Abstract: Thucydides’ use of speeches in his history and his focusing on particular characters is highly selective. As a result these two aspects of his narrative generate much disagreement and controversy among scholars. Pericles is perhaps his most widely renowned character in the present day, and his Funeral Oration is his best known and most referenced speech. This essay will firstly discuss the narrative context of the speech and its relation to Thucydides’ programmatic statements on historical method; secondly, it will critically present opposing interpretations of Thucydides’ feelings towards Pericles; thirdly, it will argue for a wholly positive reading of Pericles drawing on the dramatic and tragic aspects of his Funeral Oration in light of the misfortune of the juxtaposed, antithetical Plague and the general political degeneration from the standard he sets with it after his death.

Thucydides’ hope that his work would be ‘useful’ (1.22.4) for posterity rests on the belief that future peoples may come to appreciate the ‘contingency of chance’ through digesting his exemplary use of the past.¹ Wherefore, Grethlein explains, Thucydides carefully presents a complex and varied relationship between human expectation, experience, and chance in his narrative.² Thucydides’ narrative does not unfold step by step in seemingly logical progression. Rather, by restoring the ‘presentness of the past and cultivating a sense that something else might have happened, devices of sideshadowing recreate the openness of our experiences’.³ One such device that pauses the flow of the narrative of events and also limits our perspective is the speech. In his programmatic statement of method (1.22.1) Thucydides explains that his speeches are plausible fiction, subject to each speaker’s being assigned arguments that express the intention of his speech.⁴ ‘περὶ τῶν αἰεὶ παρόντων τὰ δέοντα’⁵ (1.22.1) means what seemed necessary to Thucydides concerning both his speakers’ circumstances (i.e. to

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¹ Grethlein p.15 cf. Stahl (p.218-9) who likewise emphasizes and explains the role of τύχη in Thucydides’ work so that the ‘usefulness’ we can have for his work is to have profound insight into the incalculability of the future and expect the unexpected.
² Grethlein p.241
³ Ibid p.249 cf. 252 ‘recreates the presentness of the past’.
⁴ Yunis (1996) p.62
⁵ ‘the appropriate things concerning always the circumstances’
persuade their live audience) and *his own* (i.e. to persuade his audience – posterity “κτήμα τε ἐς αἰεὶ μᾶλλον ἣ ἄγωνισμα ἐς τὸ παραχρήμα”6 1.22.4). Our analysis of his speeches, for example Pericles’ Funeral Oration, should bear in mind the adjustments made by Thucydides as historical commentator who is speaking to posterity.

Goldhill calls it the ‘democratic rallying cry of free participation for all’.8 The Funeral Oration clearly had nothing to do with the course of the war: the ceremony of which it forms part took place every year, and the ideas expressed by Pericles are not intended as a reply to any speech previously made or even to any general opposition within the city.9 In this speech Pericles presents the political and moral qualities of Athens as a polis, asserting that her power comes naturally from her spiritual superiority, which in turn comes from the most general principles of an ancestral constitution. In this respect, Romilly illustrates, ‘the whole analysis is indeed part of a theory on imperialism’.10 Athens acts not with regard to considerations and calculations of justice and expediency but ’τῆς ἐλευθερίας τὸ πιστῶ’11 (ii.40.5) – what Romilly calls ‘the liberty of imperialism’.12 This ‘freedom’ is not freedom from state intervention but freedom to pursue expansive imperialism.13

Romilly sees Pericles’ unrealistic elevation of tone and intensity of analysis as evidence for Thucydides’ admiration of the man and his ideals.14 Furthermore, she argues that the ideas ‘on which Pericles bases Athens’ power can be considered as the ones whose disappearance will bring about their fall’ so that ‘the ideas of the Funeral Oration fit in with Thucydides’ own.’15 (ii.65)

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6 ‘a possession for all time rather than a declamation to win the applause of the moment’
7 Greenwood p.67-8 ’The speeches were never delivered in the form in which Thucydides represents them to the audience that would have heard them, so, the “necessary” additions must be made by Thucydides, to some degree, for *his* audience’.
8 Goldhill p.63
9 Romilly p.137
10 Romilly p.131
11 ‘in the confidence of liberality’
12 Romilly p.139
13 Hornblower (1991) p.297
14 Romilly p.137
15 Romilly p.139
suggests as much as Thucydides relates how the political system and the patriotic ideal of Athens were turned away from their true nature.

