

REVIEW ARTICLE: DANGEROUS CITY

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The Looking Glass's Wars

For an increasing number of classical scholars the experiences of the Athenian polis can be resources for current engagements with the possibilities and hazards of democratic politics. Josiah Ober has argued that Athens' successful organization of knowledge offers valuable lessons on how contemporary democratic politics might be improved.² The ongoing work of political theorists such as Peter Euben and Arlene Saxonhouse draws our attention to the ways in which Athens provides a model for critical politics and frank speech.³ This appreciation of Athenian democracy as what Ryan Balot calls 'the looking glass in the reflections of which we can reinvent ourselves as democratic citizens' has a long-standing history in Western thought.⁴ Yet appreciation has always been paralleled by criticism. Even the most complementary commentators decry Athens' economic reliance on chattel slavery and its denial of political voice to women.⁵ Some have gone much further, suggesting that Athens' political culture shows modern democrats what to avoid. Social theorists such as Jürgen Habermas regularly describe classical Greek society as pre-modern, fostering an ethical homogeneity that stands against liberal pluralism.⁶ In many ways, though, the greatest barrier against embracing Athens as a resource for our own civic reinventions might be the frequency of its wars. Deep respect for Thucydides notwithstanding, Hobbes is acutely suspicious of including the ancients' histories and 'books of policy' within an educational programme designed to produce peaceful citizens.⁷ The *Federalist Papers* explicitly reject ancient democracies, too often 'the wretched nurseries

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² Josiah Ober, *Democracy and Knowledge* (Princeton, 2008).

³ J. Peter Euben, *Corrupting Youth* (Princeton, 1997); Arlene Saxonhouse, *Free Speech and Democracy in Ancient Athens* (Cambridge and New York, 2006).

⁴ Ryan Balot, 'Democratizing Courage in Classical Athens', in *War, Democracy and Culture in Classical Athens*, ed. David Pritchard (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 88–108 at p. 88.

⁵ As in Ober, *Democracy and Knowledge*, pp. 258–60.

⁶ Jürgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. Christian Lenhardt and Sherry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, MA, 1990), p. 201.

⁷ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Part Two, ch. 29, para. 14.

of unceasing discord', as salutary examples of republican politics.⁸ While these particular criticisms may be severe, it is difficult to deny that war and battle were often central to the deeds or practices of the ancients or that polemical excellence often represented the height of classical virtue. As represented by Thucydides, Pericles ends his public career in the *History* by anticipating the timeless praise that Athens will merit on account of its wars, 'that we as Hellenes ruled over the most Hellenes, sustained the greatest wars against them individually and united' (2.64).⁹ Even Aristotle's measured treatment of the virtues in the *Nicomachean Ethics* acknowledges that courage is exhibited most perfectly by facing death in battle (3.6). At the very least, such statements expose the incompleteness of attempts to gaze at the Athenian looking glass without considering its wars. This incompleteness needs to be remedied if an understanding of Athenian politics is to inform how Western democracies engage the challenges they have faced over the past dozen years. The attacks on the United States of September 2001 and the subsequent initiation of wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have made the relationship between democracy and war one of our central and most wrenching concerns. If Athenian experience is to be instructive, it is more impossible than ever to ignore its wars.¹⁰

Restoring attention to the significance of Athens' wars is the purpose of *War, Democracy and Culture in Classical Athens*, a remarkably valuable collection of essays written by an international range of distinguished classicists, historians and political theorists and edited by David Pritchard. The fifteen contributions explore how Athens' democratic political culture and military engagements mutually intersected over the course of the fifth and fourth centuries BC. The book's archive extends well beyond the wartime narratives of Herodotus, Thucydides and Xenophon to encompass political speeches in the assembly and the law courts, tragic and comic performances in the theatres and productions of material culture, both publicly displayed and privately owned. Thirteen chapters examining how democracy and war influenced each other within these different realms are framed by Pritchard's valuable historical overview and conceptual introduction and by John Keane's thoughtful conclusion on how what we learn about Athens might inform our reflections on the problematics of war, democracy and empire.

No single critical notice could do justice to the scope and depth of the volume's contributions. In different ways, however, all of the essays are framed

⁸ Alexander Hamilton, James Madison and John Jay, *The Federalist Papers* 9, §5.

⁹ Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, trans. S. Lattimore (Indianapolis, IN, 1998) with small changes.

