, the sources of unsociableness and mutual opposition from which so many evils arise, drive men to new exertions of their forces and thus to the manifold development of their capacities.¹⁴⁶

This opposition between men awakens in man his spirited nature as a political animal bound by necessity yet demanding of justice, and therefore subject to instinctual forces that prevent him from reaching his moral height. The idea or ideal of justice, however, can only be realized or recognized in a social setting, rendering *thumos*, or the political spirit the source of both disorder and order in political life, and therefore as the natural mechanism responsible for war and peace alike.

To Perpetual Peace

Although the First Supplement in *To Perpetual Peace* does not appear until the end of the essay, it is here where Kant’s argument actually begins. Indeed, “if read straight through from start to finish” the arguments in Kant’s essay on peace “are hard to grasp and unpersuasive. But when we read them backward, a coherent, or almost coherent, line of thought emerges.”¹⁴⁷ Borrowing from his essay “Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View,” Kant takes his idea of an asocial-sociability among men, and places it an international context in order to account for an asocial-sociability among nations. Just as the political spirit, man’s asocial-social nature, forces men into political communities, so too will with the thumotic nature

¹⁴⁵Kant, *On History*, 15.

¹⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁴⁷Charles Hill, *Grand Strategies: Literature Statecraft and World Order*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 124.

of the nations they create, usher in a community of states. Therefore, like peace among men, peace among nations is guaranteed insofar as Nature wills it: the asocial-sociability of nations will do what reason cannot. As Kant explains:

Instead of genuine morality, the mechanism of nature brings it to pass through selfish inclinations, which naturally conflict outwardly but which can be used by reason as a means for its own end, the sovereignty of law, and as concerns the state, for promoting and securing internal and external peace.¹⁴⁸

Regardless of man's immediate intentions, Nature will deliver on the promise of peace because as history indicates and has already shown, "peace is possible without morality."¹⁴⁹ By making use of man's thumotic nature—his selfish tendencies juxtaposed by his desire to be more than man, to be recognized in a social setting—Nature, working through the asocial-sociability of man wills what human reason alone can prescribe: the end of peace.

Such a peace, however, is not without cost. Indeed, "what we neglect to do [will] come about by itself, though with great inconveniences to us," writes Kant.¹⁵⁰ By inconveniences, Kant means war. Nations will continue to fight each other because of their natural differences. Nature, writes Kant, employs "two means to separate people and to prevent them from mixing: differences of language and religion. These differences involve a tendency to mutual hatred and pretexts for war." These differences, therefore, account for man's asocial nature and the selfish antagonisms between men, conducive to differing evaluations of justice which are reflective of differing cultural particularities. In short, these differences account for one's own, one's realism or self-interest, which, when placed in context of man's political spirit, necessarily influence one's conception of the good, leading differing evaluations of the good to conflict.

¹⁴⁸Kant, *To Perpetual Peace*, 26.

¹⁴⁹Susan Shell. *The Rights of Reason: A Study of Kant's Philosophy and Politics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 176.

¹⁵⁰Kant, *To Perpetual Peace*, 25.

For Kant, however, it is precisely these differences which “Nature wills” that force men and the nations they create into a social whole. States, like individuals, desire recognition. Because war is “engrafted in human nature” and “regarded as something noble in itself to which man is inspired by the love of glory apart from motives of self-interest,” the war that occurs as a result of this love of glory, or desire to be recognized, ushers in the end of peace. Hence, although these differences serve as pretexts for war, through war, men gradually approach greater harmony in their principles, which will eventually culminate into peaceful agreement between them.

Furthermore, man’s natural tendency towards war combined with what Kant refers to as the “commercial spirit,” which “sooner or later takes possession of every nation”¹⁵¹ will channel the remaining selfish tendencies of men and the nations they create into the market and out of the polis. This will allow for a nation’s asocial nature, conducive to conflict, to exist and thrive within an economic framework supportive of a political framework governed by law. As Kant explains:

The commercial spirit cannot co-exist with war...for, all of the forces which lie at the command of a state, the power of money is probably the most reliable. Hence states find themselves compelled—not, it is true, exactly from motives of morality—to further the noble end of peace and to avert war, by means of mediation, wherever it threatens to break out, just as if they had made a permanent league for this.¹⁵²

Economic interdependence, then, will weaken political antagonisms between states on account of the fact that the costs of war will begin to outweigh the economic benefits associated with maintaining peace. “International law may lack direct enforcement; it, can, however, fall back on

¹⁵¹Kant, *To Perpetual Peace*, 28.