Foster disagrees ‘Thucydides was not an exponent of Pericles’ materialistic imperialism’ and indeed sought to demonstrate its momentous costs.\textsuperscript{16} Foster believes that Thucydides deploys the narrative of this highly intelligent and skilled leader, who ‘succumbed’ to a belief in the historical significance of Athens’ empire in order to illustrate the general pattern of expansion.\textsuperscript{17} But Foster misrepresents Pericles. Pericles explicitly calls for restraint and recognizes the complex dimensions of power. She ignores Pericles’ cautionary qualifications of Athens’ exceptional uniqueness for ruling and reduces it to imperial accumulation. Moreover, Foster also ignores Pericles’ tragic, almost fatalistic, attitude toward the future (ii.64.3) and exaggerates his claimed ‘knowledge of the predictable future’ at (ii.65.13).\textsuperscript{18}

Grethlein elucidates how human miscalculation and chance (τύχη) are the two most significant factors in the frustration of expectation and the suffering it causes in Thucydides.\textsuperscript{19} Rood explains that Thucydides ‘does not suggest that he saw τύχη as a non-human agency: he uses τύχη at times of a turn of events, more commonly of aspects which evade the grasp of human foresight, but may still be open to rational explanation’.\textsuperscript{20} Thucydides often focuses on speeches because they failed in some respect.\textsuperscript{21} Such failure can generally be adduced to some combination of miscalculation on the part of the speaker and τύχη. Placing Pericles’ Funeral Oration within the context of Thucydides’ whole narrative, I will now examine what role it plays in the relation it bears to what was to happen after Pericles’ death: specifically the plague and the changing atmosphere of decision-making with the rise of demagogues. In this way I will address the question of the culpability of his Funeral Oration, and more generally himself, with respect to miscalculation and τύχη.

\textsuperscript{16} Foster p.4
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid p.5
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid p.206
\textsuperscript{19} Grethlein p.254
\textsuperscript{20} Rood p.27
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid p.43
The influence of tragedy on Thucydides’ work has been well documented by many scholars. The first thing to notice about the Funeral Oration is its dramatic framing. The visual stage direction ‘προελθὼν ἀπὸ τοῦ σήματος ἐπὶ βῆμα ψηλὸν πεποιημένον, ὡς ἐπὶ πλεῖστον τοῦ ὕμιλου, ἔλεγε τοιάδε’\(^{22}\) (ii.34.8) gives it a theatrical introduction. Concerning its closing ‘τοιόσοδε μὲν ὁ τάφος ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ χειμῶνι τούτῳ: καὶ διελθόντος αὐτοῦ πρῶτον ἔτος τοῦ πολέμου τοῦ ἄνδρες τελεύτα’\(^{23}\) (ii.47.1) Hornblower writes ‘There is something reassuring, something of rest after storm, about the appearance of a familiar and simple formula after an episode of heightened tension’\(^{24}\). He calls this ‘and so the N\(^{th}\) year of the war ended’ a ‘refrain’ which thus dramatically closes the Funeral Oration’s theatrical opening.

Greenwood highlights further theatricality in the Funeral Oration.\(^{25}\) Athens is a ‘παράδειγμα’\(^{26}\) for others to imitate rather than Athens ‘μιμούμενοι’\(^{27}\) others (ii.37.1). The participle highlights the theatrical connotations of ‘παράδειγμα’. Moreover, Greenwood explains how in light of the above theatre vocabulary Pericles’ wording of his claim that Athens does not exclude foreigners from any ‘μαθήμα’\(^{28}\) or ‘θεάμα’\(^{29}\) (ii.39.1) strengthens the evocation of theatre and drama here.\(^{30}\) Likewise the irony of his claim that Athens is a ‘παίδευσις Ἑλλάδος’\(^{31}\) (ii.41.1) and that his own speech is a ‘διδασκαλία’\(^{32}\) (ii.42.1) resonates throughout the following narrative as events unfold from here like a tragic drama.