¹⁰ On why the Greeks are important in this context see, for example, Victor Davis Hanson, *An Autumn of War* (New York, 2002), pp. xiv–xv; J. Peter Euben, 'Thucydides in Baghdad', in *When Worlds Elide*, ed. Karen Bassi and J. Peter Euben (New York, 2010); David Mendelsohn, 'Theaters of War', *The New Yorker*, 12 January 2004; James Morrison, *Reading Thucydides* (Athens, OH, 2006); John Zumbrennen, *The Silence of Democracy* (University Park, PA, 2008).

by a rejection of what Pritchard calls ‘military determinism’, the view attributed to ‘Aristotle and other philosophers’ (p. 56) that changes in Athenian military requirements, first for a hoplite army, then for an imperial navy, exerted a decisive influence on Athens’ political culture, demanding expanded political participation in response to a dependence on soldiers and rowers. That this assessment fully captures philosophical appraisals of Athenian democracy might be questioned, but it is clearly true that the military determinism thesis ignores the ways in which democracy itself shaped Athenian military practice. In response, the volume’s essays show how Athens’ democratic politics and culture transformed earlier Hellenic conceptions of military organization, regime success and civic virtue. Yet many of the contributors also explore how elements of democratic society resisted or complicated such transformative ambitions. From this perspective, Athenian democracy both enabled and revised the political uniqueness imaged in Pericles’ encomium to the city. This insight would be even more powerful if the collection included more examination of the contributions of classical political philosophy.

Democratic Advantage

Several of the essays replace military determinism with what Ober, in his essay ‘Thucydides on Athens’ Democratic Advantage in the Archidamian War’, calls ‘democratic advantage’, arguing that Athens’ political institutions strengthened its military capabilities over those of its more hierarchical and traditional competitors, particularly Sparta. Ober’s case is presented through an extended reading of Thucydides’ Archidamian War narrative. As interpreted by Ober, this portion of the *History* (extending through 5.25) confirms the prideful yet threatening image of Athens as daring innovator that is offered by both its most entrenched adversaries (the Corinthian speech at Sparta, 1.70–1) and by its most distinguished leadership (Pericles’ funeral oration, 2.40–1). In this spirit Ober reads Thucydides’ accounts of the Mytilene revolt (3.1–50) and the Pylos occupation (4.2–42) as illustrating Athens’ ability to respond to unexpected political challenges. Consequently, the Archidamian narrative effectively becomes a case study reinforcing Ober’s general thesis in *Democracy and Knowledge*. The second portion of the *History*, beginning with the negotiation and then the unravelling of the Peace of Nicias is read as a chronicle of Athens’ squandering its advantage as it fails to manage its accumulated knowledge. Ober parts company with the *History*’s tracing of Athens’ defeat to the pathologies of democratic rhetoric, finding this claim unconvincing because it fails to explain the city’s recovery from the defeat and its subsequent political successes in the fourth century (pp. 86–7).¹¹

¹¹ Reiterating Ober’s critique of Thucydides in *Political Dissent in Democratic Athens* (Princeton, 1998), pp. 120–1.

The chapters contributed by Iain Spence and Matthew Trundle, 'Cavalry, Democracy and Military Thinking in Classical Athens' and 'Light Troops in Classical Athens', argue that Athens' democratic institutions allowed it to expand and diversify its military capabilities in spite of the class divisions that might otherwise have hamstrung cooperation. Spence's claim is that the demos was willing to provide financial subsidies to the more economically privileged cavalry class because it recognized the importance of cavalry for military success (pp. 117–18). Using epigraphic and inscription as well as literary evidence, Trundle argues that the democratic prejudice against light troops was elided, though not eliminated, by the participation of a limited number of citizens in the force of archers (p. 151).

Ober, Spence and Trundle interpret Athens' democratic advantage as instrumental, helping the city to achieve wealth and influence through knowledge management. There is less focus on how Pericles' valourization of a daring energy presented as somehow good for itself, and converting wealth and material influence into instruments (2.62), might introduce controversy into questions about the content of political goods and therefore demand more attention to the character of political purposes. Implicitly, the goals requiring strategic competence are either embedded in the historical struggles of the Greek cities against one another (cf. Spence, pp. 124–5, 128) or characteristic of the dynamics of political competition, generally. When Ober and Spence interpret Thucydides' Mytilene narrative, they focus on its operational implications (Ober, pp. 80–1; Spence, pp. 137–8) and sideline any problematics about political purposes that emerge in the debate between Cleon and Diodotus over Mytilene's punishment (3.36–50). Finally, there is limited consideration of the more troubling human consequences of Athens' strategic successes, as signalled (for example) in Thucydides' shift from energy, daring and motion (1.1) to bloodshed, displacement and suffering (1.23) as different explanations for why the Peloponnesian War was most worthy of being spoken about. Athens' democratic advantage shows one side of the relationship between democracy and war, but it is clearly only one side.