¹⁵²Ibid.

the indirect enforcement provided by a world wide economy.”¹⁵³ Mediation, not war, will become the preferred option in an international arena where economic prosperity among nations begins to take precedence over the selfish and self-interested claims to morality and justice between them. In time, the commercial spirit will subdue that of the political in both men and the nations they create.

Hence, rather than eradicate the political spirit from the human condition altogether, Kant incorporates it into his philosophical sketch as something in fact integral to the evolution of perpetual peace. “In this manner,” writes Kant, nature guarantees perpetual peace by the mechanism of human passions.” He incorporates the otherwise volatile and unpredictable nature of the passions into his progressive history by placing his concept of asocial-sociability in an international context. The war that occurs as a result of man’s political spirit will enable him to devise a system of international law strong enough to deter it, and as nations become more and more economically interdependent, the deterring effects of international law will strengthen. Alas, what Thucydides pointed to as the starting point for human conflict, Kant regarded as the starting point for historical progress: “In the self-seeking tendencies of men this disagreement in principle exists and may always survive; for it serves as a whetstone to virtue,” and in this way, a whetstone to peace.¹⁵⁴

The problem, however, is that Kant’s evolutionary theory for peace is predicated on the assumption that peace thus understood has already evolved within individual states. To be sure, peace has evolved insofar as man’s asocial-sociability has led to the founding of political communities. But the rule of law within such communities remains imposed and is thus

¹⁵³Shell, *The Rights of Reason*, 176.

¹⁵⁴Kant, *To Perpetual Peace*, 43.

dependent upon on an enforcement mechanism—a Leviathan or “subduer of the proud” that will serve as a check on man’s thumotic behavior. Moreover, regardless of the rule of law, laws continue to be broken which seems to suggest that peace has not in fact evolved to a point where *nomos* (law) governs *physis* (nature). As Kant explains:

Man is an animal which, if it lives among others of its kind, requires a master. For he certainly abuses his freedom with respect to other men, and although as a reasonable being he wishes to have a law which limits the freedom of all, his selfish animal impulses tempt him, where possible, to exempt himself from them.¹⁵⁵

Hence, even under a system of finely tuned international laws, nations drawn towards the invisible, or as Kant puts it, “selfish,” factors of hope and desire pointed out by Diodotus in the Mytilenean debate, will nonetheless risk breaking those laws regardless of the consequences. And, if the example of Brasidas reminds us of any one thing it is this: a single man’s ability to persuade entire peoples, leading them to act on behalf of what they desire by deluding them into thinking that what they desire is also what they deserve.

Kant himself acknowledges that entire peoples have a tendency to act on behalf of what they think they deserve or believe is right when he comments on the “inhospitable behavior” of “civilized nations,” highlighting the injustice “they exhibit on visiting foreign lands and races.”¹⁵⁶ Such injustices, according to Kant, are often carried out by those “nations who make a great ado about their piety, and who, while they are quite ready to commit injustice, would like, in their orthodoxy, to be considered among the elect.”¹⁵⁷ According to Kant, then, nations who regard themselves as “elect” and claim to be morally superior are equally if not more prone to committing injustice in the world.

¹⁵⁵Kant, *On History*, 17.

¹⁵⁶Kant, *To Perpetual Peace*, 19.

¹⁵⁷Ibid.

In order to address this issue of self-righteousness among states, Kant gives us his third definitive article: “*The rights of men, as citizens of the world, shall be limited to the conditions of universal hospitality.*”¹⁵⁸ Important to note, is that hospitality in this sense is negative—it does not mean that men have a right to be treated as guests, or receive some kind of special treatment upon their entering into a foreign territory. Rather, by hospitality Kant simply means the right “to be treated” without “hostility.”¹⁵⁹ As Kant explains:

This right to hospitality, however—that is to say, the privilege of strangers arriving on foreign soil—does not amount to more than what is implied in a permission to make an attempt at intercourse with the original inhabitants. In this way far distant territories may enter into peaceful relations with one another.” These relations may at last come under the public control of law, and thus the human race may be brought nearer the realization of a cosmopolitan constitution.¹⁶⁰