Romilly compares how Thucydides makes Pericles a representative of Athenian patriotism in the Funeral Oration to how Euripides does his tragic heroes of the time – specifically with regard to advertising equality, deliberation,

\(^{22}\) ‘he came forward from the tomb to a high platform in order to be heard by as many of the crowd as possible, he said the following’
\(^{23}\) ‘such was the funeral that took place in this winter; and with which the first year of this war ended’
\(^{24}\) Hornblower (1987) p.117
\(^{25}\) Greenwood p.123-4
\(^{26}\) ‘example’
\(^{27}\) ‘imitating’
\(^{28}\) ‘learning’
\(^{29}\) ‘wonder’
\(^{30}\) Ibid p.123
\(^{31}\) ‘education for Greece’
\(^{32}\) ‘teaching’
courage, and generosity.\textsuperscript{33} She explains how ‘in general ideas and detail of argumentation, almost all the views put into Pericles’ mouth by Thucydides are repeated by Euripides’.\textsuperscript{34} Such are the links between this speech and theatre, and between Pericles and the tragic hero it is no wonder that Pericles’ draws interpretations such as that he is ‘symbolic for the tragedy of his age’.\textsuperscript{35}

Lateiner explains how ‘strategically minor incidents receive disproportionate attention – thus emotional and artistic intensity’ because Thucydides’ interest is not merely statistical but in the explanation of suffering and its moral and psychological effects.\textsuperscript{36} Regarding Thucydides’ intense, artistic, horrifying description of the plague, Bellemore and Plant conclude after much analysis of the text and investigation of other authors, archaeological evidence, and scientific findings that ‘there is evidence for the Plague in Athens and perhaps in Attica. The rest we can dismiss as fanciful speculation dressed up to entice the reader to imagine the extreme sufferings of the Athenians.’\textsuperscript{37} Pericles’ Funeral Oration presents a city ordered by and deriving much of its strength from generally accepted civic customs and procedures; the Plague presents a place of increasing self-gratification and \(\text{ἀνομία}\).\textsuperscript{38} Thucydides’ dramatically juxtaposes the ideals and aspirations of the oration with the depravity and destruction of the plague so that one scholar describes the two together as an antithetical pair, like speeches.\textsuperscript{39}

Hornblower discusses the general reverence and importance of the burial of the dead in Thucydides.\textsuperscript{40} This custom is nowhere more emphasized and glorified than in Pericles’ Funeral Oration. Correspondingly it is nowhere more disregarded and disrespected than during the Plague (ii.52) that immediately follows. The \(\text{νόμος}\) of burial contrasts with the \(\text{ἀνομία}\) of the Plague. Interestingly, the Plague is included at (i.23.3) along with eclipses, earthquakes and so on as portentous things that ‘accompanied’ the war such that there is more than a hint

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{33} Romilly p.133-6
  \item \textsuperscript{34} Ibid p.136
  \item \textsuperscript{35} Foster p.183
  \item \textsuperscript{36} Lateiner p.44
  \item \textsuperscript{37} Bellemore and Plant p.389
  \item \textsuperscript{38} Connor p.64
  \item \textsuperscript{39} Allison p.14
  \item \textsuperscript{40} Hornblower (1987) p.113-4
\end{itemize}
of causal connection between the war and these portentous events.\textsuperscript{41} Flory illustrates that where Thucydides includes praise/self-praise in speeches (e.g. Pericles’ Funeral Oration) this is to undercut it with the irony of claims of patriotism juxtaposed with actual events (e.g. the Plague).\textsuperscript{42} After the Plague, Pericles tries to warn the Athenians against the danger of letting misfortune like the Plague dishearten them and also to rouse them (ii.61.2). The Plague, which Pericles reflects is ‘the one phenomenon of all that has proved stronger than our expectation’ (ii.64.1) has raised questions not only in Athens’ assembly but also in the reader’s mind about the wisdom of Pericles’ policy (i.e. moving people into the city) and confident spirit.\textsuperscript{43}