Cleavages

Complications in that relationship emerge if we interrogate Pericles' rhetorical gestures towards civic solidarity more critically. A number of the essays explore the persistence and significance of cleavages in Athens' military organization, political rhetoric and cultural images. While the theoretical underpinning of the Ober, Spence and Trundle chapters is some version of the logic of collective action, this set of contributions relies more on theorizations intersecting culture and power, examining how the culture/power dynamic reflects, intensifies or elides difference. Two matrices of difference seem at issue, the first between the cohesiveness of the community and the interests or

well being of individuals or families, the second between the economic or social classes within the city itself.

Political theorists sometimes engage the first matrix in ways that can be misleadingly binary, whether the community or the individual is primary. Several chapters in the volume take this problem seriously, but do so in ways that recognize nuance and ambiguity. Peter Hunt's essay, 'Athenian Militarism and the Recourse to War', examining how a militaristic ethos shaped Athenian policy recognizes the continued presence of dissent (draft dodging implicitly challenging an ethic of patriotism, p. 231) but contends that the overwhelming power of militarism, represented in the rhetoric of funeral orations for example, still led to the initiation of counterproductive wars (p. 225). In this respect, Hunt's essay tempers Ober's conclusion that Athenian military practice generally reflected successful knowledge management and points instead to elements of irrationality underlying the city's energetic innovations. One might question whether militarism is a completely adequate explanation for Athens' distinctive and destabilizing energy (cf. Thucydides, 1.70–1), for Hunt acknowledges (p. 226) that Athens seems to have been no more militaristic than other Mediterranean societies. Still, his chapter points towards the need to balance an appreciation of the importance of knowledge management with an awareness of the power of political imaginaries.

Essays contributed by Sumio Yoshitake, Polly Low and Alastair Blanshard examine the impacts and limitations of the funeral oration imagery. Yoshitake, in 'Aretē and the Achievements of the War Dead: The Logic of Praise in the Athenian Funeral Oration', focuses on the ways that funeral oratory elided differences among individual citizens, praising the courageous sacrifices of the generic war dead rather than the distinctive heroism of individuals (pp. 372–3). Thus interpreted, funeral oratories represent a civic community devoid of cleavages and transform the terrible individual experiences of pain and death into an enduring common achievement. Yoshitake argues that this set of tropes influenced cultural conceptions of *aretē*, representing excellence as maintaining one's place, a 'passive conception of courage as . . . the acceptance of the risk of injury and death in battle' (p. 368). This conceptual network is appropriately called a logic, for it plays out with a level of consistency that may obscure fault lines. Yet such fissures can certainly be detected even within the signature representation of Pericles' funeral oratory in Thucydides. Allegedly, even those whose characters were otherwise suspect have been ennobled by dying for the city (2.42), and all of those who died are said to have experienced 'unfelt death' (2.43). However, these very attempts to overwhelm individual flaws and sufferings by a single logic also recognize grounds upon which that logic could be challenged. Pericles thus closes by noting (2.43) that the whole earth rather than any single city provides the tombs of men who truly stand out (*epiphanōn andrōn*). To this extent, this funeral oratory suggests that even the most estimable political membership

can be challenged by an *aretē* that is anything but passive, exceptional achievements that are political in the widest sense and therefore destabilizing of particular political communities.

While Thucydides' intricate literary creation may be itself exceptional, the essays of Low and Blanshard suggest that funeral oratory's logic encountered disputations and resistances within the experiences of ordinary citizens. In 'Commemoration of the War Dead in Classical Athens: Remembering Defeat and Victory', Low expands the archive of Athenian commemorative practices beyond notable funeral orations to the monuments and rituals that accompanied Athenian life more continuously. She also rightly insists on the need to understand how such commemorative creations were, intended functions notwithstanding, actually received by citizens and families touched by war (p. 351). Her acute interpretations of both the narratives of Thucydides and the more common forms of commemorative practice, such as casualty lists, reliefs and rituals, underscore how images symbolizing Athens' military successes could also be read as signalling the city's vulnerability (p. 356), representing the overwhelming human costs of war even within efforts to obscure them. In suggesting that Athens' commemorative practices need to be read as efforts to encourage citizen contributions to common projects, generally (p. 344), Low seems at one with Ober's treating Athenian military practice as a subset of democratic advantage. Yet in noting the persistent influence of unsettling images of war, Low both reinforces and complicates Hunt's project of reading democratic advantage through a less rational and more polemical lens.