By limiting lawful interaction between states to hospitality thus understood, Kant establishes a precondition necessary for upholding the integrity of an international system governed by law, by *nomos*. The right to hospitality itself, however, guarantees nothing insofar as peace is concerned; it merely outlaws nations from acting on their otherwise imperial and self-righteous ambitions, from acting on behalf of a prejudiced conception of justice informed by necessity. Hence, it is “no fantastical, high-flown, notion of right,” writes Kant, “but a complement of the unwritten code of law—constitutional as well as international law—necessary for the public rights of mankind in general and thus for the realization of perpetual peace.”¹⁶¹

So what about those nations with imperial ambitions? What about those nations who continue to act in an otherwise spirited fashion, determined to force their will on others? The right to hospitality may condemn them for it, but will it really prevent them from acting on it?

¹⁵⁸Kant, *To Perpetual Peace*, 17.

¹⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁶⁰*Ibid.*

¹⁶¹*Ibid.*, 20.

After all, Thucydides teaches us that even the most civilized of nations, those of Athens and Sparta, have a tendency to pursue foreign policies that violate the right to hospitality and hence the rights of other peoples.

Kant addresses this problem in his second definitive article, which states that “*The law of nations should be founded on a federation of free states.*”¹⁶² In it, Kant draws a comparison between states that are composed of individuals who say “there shall be no war among us, for we shall form ourselves into a state—that is to say, constitute for ourselves a supreme legislative, administrative, and judicial power which will settle our disputes peaceably,” and nations who say “there shall be no war between me and other states, although I recognize no supreme lawgiving power which will secure me my rights and whose rights I will guarantee.”¹⁶³ In doing so, Kant argues that the latter will only make this commitment against war if their rights as individual nations, are guaranteed in a way similar to those of the former—that is, by way of a “compact on which civil society is based—namely, a free federation which reason must necessarily connect with the idea of the law of nations,” as it does with the idea of the law of individuals.¹⁶⁴

In short, Kant argues that the only thing that will effectively prevent nations from acting on their imperial ambitions or spirited nature—indeed, the only thing that will prevent nations from deciding what is just and enforcing it “by means of one-sided maxims applied by force,” is the formation of a federation of states, whereby all members enter into a compact similar to that of civil society. Otherwise, writes Kant, “there can be, according to reason, no other way of advancing from that lawless condition which unceasing war implies, than by giving up their savage lawless freedom, just as individual men have done, and yielding to the coercion of public

¹⁶²Kant, *To Perpetual Peace*, 13.

¹⁶³*Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁶⁴*Ibid.*

laws.”¹⁶⁵ Not surprisingly, Kant argues that such a federation will come into being the same way that men enter into civil society—that is, through their asocial-sociability. As Kant explains: The problem, therefore, is simply to “learn how this mechanism of nature can be applied...in order so to regulate the antagonism of conflicting interests in a people that they may even compel one another to submit to compulsory laws and thus necessarily bring about the state of peace in which laws have force.”¹⁶⁶

However, in order for each individual state to agree to join a larger federation of free states, each state must already be organized internally according to a civil compact whereby the freedoms and rights of individual citizens are guaranteed. The asocial-sociability of man must account for peace in society before the asocial-sociability of nations can account for international peace. Herein lies the reasoning behind Kant’s first definitive article: “*The civil constitution of each state shall be republican.*”¹⁶⁷ By republican, Kant does not simply mean democratic. Rather, he means what in contemporary political science is referred to as liberal democracy.¹⁶⁸ According to Kant, in a democracy, the tyranny of the majority rules over the minority. In a republic, however, the rights of the minority are protected from the majority. As Kant explains: “democracy, in the proper sense of the word, is of necessity despotism...the ‘whole people,’ so-called, who carry their measure are really not all, but only a majority: so that here the universal will is in contradiction with itself and with the principle of freedom.”¹⁶⁹ Hence, a republican

¹⁶⁵Kant, *To Perpetual Peace*, 17.

¹⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 26

¹⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁶⁸Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, 281.

¹⁶⁹Kant, *To Perpetual Peace*, 11.

constitution is the only one that effectively guarantees “the principle of freedom of the members of society as human beings” and the “equality of the members as citizens.”¹⁷⁰

Furthermore, a republican constitution is an essential pre-condition for perpetual peace because it takes the war making powers of a nation out the hands of a despot, by placing them into the hands of the governed. “If, as must be so under this constitution,” writes Kant, “the consent of the subjects is required to determine whether there shall be war or not, nothing is more natural than that they should weigh the matter well, before undertaking such a bad business”¹⁷¹ The logic behind this argument, then, is predicated on the assumption that the governed are those who fight, and therefore, will be less likely to engage in wars because they themselves will have to wage them.

