The Promethean Library



The First Citizens

Greek Voices on Self-Government, from Solon to Aristotle

Plutarch · Herodotus · Aeschylus
Thucydides · Plato · Aristotle

An anthology in eight chapters, with headnotes and questions

Anthologies · No. 1

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Greek Voices on Self-Government, from Solon to Aristotle

Readings from Plutarch, Herodotus, Aeschylus, Thucydides, Plato and Aristotle

With headnotes, questions, notes, glossary and chronology



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Transatlantic Press

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The readings. The readings are reproduced word for word from public domain translations. Each translator, edition and date is listed under Sources of the Texts, with what this edition leaves out.

How this edition was made. The introduction, headnotes, questions, reflections, practices, notes, glossary, chronology and reading list were drafted with the help of artificial intelligence and checked by hand against the readings and against published sources. Every quotation in them matches the readings printed in this book word for word, and every fact was checked against a published source before it was printed. The publisher keeps a record of the source checked for each fact. No quotation, fact or story was invented. The readings themselves are copied unchanged from the translations named under Sources of the Texts.

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...the rule of many has first a name attaching to it which is the fairest of all names, that is to say 'Equality'

Herodotus, Histories, Book III, translated by G. C. Macaulay

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Before You Begin

This book gathers eleven readings by six Greek writers on a single question: how can free people govern themselves? The readings run from Solon, the Athenian lawgiver of about 594 BC, to Aristotle, who died in 322 BC, the year Athens lost its democracy. In between come a Persian debate on the three kinds of government, a goddess founding a court of law, a myth about why every citizen may speak in the assembly, an assembly that changed its mind about killing a whole city, a civil war that poisoned the meaning of words, and two philosophers who looked hard at what democracy does to people.

The book is for readers who have never studied the classics. You need no Greek and no history beyond what the headnotes supply. A reading group can take one chapter a meeting.

Each of the eight chapters has the same shape. A headnote sets the scene and says exactly where the passage comes from. Then comes the reading itself, printed word for word from a translation now in the public domain, and three or four questions for thinking or discussion. Paragraphs and verse lines are numbered: 6.9 means Reading 6, paragraph 9. Those numbers guide you to the Notes on the Texts near the back, which explain names, places and difficult phrases. A glossary, a chronology and suggestions for further reading follow.

You can read the chapters in order, which follows the story from Solon to Aristotle, or start with whichever voice draws you in.

Introduction

A Question Without a Precedent

Most people who have ever lived were ruled by someone. Kings, priests, chiefs and conquerors gave the orders, and the rest obeyed or suffered. In a handful of small Greek cities, and above all in Athens, people tried something else. Ordinary men, farmers and craftsmen and sailors, met in an assembly, argued, voted and lived with the result. They called the arrangement *demokratia*, literally the rule of the *demos*, a word that meant the body of citizens and could mean the assembly itself.

Nobody handed the Greeks a theory of self-government. They had to work it out as they went, under pressure from debt, faction, war and their own tempers. The writers in this book watched that experiment from inside it or looked back on it. Some admired it, some feared it, and most did both. What they left us is not a manual but an argument, still unfinished, about who should rule and how ordinary people can be trusted with power.

The title, The First Citizens, points to the heart of that argument. A subject obeys. A citizen, in Aristotle's later definition, shares in judging and in holding office (10.2). The readings show how that idea was born, what it demanded of people, and how it could go wrong.

Solon and the First Settlement

The story begins in a crisis. Around 600 BC Athens was split between a few rich families and a mass of poor farmers. Many of the poor worked the land of the rich for a sixth of its produce, and a man who could not pay his debts could be sold into slavery with his children (1.1). A genera-

tion or more earlier a nobleman named Cylon had tried to seize power and failed, and the killing of his followers left a curse on one of the great families. The city had tried written law, too: Draco's code, generally dated to 621 BC, punished almost every crime with death.

Solon, a poet as well as a statesman, was chosen archon, the chief annual magistrate, in about 594 BC. Britannica dates his laws to that year; another account in the same reference work has him given full powers as lawgiver some twenty years later, so the timing is uncertain. What he did is clearer. He canceled debts and banned loans secured on a person's body. He divided citizens into four classes by income, so that wealth rather than birth decided who could hold office. He let the poorest class attend the assembly and sit on juries, and he allowed an appeal from a magistrate's decision to the people. He refused to redistribute land, and he refused to make himself tyrant.

Plutarch, who tells the story in Reading 1, wrote more than six centuries later, but he quotes Solon's own poems, and about three hundred lines of those poems survive in quotations like his. The reading shows a man who pleased neither side and expected to be blamed by both.

Solon's settlement did not last unbroken. Within half a century Athens was ruled by the tyrant Peisistratus, whose family held power until 510 BC. Then in 508 BC Cleisthenes reorganized the citizens into ten new tribes and enlarged the council to five hundred, and he is usually regarded as the founder of Athenian democracy. The readings jump over his work, but everything after Reading 1 takes place in the city he reshaped.