Blanshard's chapter, 'War in the Law-Court: Some Athenian Discussions', points to ways in which funeral oratory's logic was undermined, not by the remembrance of loss but by the resilience of interest. Using law-court speeches from the fourth century, Blanshard presents the *dikastērion* as an institution allowing challenges to funeral oratory's ideological monology (p. 205). While funeral orations erase political difference, the law courts' argumentative context reveals disputes, making it clear that 'not every citizen fought with the same fervour or with the same motives' (p. 207). This convincing interpretation of law-court dynamics may thus also reveal the need for discourses like funeral orations at times of significant regime stress. In extending his account of the contestative speeches of the law courts to the practices of the assembly and democratic political speech, generally, Blanshard's historical reading aligns itself with the priorities of modern agonistic democrats such as William Connolly and Chantal Mouffe.¹² Like them, however, he may also go a bit too far in representing the contestative model as exhausting the ways in which democratic institutions enabled first personal criticism of public policy.

¹² William Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization* (Minneapolis, 1995); Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London, 2000).

Low's extension of her archive beyond funeral oratory is continued in the essays on material commemoration offered by Robin Osborne, Patricia Hannah and Margaret C. Miller. Apart from their individual contributions, they jointly show why political theory should move beyond the interpretation of written texts to a consideration of visual representations if it is to engage the political texture of classical society. Each of these essays is a skilled and nuanced attempt to read visual representations as texts with political import. In 'Democratic Ideology, the Events of War and the Iconography of Attic Funerary Sculpture', Osborne argues that the memorialization of a single young cavalryman, Dexileos, killed in the Corinthian war of 394/3, can be interpreted as revising a political ideology that privileged hoplite warfare (recall Spence and Trundle) and absorbed individual distinction within collective achievement (think of Yoshitake). Osborne emphasizes the political controversy of this memorial by showing how the praise of an individual cavalryman fitted uneasily within a continuing democratic mistrust of a class associated with the hated Thirty Tyrants, whose brief rule occurred ten years earlier. Osborne is suitably modest in raising without fully answering the question of whether the memorial signalled the overcoming of civic prejudices under the pressures of war or a more deliberate effort to affirm the civic contributions of a younger member of a cultural class still suspect (p. 260). He is more confident in his claim that the production of the monument prompted a notable change in funeral imagery in the early fourth century and thereafter, arguing that '[I]t was . . . essentially a chance event . . . that enabled a dramatic change in how the Athenians were prepared to imagine themselves and each other to take place' (p. 265). Without in any way challenging Osborne's conclusion, it should be added that such a change would also require the contextualization of a culture in which a reinvention of disrupting and contested social identities was possible, perhaps a different kind of democratic advantage.

While Osborne examines how political cleavages were negotiated within visual images, in 'The Warrior *Loutrophoroi* of Fifth-Century Athens' Patricia Hannah focuses attention on how such images might reconcile the experience of private grief with the securing of common advantage, particularly in the case of young men killed defending the city. Her material resource is a series of warrior *loutrophoroi* (vases designed to carry bath water) produced in the fifth century. *Loutrophoroi* played symbolic roles in both nuptials and funerals and Hannah argues that the funeral use would be particularly relevant and poignant if the deceased were young. In the case of young men, a common cause of death during this period was warfare; Hannah hypothesizes a connection between the large surviving number of vases from the late fifth century and the higher casualty levels of the Peloponnesian War (p. 277). Hannah also contends that while not obscuring the harsh reality of war, the *loutrophoroi* images were also generic and idealizing. In one respect, *loutrophoroi* may

have played commemorative roles in private as well as public spaces and thus have offered opportunities for more intimate reflections potentially departing from the public responses to funeral oratory. Yet these private sites and images were, according to Hannah, still ‘designed to control, channel and assuage . . . raw grief in a variety of stabilizing ways for the good of all’ (p. 299). Here, Yoshitake’s funeral oratory logic proceeds continuously to embrace private experiences of grief. Yet one might also ask some of Low’s questions about how such images were read.