In fact, Thucydides himself makes a similar argument in Book Eight of the *Peloponnesian War* when he points to the relative stability of Athens as a democracy, ruled by five thousand, as opposed to Athens as an oligarchy, ruled by four hundred. According to Thucydides, “The Four Hundred were deposed of and it was voted that power should be handed over to the Five Thousand, who were to include all who could provide themselves with a hoplite’s equipment.”¹⁷² Having transferred power to a mass of five thousand men, each of whom were armed for battle, Thucydides states that Athens had never “had a better government,” at least “in [his] lifetime;” for “there was a reasonable and moderate blending of the few and the many,” which made it “possible for the city to recover from the bad state into which her affairs had fallen.”¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰Kant, *To Perpetual Peace.*, 9.

¹⁷¹*Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁷²Thucydides, 8.97.4.

¹⁷³*Ibid.*, 8.97.15.

To recap, then: If Nature is purposive then History is progressive thereby rendering man's thumotic nature as an asocial-social being, the starting point for human progress. Accordingly, through war and the selfish antagonisms of men, humanity will work towards the end of peace. In time, this natural process, coupled by man's "commercial spirit," will see each individual state adopt a republican constitution and agree to join a larger federation of states wherein the right to hospitality is enforced, and self-righteous claims to justice among nations no longer pose a threat to international security. In this way, *nomos* will effectively govern *physis*; law will effectively govern nature, and peace among nations will have been achieved: for "the problem of the formation of the state, hard as it may sound, is not insoluble, even for a race of devils, granted that they have intelligence."¹⁷⁴

It is not surprising, then, that only after each of these definitive articles have been acted on, do Kant's preliminary articles for peace begin to seem like practical goals. Take, for example, Kant's sixth preliminary article which states that "*No state at war with another shall countenance such modes of hostility as would make mutual confidence impossible in a subsequent state of peace: such are the employment of assassins or of poisoners, the violation of articles of surrender, and the instigation of treason in the hostile state.*"¹⁷⁵ Presumably, in an already established federation of free states, individual nations will have ceased to be weary of one another. As a result, assassins, spies, and any other mode of hostility that might jeopardize peace, will no longer qualify as a practical necessity, given mutual confidence among states.

¹⁷⁴Kant, *To Perpetual Peace*, 25.

¹⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 7.

Similarly, Kant's fifth preliminary article, which says, "*No state shall violently interfere with the constitution and administration of another,*" also becomes a realizable goal.¹⁷⁶ If every state already has a republican constitution protecting the rights of individual citizens, and has embraced the "commercial spirit" to a point where that of the political is no longer a threat, violent interference with the constitution and administration of another state would, presumably, never occur.

Finally, articles two through four, which deal with the abolition of standing armies, the accumulation of national debts, and the right to self-determination, also become realizable goals given the assumed existence of a federation of free states. Standing armies would no longer be necessary given the absence of any foreign threat including spies or assassins. Similarly, accumulating a national debt would not occur because there would no longer be a need to fund standing armies. Finally, the right to self-determination among peoples presupposes the right to hospitality among nations; for, according to both, "it is a society of human beings over whom no one but itself has the right to rule and dispose."¹⁷⁷

Therefore, all of the above mentioned preliminary articles become realizable goals, given the fact that man's political spirit, his asocial-sociability, has already lead to the evolution of an international system whereby man's commercial spirit reigns, and international law is effectively enforced. Through war, Nature will force men and the nations they create to realize that peace is more desirable and that a system of national and international laws alike should be sought so as to keep men from becoming more asocial than they are social. And, once this system is in place,

¹⁷⁶Kant, *To Perpetual Peace*, 6.

¹⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 4.

nations can begin to confidently implement, Kant's preliminary articles for peace thus understood.