Thucydides affirms that crowding affected the situation at Athens during the Plague (ii.17.2, 52.1). Nevertheless, nowhere is it suggested that Pericles should, and he does not, apologize or defend his policy of moving everyone into the city.\textsuperscript{44} Allison shows, on the one hand, that moving people into the city is not a specifically Periclean policy but represents what naturally would have happened and, on the other, that what apparently made the move unusual was the magnitude of numbers and duration of confinement.\textsuperscript{45} But if Thucydides does not blame Pericles why does the Plague recall Pericles’ first speech (documented by Allison 14-20) and seem to be meant to entirely undermine the Funeral Oration? Allison’s answer is that Thucydides is suggesting that a commander, however good his γνώμη, inevitably must bear some blame for a disaster, no matter how unforeseen, even if it is only for having put people in the wrong place at the wrong time.\textsuperscript{46} I suggest, on top of this, that in Pericles’ regretful concession ‘the one phenomenon of all that has proved stronger than our expectation’ (ii.64.1) we see a hint of apology. Though Pericles impresses upon others to anticipate that παράλογοι will frustrate γνώμαι (i.140.1) the reality of the Plague tragically undermines the confidence of his Funeral Oration.

\textsuperscript{42} Flory p.202
\textsuperscript{43} Connor p.71
\textsuperscript{44} Allison p.21
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid p.22
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid p.23
Thucydides presents Athens as leaderless after Pericles’ death and portrays it as vulnerable to self-seeking leadership and adventurism. Cleon, the archetypal demagogue, is starkly contrasted against Pericles. In Cleon’s first appearance alone the following passages allude to Pericles’ Funeral Oration and other speeches: 3.37.2 of 2.37.2 and 63.2; 3.37.4 of 2.40.2 and 42.4; 3.38.1 of 2.61.2 and 1.140.1; 3.39.2 of 2.62.4; 3.39.5 of 2.64.3; 3.40.4 of 2.64.2. The actual introduction of Cleon (3.36.6) is a virtual parody of the introduction of Pericles (1.139.4). 47 Andrewes explains how Pericles tries to free the people’s γνώμη of anger (2.59.3) in order to resume their rational resolve, while Cleon does the opposite. 48 All of these comparisons serve to establish a contrast between Cleon’s policy of ὀργή and Pericles’ of γνώμη.

On this note, although Cleon is opposed to democratic debate in the Mytilenean Debate, his opponent does not resemble Pericles. Diodotus encourages deliberation only because it helps his own cause. Cleon and Diodotus’ respective standpoints on democratic debate are determined only by their immediate purposes – they are both essentially dishonest. 49 They also spend much time avoiding discussion of the issues at stake in the debate and instead deconstructing the credibility of each other. Thus, Hesk elucidates 'The rhetoric of anti-rhetoric is both a symptom and a cause of post-Periclean democracy’s decline.' 50

Pericles once believed ‘It is not public discussion that hinders action, but rather not to be instructed by debate before going forth to our tasks’ (ii.40.2). That the demos decided once instructed about public policy does not mean they were instructed what exactly to decide. Their decision was formed from thorough understanding, not shallow, unreliable inclination based on unassimilated reasons that may have seemed momentarily persuasive but afterwards are replaced by new impressions. 51 As we noted above with Cleon and Diodotus, the new demagogic rhetoric at Athens focuses on undermining the method of deliberation and policy-making in question; and it also turns