Margaret C. Miller’s essay, ‘“I am Eurymedon”: Tensions and Ambiguities in Athenian War Imagery’, returns the focus to social cleavages, here involving not the division between hoplites and cavalry but the distinction between hoplites and rowers. In this respect, Miller extends the sociological perspective on military organization begun by Trundle to a broader examination of divisions within democratic society itself. Like Osborne, Miller focuses on the cultural significance of a single artistic image, the so-called Hamburg *oinochoē* (wine jar), produced in connection with the Athenian victory over the Persians at the Eurymedon river (*ca.* 460) and bearing the inscription, ‘I am Eurymedon and I stand bent forward’. Miller offers a highly sophisticated and increasingly persuasive reading of this artifact that challenges previous interpretations that have portrayed it as a straightforward valorization of Greek manliness over Persian weakness and effeminacy. Grounding her argument in a comprehensive and disciplined examination of parallel images, Miller argues that the *oinochoē* offers a more complex form of ‘social coding’ that represents the Persians as being defeated by the lower class citizens who served as rowers. Linking her assessment of the visual images with a revised reading of the inscription (pp. 335–7), Miller concludes that the *oinochoē* is an elite acknowledgment of the necessary contribution of a social class nonetheless blemished by an inferior moral worth (pp. 327, 338). Precisely because the conflicting figures represented in the *oinochoē* are empires, one in place, one emerging, Miller implicitly suggests as well that the growth of the Athenian empire makes controversies over social cleavages particularly acute. To this extent, democratic difference and imperial ambition converge to intensify the significance of sites of contestation, including but not limited to contests over social standing.

Pity, Laughter and Excellence

The public contexts in which Athens encountered both visual and rhetorical images of war included its theatres. Sophie Mills and David Konstan explore, respectively, how tragic and comic performances commented on the political and cultural significance of Athens’ wars. In addition to engaging different forms of poetry, they come to different substantive conclusions about the character of and reception to Athenian drama. In ‘Affirming Athenian Action: Euripides’ Portrayal of Military Activity and the Limits of Tragic Instruction’,

Mills provides a reading of Euripidean tragedy, particularly *The Trojan Women*, which is in part a caution against interpreting these works through contemporary lenses that emphasize dissent. Mills is particularly distrustful of readings of the drama as a critical response to Athens' brutal treatment of Melos (p. 165).¹³ While acknowledging the common sense view that the tragedies played an educational role in classical Athens, she argues that this education reinforced rather than challenged cultural templates positing Athenian exceptionalism, a fundamental difference between Greeks and barbarians, and a rigid gender divide (pp. 181–2). To this extent, Mills sees Euripides' tragedies as continuously adding to Yoshitake's funeral oratory logic. Mills is equally suspicious of any allegations that the demos witnessing the tragedies exerted any influence on Athenian policy, arguing that there is no direct evidence of political efficacy (p. 183).

Mills is certainly right to question tendencies to read these performances unhistorically. Yet it is also worth asking about the degree to which tragedies such as *The Trojan Women* challenge rather than reinforce the cultural separations between men and women, Greeks and barbarians, Athens and its others. For all of Mills's care, her analysis does not seem to settle this. One piece of countervailing evidence in this volume is Ryan Balot's reading (discussed more fully below) of Euripides' *Suppliants* which argues that the contributions of a woman and mother are necessary to educate practices of civic leadership that are culturally presented as masculine.¹⁴ While Mills is right to say that 'questioning is not synonymous with advocating, much less effecting change' (p. 183), insisting on the need for tangible evidence of influence may under-appreciate the degree to which political outcomes are fluid and uncertain.

By contrast, in 'Ridiculing a Popular War: Old Comedy and Militarism in Classical Athens', David Konstan provides a reading of Aristophanic comedies which offers a view of theatrical performance that emphasizes the construction of possibilities for critical dissent. In his interpretations of some of the major surviving comedies (from *The Acharnians* to *The Frogs*), Konstan both supports and challenges aspects of Mills's readings. He acknowledges that established cultural templates, such as the praise of patriotic masculinity, are reinforced within Aristophanic comedy. However, he also argues that in Aristophanes' hands this recognition includes appreciation of the hazards of

¹³ A connection drawn, for example, by Martha Nussbaum, 'Compassion and Terror', *Daedalus*, 132.1 (2003), pp. 10–26. The likelihood that the initial performance of *The Trojan Women* was tied to the Melian episode is challenged on historical grounds by David Kovacs (*Euripides*, trans. David Kovacs, vol. IV (Cambridge, MA and London, 1999), pp. 3–4).