It is in the first preliminary article, however, where Kant's philosophical sketch for peace begins to lose its practical allure. Specifically, it states that "*No treaty of peace shall be regarded as valid if with the secret reservation of material for a future war.*"¹⁷⁸ Kant here explains the difference between a treaty of peace, or peace itself, and a mere truce or what he refers to as a "suspension of hostilities," the mere illusion of peace.¹⁷⁹ According to Kant, "peace signifies the end of all hostilities," rendering "the causes of a future war existing, although perhaps not yet known to the high contracting parties themselves... entirely annihilated."¹⁸⁰ Up until this point, however, peace is not peace as long as the possibility for future conflict remains, for "there may be a mental reservation of old claims," or an "evil intention" that remains waiting for the "first favorable opportunity for further hostilities."¹⁸¹

This begs the question: Does it not follow that action on the first preliminary article requires the prior fulfillment of preliminary articles two through six? Presumably, the right to self-determination, standing armies, national debts, the threat of violent interference in the constitution and administration of another state, not to mention the use of spies or assassins, all qualify as future causes of war. When taken into account, one is forced to conclude that "the first preliminary article cannot be positively acted on until the peace to which it is presumably preliminary is itself permanently concluded."¹⁸² Simply put, Kant's preliminary article for peace

¹⁷⁸Kant, *To Perpetual Peace*, 4

¹⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁸⁰*Ibid.*

¹⁸¹*Ibid.*

¹⁸²Susan Shell, "Bowling Alone: On the Saving Power of Kant's Perpetual Peace," *Idealistic Studies* vol. 26, n. 2 (1996): 155.

presupposes the prior achievement of the kind of peace only republican states as members of a federation (whereby the right to hospitality among nations prevails) can achieve. Acting on the first preliminary article for perpetual peace therefore presupposes perpetual peace. Kant's philosophical sketch is but a rhetorical house of cards, built on sand.

The Case for Perpetual Peace

In the first Appendix of *To Perpetual Peace*, Kant himself acknowledges that human reason alone is not “sufficiently enlightened to survey the series of predetermining causes which would make it possible for us to predict with certainty the good or bad results of human action.”¹⁸³ Indeed, human reason is lacking on account of the fact that man participates in both a phenomenal and noumenal world, and is therefore, caught in a tension between his necessity, or self-interested realism, and his desire for justice, or selfless idealism. So it follows that human reason alone is not sufficiently enlightened to survey the future causes of war either, which necessarily arise out of the unforeseen bad results of human action. In this view, the human condition itself which remains in a state of tension, calls into question the possibility of any treaty thus understood.

In fact, far from a philosophical discourse, Kant's *To Perpetual Peace*, is in and of itself written in the form of a treaty, which is indicative of certain practical implications regarding the essential difference between a “treaty of peace” and a mere truce or suspension of hostilities. A treatise implies law and law presupposes a need for it. Law is coercive and required in order to maintain a state of peace in a world where peace is not the status quo. Indeed, Kant himself admits that “peace among men is not the natural state” but that “the natural state is one of

¹⁸³Kant, *To Perpetual Peace*, 32.

war.”¹⁸⁴ Peace, therefore, is the exception to the rule. Law is necessary so as to prevent otherwise imperfect, morally incomplete human beings from becoming more asocial than they are social. Accordingly, a continued need for law and a treaty itself presupposes the impossibility of achieving anything more than a truce among nations.

In this view, because *To Perpetual Peace* is written in the form of a treatise, it is indicative of certain practical implications regarding the limits of peace on earth. Herein lies Kant’s realism as a said idealist searching not for an end to history, but merely a progressive interpretation of it. Although he advances a progressive view of history whereby peace evolves gradually due to the conflict that arises from man’s thumotic nature, he himself does not regard his philosophical sketch for perpetual peace as a practical design. Devoid of any proven guarantee beyond that of Nature, his philosophical sketch amounts to a regulative guide towards an assumed end we may never realize—that is, an end we should strive for as imperfect beings incapable of perfection, yet nonetheless capable of recognizing as our moral duty a need to pursue it. As a result, “those who treat Kant’s” *To Perpetual Peace* “as a recipe for peace ignore both the irony of its title—an irony Kant thought he had made obvious—and its more serious intention.”¹⁸⁵ For Kant, “history provides moral hope, not objective assurance.”¹⁸⁶

Because of this lack of objective assurance, confronting the problem of the political spirit directly—deliberately theorizing a remedy aimed at subduing or eradicating the political spirit from the human condition i.e. putting forth an end of history thesis—would, in light of his own moral law, qualify as a subjective and hence coercive undertaking. “The progressive history of Kant” thus “points towards the dialectically self-conscious history of Hegel,” but stops short.