47 Connor p.79 n.1.
48 Andrewes p.33
49 Immerwahr p.28
50 Hesk p.258
51 Yunis (1991) p.186
arguments ad hominem. In contrast to this, Yunis defines ‘instructional’
argument as both scrupulously honest in its presentation of the speaker’s
political advice and depending on reasoned argument for its persuasive power.52
Demagogy is neither of these. Yunis concludes ‘We ought to accept his
(Thucydides) unqualified ascription of a distinctive, instructional rhetoric to
Pericles in the same vein as we do his presentation of Pericles’ deliberative
speeches without opposition.’53 Since Thucydides himself evidently believed
Pericles’ war policy could have succeeded (ii.65.12-3), he took pains to establish
for the reader the correctness of that policy. It is precisely in these deliberative
speeches that this policy is set out and justified for the benefit of the reader.54

Correspondingly, Immerwahr sees a related deterioration of the
intellectual factor in speech making in the narrative after Pericles’ Funeral
Oration. He sees the speeches becoming less and less reasonable and ‘can no
longer be said to say τὰ δέοντα in an objective sense’.55 The best examples of this
deterioration are certain speeches that are spoken in extreme situations of
suffering (e.g. the Plataeans before the Spartans iii.53-9, the Melians before the
Athenians v.85-112, and Nicias vii.7.7). Here the speakers give themselves over
to false notions and subjective arguments and aim at a purely emotional effect.56

The general deterioration of intellectual arguments and heightening of
emotional pleas reaches an ironic and thus tragic climax just before the utter
destruction of the Athenians in Sicily. Rood explains how Nicias raises the
emotional tone during the powerful narrative of the Athenians’ annihilation by
reproducing the content and tone of Pericles’ praise of Athens, particularly his
Funeral Oration (e.g. honor of Athens’ great name, her love of pleasure,
hereditary values, freedom).57 To no avail.

In his Funeral Oration Pericles dismisses Athens’ need of poetry to praise
it ὅ τ' οὐδὲν προσδεόμενον οὗτος Ὁμήρου ἐπαινέτου οὗτος ὅστις ἔπεσε μὲν τὸ αὐτίκα

52 For example comparisons between Pericles and Cleon cf. Yunis (1991) p.191-8
54 Ibid (1991) p.199
55 Immerwahr p.31
56 Ibid p.31
57 Rood p.193
Hornblower notes how this recalls Thucydides' dismissal of poetry in his programmatic statement of method (i.21.1) because it exaggerates. Pericles' dismissal here of 'τὸ αὐτίκα τέρψετ' also reminds us of Thucydides' embracing of the 'ἀτερπέστερον' (i.22.4) for the sake of accuracy and usefulness. Though this genre of speech does not demand exaggeration, Pericles certainly idealizes and pleases. The result is a long shadow cast forward by him over both Athens and the narrative that gets smaller and smaller as events unfold and what he truly represents distorted or forgotten.

In her monumental book, Romilly argues that Thucydides believes that it was the arrogantly excessive growth of Athenian imperialism after the death of Pericles that caused the mistake that led to destruction: democracy falls apart when wise leadership gives way to violent and intemperate policies due to thirst for power and domination. In Thucydides, Pericles is, par excellence, the man of thought who never acts without intellectual reasons for doing so, thus Thucydides was naturally led to make a complete analysis of his ideas on imperialistic policy. Thucydides makes it clear in his judgment at (ii.65) that he thought Pericles was right in his understanding, estimations, calculations, and plans, including the Pericles' warning at (i.144.1) that Athens must not extend her empire and run into unnecessary dangers. We must not forget that in many ways Pericles' policy worked for nearly three decades. Nevertheless it did fail.

So, in conclusion, Thucydides presents Pericles as a tragic and sympathetic figure: a visionary leader who represents Athens at its best before the horror of the Plague and the political degeneration after his death that loses them the war. The Funeral Oration is the key to understanding this. Its significance comes both from its own content and its position within the narrative.

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58 'in no way needing the praise of Homer or another who with his verses might charm for the moment'
59 'charm for the moment'
60 'less pleasing'
61 Romilly p.111
62 Ibid p.119
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