¹⁴ I discuss how some of the same challenges to accepted gender and cultural designations might be found in Aristotle's practical philosophy in Gerald Mara, 'The Near Made Far Away: The Role of Cultural Criticism in Aristotle's Political Theory', *Political Theory*, 23 (1995), pp. 280–303.

patriotic fervour, especially its making the Athenian demos vulnerable to manipulative politicians (pp. 193–5). Far from reinforcing the gender hierarchy that seems so dominant in other cultural images, Aristophanes represents the best argument for peace (in *Lysistrata*) as coming from ‘a heroic and dignified woman’ (p. 198), affirming while also problematizing the masculinity expected from a good citizen. Konstan’s Aristophanes is able to effect such a problematization in part because of a lingering social cleavage between masses and leaders (p. 195) and in part because of the city’s democratic context wherein ‘[o]ld comedy was . . . an activity that involved pretty much the entire city’ (p. 187). Within this context, ‘Aristophanes’ rhetoric . . . has a kind of jiu-jitsu quality insofar as he turns the strength of his opponents against them’ (p. 185). One could, with Mills, read Konstan’s argument as unhistorical, making too much of parallels between Aristophanic comedy and current criticisms of the United States’ invasion of Iraq (p. 186). Yet my intuition is that Konstan more fully captures the possibilities of Athenian democratic practice and of politics, generally. Though any claim about decisive influence would be unprovable, Konstan suggests that the outcomes of Aristophanic performance embrace multiple possibilities (p. 193); consequently, discounting the critical political influence of dramatic performances, generally, is premature. In this context, Konstan might say even more about the differences between socially based and first personal critiques (the cleavage between mass and elite may not offer the only site for critical dissent) and about the other limits to the overall strategy that Aristophanes deploys ‘to undermine popular support for the war’ (p. 185). After all, Bdelycleon’s attack on the politicians in *The Wasps* assails their failure to distribute the benefits of the empire more equitably and not the goals of the empire itself.¹⁵

Ryan Balot’s essay, ‘Democratizing Courage in Classical Athens’, focuses more explicitly on how Athens’ democratic political culture enabled first personal responses to the demands that inter-poleis conflict continually presented. He suggests that such responses potentially extended beyond contributions to knowledge management to include a more deliberative consideration of purposes. Athenian public discourse at its best thus offered not simply critical but transformative possibilities. Balot’s broader historical argument challenges claims that Athenian political culture was a detail within a Hellenic cultural identity (p. 89). His case study outlines how Athenian democracy restructured conceptions of courage away from the more commonly accepted model of aggressive masculinity offered by Homer’s Achilles (p. 92). The Athenian alternative gestured towards a democratic courage with reflective overtones. Balot begins with an incisive explanation of how the reckless masculinity of the character Callicles in Plato’s *Gorgias* is problematized by Socratic interrogations (p. 93). He continues through an interpretation of the Thucydidean rejection of Cleon’s equation of justice with retaliation in the *History*’s

¹⁵ Cf. *Wasps*, 654–84.

Mytilene debate (pp. 97–8). The essay ends with an appreciative reading of Euripides' *Suppliants* where Theseus and his mother Aethra continually reject the rashness implicit in other views of courage in favour of a bravery tempered by moderation and thoughtfulness (pp. 105–7). As presented by Balot, all of this evidence suggests that while the connection between courage and aggressive masculinity persisted, it did so in a democratic context 'shot through with tension, ambiguity and internal conflict' (p. 97). Balot contends that this richer possibility was not limited to texts but was reflected in practical politics, for Athens' military policies seem to have been (relatively) more moderate than those of its competitors (pp. 95–6). In Balot's reading, this moderate practice was not simply the outcome of better strategy but the product of greater political opportunities for thoughtfulness about both strategy and purpose. The rejection of Cleon's violent proposals in the Mytilene debate was therefore not exclusively due to the extraordinary contributions of the otherwise unknown citizen Diodotus (unmentioned on pp. 97–8), but also traceable to a more culturally embedded need for reflective consideration. 'Even in the foxhole . . . Athenians understood more clearly than others *why* they were doing what they were doing' (p. 101).

Other readings of these texts might detect within Athens a greater affirmation of aggressive maleness and a greater resistance to thoughtfulness than Balot's interpretations do, pointing (for example) to the ways in which both the Platonic Socrates and the Thucydidean Diodotus stand outside as well as within Athenian democracy. Socrates, in particular, may offer a sketch of courage that transcends and diminishes the immediate language of 'war and battle' (cf. *Gorgias* 447a). But Balot convincingly shows the deep complexity of Athenian representations of courage and his readings should make us appreciative of the connection between this complexity and democratic richness. His essay also suggests, in ways that many of the others do not, the strong parallels between democratic richness and philosophy. While it would be unfair to demand even more from this fine volume, the relative lack of attention to classical political philosophy's contribution to this conversation is perhaps its biggest omission.