¹⁸⁴Kant, *To Perpetual Peace*, 9.

¹⁸⁵Shell, *The Rights of Reason*, 179.

¹⁸⁶Ibid.

“The Kantian ‘cunning of nature’ is not yet the Hegelian ‘cunning of reason.’”¹⁸⁷ Solving the human problem, the tension between man’s realism and idealism, his necessity and desire for justice, the tension between the phenomenal and noumenal) was an undertaking Kant recognized as impossible.

Recognizing the limits of reason, and therefore, the practical limits of his philosophical sketch, Kant stopped short of providing objective assurance settling instead for moral hope. Like his idea for a kingdom of ends and categorical imperative before it, Kant understood his philosophical sketch for perpetual peace to be something regulative and pragmatic—something that might direct mankind towards an assumed end—and therefore constructed it in a way that would qualify his hope for mankind with certain doubt. His first preliminary article for peace is therefore indicative of a world in which law remains necessary, and peace among nations is predicated on the theoretical assumption that Nature is purposive and History is progressive. As someone who defined himself as a transcendental idealist and empirical realist, Kant intended to provide hope while promising nothing, and to that extent, intended his *To Perpetual Peace* to serve a rhetorical purpose. It speaks of eternal peace on earth in the hope that one day such a peace will in fact come about. And, “to the extent that human beings generally adopt” such a “hopeful perspective, the end of justice will in fact be advanced, inasmuch as hope in progress is a spring to progressive action.”¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷Shell, *The Rights of Reason*, 177.

¹⁸⁸Susan Shell, “Fukuyama and the End of History,” in *After History? Francis Fukuyama and His Critics* by Timothy Burns (Boston: Rowan and Littlefield, 1994), 40.

Conclusion: Perpetual War or Perpetual Peace?

The preceding analysis, which focuses on how Thucydides and Kant each view the essential problem of the political spirit in human affairs, provides a theoretical framework for understanding where the two converge and diverge as thinkers on war and peace. In doing so, it attempts to show why the former regards this problem as something conducive to perpetual war, and why the latter regards it as something ultimately conducive to perpetual peace.

Unlike Thucydides, who was content merely to acknowledge the thumotic tension between necessity and justice, realism and idealism, as the starting point for human conflict, Kant sought to account for a progressive view of history whereby the political spirit would eventually bring mankind and its differing evaluations of justice, together into a harmonious whole. Man's asocial social nature—his thumotic nature as a political animal, bound by necessity yet demanding of justice, his selfishness juxtaposed by his desire to be recognized as more than man—would serve as a whetstone to virtue, and thus an impetus to peace between individuals and nations alike.

Unable to resolve the essential human problem, the tension between his realism and idealism, necessity and justice, phenomenal and noumenal, Kant accepted it for what it is. He therefore incorporated it into his progressive history so as to provide hope where Thucydides saw none, rendering his *To Perpetual Peace* a regulative guide towards achieving an otherwise uncertain end.

Yet, however regulative his philosophical sketch may be, his attempt to account for a progressive history is in and of itself, a thumotic undertaking. Kant's desire for earthly justice

and the idealism underlying his own philosophy is indicative of his own ambition as a philosopher trying to reconcile his idealism with his realism. The tension throughout Kant's thought between his realism and idealism thus points to the ambiguity of trying to reconcile his understanding of human necessity, or self-interest, with his concern for justice, in order to provide mankind with hope for the future.

Although a noble undertaking, when placed in context of Thucydidean wisdom regarding the weakness of reason in the world, one cannot help but wonder if, in attempting to provide mankind with such hope, Kant himself fell victim to the invisible factors of hope and desire pointed out by Diodotus in the Mytilenean Debate. Has Kant, like Brisadas, instilled in men like Hegel, a certain hope for humanity, causing would be philosophers to run foolish risks as devout believers in the end of History? More generally, does Thucydidean wisdom anticipate the folly of modern political philosophy in its otherwise thumotic attempt to account for the liberation of mankind from the horrors of war? And in doing so, has Kant inadvertently put forward his own case for perpetual war, encouraging mankind to believe in, if not take up and deliver on the otherwise empty promise of eternal peace on earth?

Perhaps. Although intended to provide mankind with moral hope, it is important to remember that Kant's philosophical sketch remains entirely dependent upon our faith in an amoral mechanism: Nature. Just as peace within a state is dependent upon an established order, so perpetual peace is dependent upon the order of Nature. Paradoxically speaking, then, perpetual peace as an idea only human reason can prescribe is an end only Nature can will. Accordingly, if man's thumotic nature and the war that results from it, is in fact integral to the gradual evolution of perpetual peace, the obvious question worth asking is: why not speed up this

historical process by starting more wars? *Why not* make the world safe for democracy? Or, as Pangle suggests: “if Kant is right about the ‘guarantees’ of progress, will not the Machiavellians in fact contribute more than will the men of the categorical imperative to the achievement of perpetual peace?”¹⁸⁹ Does the ultimate end of perpetual peace therefore give some kind of incentive to employ immoral means?

Furthermore, faith in the capacity of commerce or the commercial spirit as an indirect enforcement mechanism for international law seems equally dubious. War, writes Kant, “makes the mentality of the people who conduct it all the more sublime...whereas a long peace causes the spirit of mere commerce to predominate, along with base selfishness, cowardice and weakness, and usually debases the mentality of the populace.”¹⁹⁰ As a result, “the greatest admiration” among human beings is “someone who is not frightened, who has no fear,” and “thus does not shrink before danger but energetically sets to work with full deliberation.”¹⁹¹ In other words, the greatest admiration among human beings is someone who is spirited, and, according to Kant, “even in the most civilized circumstances, this exceptionally high esteem for the warrior remains.”¹⁹² Will not a long peace due to the predominance of commerce, then, instill in a populace a certain nostalgia for war? After all, Thucydides tells us that from the greatest rest, arises the greatest motion.

The problem with asking such questions lies in the fact that they can only truly be answered after history has ended—after man has fulfilled his assumed natural end and a state of perpetual peace has been achieved. Until then, however, it seems as though man will continue to

¹⁸⁹Pangle, Ahrens Dorf, *Justice among Nations: On the Moral Basis of Power and Peace*, 208.

¹⁹⁰ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. and ed. by Paul Guyer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 146.

¹⁹¹Ibid.

¹⁹²Ibid.

live in a Thucydidean world where war remains, and ironically, is fought and justified increasingly under the pretense of Kantian ideas and rhetoric concerning peace. Indeed, how many humanitarian interventions, peacekeeping, or peacemaking missions will be required before perpetual peace is achieved? Which war in the name of human rights and freedom will be the war to end all wars in the name of human rights and freedom?

Regardless of the pretense, as long as the political spirit continues to see human beings attach their own to some conception of the good; as long as the thumotic nature of individuals and the nations they create, the tension between necessity and justice characteristic of human life, remains a central feature in the relations of both; it seems as though perpetual peace will remain an idea, a hope, in a world where war remains the reality.

Or will it? Although Thucydides argues that war is a permanent feature of the human condition, having recognized the thumotic tension between necessity and justice as central to political life, he perhaps also, suggests a way of overcoming it. To be sure, he presents justice as something that is frequently, if not always partial because human beings, frequently, if not always attach their own (realism) to some conception of the good (idealism). In short, Thucydides presents justice as something that is almost always self-righteous. In doing so, however, he is nonetheless making an impartial statement thereby doing justice to those who read his history, allowing for a certain philosophical truth regarding the nature of man to transcend the prejudices of those within it. In effect, his universalism as a philosopher is in and of itself an indication of the human capacity to rise above prejudice, and tame one's own political spirit.

Herein lies the humility of a realism that points to the weakness, or pride of reason in the minds of men, who, despite their said and often sincere concern for justice (idealism), remain hypocritical in their actions as human beings bound by their necessity (realism). By pointing out the hypocrisy of those who genuinely believe in the justice of their actions and their cities, by pointing out the weakness of reason in the world, Thucydidean wisdom thus anticipates the folly of those men who remain subject to a spirited desire for a justice, partial to their own circumstance.

Accordingly, Thucydides rises above his own prejudice as an Athenian general, thereby taming his own political spirit as a human being. He allows for universal truth and reason (*logos*) to shine through the murky waters of half-truth in which so many of his fellow Athenians and human beings alike remain submerged. In this way, he transcends his own (necessity) by refraining from attaching it to his own conception of the good (justice), allowing for his readers to see the universal from his own particular viewpoint.