War, Democracy and Philosophy

Pritchard's introductory chapter and Keane's concluding reflections explicitly raise the question of the relevance of Athens' historical experiences for our own attempts to understand the situations of modern democracies in a conflictual world. In his 'The Symbiosis between Democracy and War: The Case of Ancient Athens', Pritchard both reinforces and problematizes Ober's democratic advantage. For him, the Athens represented in these essays is a city where dynamics between elites and demos spawned a militaristic culture that initiated wars but where democratic institutions of public debate also led to innovations and efficiencies that made the Athenians both more successful

and more dangerous than their competitors (p. 31). The history of Athens' wars can be read as the first case study confirming the hypothesis that democracies wage wars more effectively than other regimes (p. 28). Pritchard thus parallels Ober in recognizing Athens' democratic advantage, but he implicitly complicates any straightforward endorsement of that capability by pointing to this advantage's destructive side. Differing from Balot, Pritchard contends that Athens was neither less — nor more — brutal than other Greek cities in dealing with defeated opponents, including populations of non-combatants (p. 20). For Pritchard, Athenian exceptionalism seems marked by its being more effective at doing what all cities tried to do. Most of the political and cultural institutions treated here are thus seen as embracing rather than problematizing the different aspects of military efficiency, oiling rather than hindering the Athenian war machine (p. 43). Offering a coherent vision of a volume's contribution is, of course, essential for any editor and Pritchard's introduction is in many ways a remarkable *tour de force*. Yet it also seems to downplay some important differences among the essays and thus to risk obscuring fault lines and complexities within wider Athenian society itself.

Keane's conclusion in his Epilogue 'Does Democracy have a Violent Heart?' both agrees with and challenges Pritchard's introduction. Keane largely accepts the historical verdict on Athens (pp. 382–4) but wonders about the ways in which an understanding of the role of war within Athenian culture can answer the generalized question of whether democracy has a violent heart (p. 378). Some of his reservations are empirical; he emphasizes Athens' waste of its democratic advantage in losing the Peloponnesian War and is generally sceptical that democracies normally win their wars (p. 402). His deeper theoretical point is that claims about the character and tendencies of democracy, generally, are too dismissive of variation. Even '[i]n the Greek world assembly-based democracy was not a single or fixed form' (p. 385). This variability reflects the broader ontological reality of contingency and one of democracy's other advantages is its appreciation of 'the complexity and contingency of things' (p. 381). Democracy is resolutely non-foundational. One outcome of the democratic recognition of contingency is what Keane calls the 'denaturalization' of war (p. 379), the perspective that sees wars not as inevitabilities dictated by a turbulent cosmos, but as contingent events susceptible to control through human agency. Keane is not sanguine about democratic Athens' ability to resist impulses towards war and he accepts the indictment against Athens that is offered by Thucydides' Corinthians (1.70); this is a dangerous city, always 'acting as if it had been born into the world to give no rest either to itself or to others' (p. 385). This historical case does not, however, prove that violence lies at the heart of democracy, for the democratic denaturalization of war means that more pacific outcomes are possible. This possibility is consistent with a democratic Athens whose institutions presumed public questioning (p. 406). Keane eventually finds more

pacific possibilities in the representative democracies with origins in the Enlightenment, though these regimes must also confront the disturbing reality of asymmetrical violence, the terrifying consequences of the creation of over-kill weapons (pp. 405–8) and the temptations of empire (p. 407).

In their judgments about and gestures beyond classical Athens, both Pritchard and Keane downplay the presence and importance of philosophy within Athens' democratic context, either because classical political philosophy should be read as a series of elite criticisms directed at democracy (in Pritchard's essay, p. 56) or because the enterprise of theory, generally, may disregard contingency (in Keane's essay, p. 405). Within the volume, relevant contributions of classical political philosophy are largely muted. The Platonic dialogue receiving the most attention is the *Menexenus* and its parodic representation of funeral orations. Aristotle's contributions to comparative political thought are under-explored even though he anticipates (in *Politics* 4.4) Keane's point about democratic variation. The philosophical dimensions of Thucydides' *History* have only trace presences. This omission is unfortunate. One might, with a number of other scholars, question whether these texts are elite discourses in any straightforward way. Plato's dialogue form, Aristotle's conversational pragmatics and Thucydides' complex blend of narrative and speeches complicate any equation of philosophy or theory with essentialism. In different ways, all of these texts raise questions about what philosophy is and how it might be related to politics, particularly democracy.¹⁶ In this light, the premature separation of philosophy from democracy serves neither practice well.

One (schematic) illustration of how attention to classical political philosophy might contribute to the volume's themes concerns the question of whether Athens' wars originated out of necessity or choice, a question that persists as we come to grips with the causes and consequences of our own recent wars. The volume's historical essays situate Athens within a political context marked by contestation and much of Athenian militarism seems to be a response to pressures that were externally imposed. At the same time, Athens' exceptional ability to respond to these challenges played back onto the culture to stimulate imperial ambitions that originated wars. In our own recent circumstance, defence against threat was transformed into a project of wider democratization as a matter of moral principle (one motive that never seems to have informed Athenian politics).¹⁷

¹⁶ That the Platonic dialogues are representations of different possible identities for philosophy has been argued recently by Catherine Zuckert, *Plato's Philosophers* (Chicago, 2008).

¹⁷ *Pace* Keane, p. 384. An interesting (counter) point of comparison (and the source of the title of this essay) is provided by Robert Kagan's assessment of the early history of United States foreign policy, *Dangerous Nation* (New York, 2006).

The question of whether Athens' wars were matters of necessity or choice becomes explicit when Thucydides follows an Athenian speech at Sparta that explains the empire as a response to necessity (1.75–6) with his own extended account (the *Pentēcontaetia*) of how the Athenian *archē* emerged (1.89–117). The nature of necessity or compulsion (*anankē*) is therefore a thematic puzzle throughout the *History*. In a section of Plato's *Republic* that might be read as offering a kind of parallel, Socrates represents the situation of a city in speech turned luxurious.¹⁸ Once the city that Socrates, Glaucon and Adeimantus are founding turns from moderation to luxury, it finds itself in need of a more substantial resource base. 'Then we shall have to cut off a portion of our neighbour's land if we are to have enough for pasture and ploughing' (373 d).¹⁹ While this expansion is represented as a necessary demand for sustenance, it only emerges as an imperative after a change in the character and priorities of the city itself. The luxurious city soon sees itself as being threatened in turn by other political communities who 'abandon themselves to the pursuit of wealth without limit, exceeding the boundaries of necessity' (373d). Yet perhaps the city in speech's 'greedy' neighbours also see themselves as acting only out of necessity, just as they might interpret the neediness of the (now luxurious) city in speech as a pursuit of wealth without limit. In this respect, what seems a necessity may be a product of regime priorities and what looks like desperation to one party might look like overreaching aggression to another. In a sense, these seemingly opposite characterizations may simply represent the same situation described from different perspectives, perhaps resonating with Thucydides' contention (1.23) that the truest causes of the Peloponnesian War were Athenian greatness and Spartan fear. Aristotle's sustained critique of militarism in *Politics* 7.14 warns against the hazard of confusing the necessary with the noble or the compelled with the choiceworthy. In representing the complexities of choice and necessity as belonging to the human condition generally (this may be what Thucydides has in mind when he calls the *History* a 'possession forever' (1.22)), Thucydides, Plato and Aristotle may also point to the importance of a certain kind of philosophy for more historically situated reflections on the relationship between democracy, war and empire. This need not be a philosophic rhetoric deployed by elites or a disconnected theorization invented by metaphysicians but a kind of intellectual seriousness indicating the importance of political thought.²⁰ Seeing Athens as a city that particularly encouraged political thought might identify another of its democratic advantages.²¹

¹⁸ What follows is developed more fully in Gerald Mara, *The Civic Conversations of Thucydides and Plato* (Albany, NY, 2008), pp. 172–3.

¹⁹ Bloom's translation in *Plato's Republic* (New York, 1968).

²⁰ A distinction treated at greater length in Mara, *Civic Conversations*, pp. 27–9.

²¹ Suggested by Socrates' comments in *Republic* VIII. '[Democracy is] a convenient place to look for a regime . . . [t]hanks to its *exousia* it contains all species of regimes and

Though the volume's structure may downplay the significance of philosophy, all of the essays can be read philosophically in the sense intended above. That they lend themselves to these readings is an additional sign of the book's significance. All of those who believe that Athens can offer a looking glass for democratic reflections owe the editor and every one of his colleagues tremendous gratitude.

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it is probably necessary for the man who wishes to organize a city to go to a city under a democracy' (556 b).