The reality of perpetual war therefore does not preclude one from achieving his or her own peace, because as the example of Thucydides shows, the experience of war does not hinder one from rising above his or her own necessity. Rather, the experience and reality of war, renders peace a matter of ordering the human soul according to a certain disposition that brings the political spirit in line with reason, thereby allowing one to transcend the often partisan and prejudiced desires that remain within. This occurs as we become more aware of our own prejudices, and as a result, less likely to react in response to a perceived injustice, without first injecting some forethought into the equation. Thucydides' universalism as a historian poet,

concerned with uncovering general truths regarding the human condition is indicative of our ability to do so.

Giving practical weight to the Socratic dictum “know thyself,” the example of Thucydides therefore suggests that the path towards peace begins not with Nature but within the human soul. Regardless of war, peace is possible even for those directly affected by it. Accordingly, although Kant puts forward the case for perpetual peace, he may inadvertently put forward a stronger case for war. And, although Thucydides puts forward the case for perpetual war, his example and his philosophy inadvertently suggest a way of overcoming it by enlightening us of the human capacity for personal peace.

Bibliography:

- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. and ed. by Joe Sachs. Newburyport MA: Focus Publishing, 2002.
- Ahrensdoerf, Peter, J. "The Fear of Death and the Longing for Immortality: Hobbes and Thucydides on Human Nature and the Problem of Anarchy," *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 94, No. 3 (September, 2000): 579-593
- Craig, Leon Harold. *The War Lover: A Study of Plato's Republic*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003.
- Fukuyama, Francis. *The End of History and The Last Man*. New York: Free Press, 2006.
- Kagan, Donald. *Thucydides: The Reinvention of History*. New York: Viking Press, 2009.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. trans. Mary J. Gregor The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. translated and edited by Paul Guyer. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Kant, Immanuel. "Idea for a Universal History From a Cosmopolitan Point of View," in *On History*, trans. Lewis White Beck (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1963), 21.
- Kant, Immanuel. *To Perpetual Peace*. translated by Mary Campbell Smith. New York: Cosimo Inc., 2005.
- Lauriello, Christopher Lewis "Diodotus and Thucydides," *Interpretation: a Journal of Political Philosophy*, vol.36, Issue 3 (2009): 305-325.
- Leo Strauss, *The City and Man*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1964.
- Mansfield, Harvey. *Tocqueville: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Mansfield, Harvey. "How to Understand Politics," *First Things* (August/September, 2007): 41-47.
- Mansfield, Harvey. *Manliness*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006.
- Morgenthau, Hans J. *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Orwin, Clifford. *The Humanity of Thucydides*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994.

- Pangle, Thomas, Peter J. Ahrensdorf. *Justice Among Nations: On the Moral Basis of Power and Peace* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1999).
- Plato, *The Republic*, trans. and ed. by Joe Sachs. Newburyport MA: Focus Publishing, 2007.
- Paul A. Rahe, "Thucydides' Critique of Realpolitik," *Security Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Winter, 1995): 105-141.
- Saxonhouse, Andrew W. "Thymos, Justice, and Moderation of Anger in the Story of Achilles" in *Understanding the Political Spirit: Philosophical Investigations from Socrates to Nietzsche*, edited by Catherine H. Zuckert. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988.
- Shell, Susan. "Bowling Alone: On the Saving Power of Kant's Perpetual Peace." *Idealistic Studies* vol. 26, n. 2, (1996): 153-173.
- Shell, Susan. "Fukuyama and the End of History," in *After History? Francis Fukuyama and His Critics*, edited by Timothy Burns. Boston: rowan and Littlefield, 1994.
- Shell, Susan. "Kantian Idealism" in *Educating the Prince: Essays in Honor of Harvey Mansfield*, eds. Mark Blitz and William Kristol. Boston: Rowan and Littlefield, 2000.
- Shell, Susan. *The Embodiment of Reason: Kant on Spirit, Generation and Community*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- Shell, Susan. *The Rights of Reason: A Study of Kant's Philosophy and Politics*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980.
- Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. By Rex Warner. New York: Penguin Books, 1954.
- Waltz, Kenneth. "Kant, Liberalism, and War," *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 56, No. 2 (Jun., 1962): 335-356.
- Zuckert, Catherine H. "On the Role of Spiritedness in Politics" in *Understanding the Political Spirit: Philosophical Investigations from Socrates to Nietzsche*, edited by Catherine H. Zuckert. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988.