Arguing About the Best Constitution

Herodotus, born possibly in 484 BC at Halicarnassus, then under Persian rule, wrote the history of the wars between the Greeks and Persia. In Reading 2 he sets a startling scene in Persia itself. In 522 BC seven Persian nobles killed a Magian who had seized the throne by pretending to be the dead king's brother. Before choosing a new king, says Herodotus, they

debated whether Persia should be ruled by the many, the few or one. He insists the speeches were really made, though some Greeks of his own day did not believe it (2.1), and modern scholars are still divided. Whether or not it happened, the debate sets the three kinds of government side by side, and later Greek thinkers kept returning to the same three.

Aeschylus, the tragic playwright, fought for Athens against the Persians at Marathon. His trilogy the *Oresteia*, produced in 458 BC, ends with the *Eumenides*, in which the goddess Athena stops an endless chain of revenge killings by founding a court of citizens on the Hill of Ares, the Areopagus. Readings 3 and 4 come from that play. They were written just after a real political fight: in 462 or 461 BC (sources differ) the reformer Ephialtes stripped the old council of the Areopagus of most of its powers and left it chiefly as a court for homicide, and he was murdered. Scholars disagree about where Aeschylus stood.

Protagoras of Abdera was the most famous of the sophists, the traveling teachers of the later fifth century BC, and in 444 BC Pericles chose him to frame laws for a new colony at Thurii in Italy. In Reading 5, from Plato's dialogue named after him, Protagoras explains with a myth why the Athenians let any citizen give advice on public affairs. Whether the myth's form is his or Plato's is not known, but it makes a striking case for the idea that political judgment belongs to everyone.

Athens Tested

Thucydides, an Athenian who commanded in the long war between Athens and Sparta and spent twenty years in exile after failing to save the city of Amphipolis, wrote its history. The war lasted from 431 to 404 BC and ended with Athens' surrender. Readings 6 and 7 come from 427 BC, the war's fifth year.

In 428 BC the city of Mytilene on the island of Lesbos revolted against Athens. When it fell, the Athenian assembly voted in anger to kill all its men and enslave its women and children, then met again the next day and argued it over. Reading 6 gives the two speeches, by Cleon, the

most powerful politician in Athens after Pericles died in 429 BC, and by Diodotus, a man known to us only from this one speech. It is democracy at its best and worst in a single day.

Reading 7 moves to Corcyra, the island we call Corfu, in 427 BC. There a civil war between the party of the people and the party of the few became a massacre, and Thucydides stops his narrative to describe what such strife does to a city's morals and even its language. His analysis has often been read as a warning to free states.

The Philosophers Look Back

Plato, born in 428 or 427 BC, grew up during that war. He came from an aristocratic family related on his mother's side to Solon, and he was in the circle of Socrates, whom Athens tried and executed in 399 BC. In the *Republic*, written in his middle years, Socrates describes how the best state decays step by step into worse ones: rule by the ambitious, then by the rich, then by the people, then by a tyrant. Readings 8 and 9 give his portrait of the democratic city, charming and disorderly, and of the way an excess of freedom breeds its opposite.

Aristotle, born in 384 BC at Stagira in the north, studied in Plato's Academy for about twenty years, later founded his own school, the Lyceum, and had his students collect information on the constitutions of 158 cities. He lived and taught for many years in Athens without being a citizen there. His *Politics* comes down to us probably as lecture notes. In Reading 10 he asks what a citizen is, and in Reading 11 he argues that the best practical constitution rests on a large middle class. He names Solon as an example of a lawgiver from the middle rank (11.5), and so the book ends where it began.

What These Voices Share

The writers disagree, often sharply. Otanes praises the many and Megabyzus despises them; Protagoras trusts every citizen and Plato fears

what the crowd will do; Cleon wants laws that never change and Diodotus wants the assembly to think again. Yet several threads run through them all.

The first is fear of faction. Solon's poems, Athena's court, the Furies' prayer, Thucydides on Corcyra and Aristotle on the middle class all treat civil strife, which the Greeks called *stasis*, as the deadliest enemy of a free city.

The second is the problem of excess. Too much wealth on one side and too much want on the other, too much fear or too little, too much liberty or too little: again and again the cure is a balance, and the danger lies at the extremes.

The third is the place of reverence and law. Athena tells the citizens to keep some fear in the city (3.20). Zeus sends reverence and justice to all people so that cities can hold together (5.8). Thucydides mourns the general laws that partisans destroy (7.4).

Who Counted

These were first citizens in more than one sense. The Athenian assembly was made up of male citizens. Slaves had no political rights, and resident foreigners, called metics, were protected by law but were not citizens. Aristotle himself was not a citizen of Athens. The readings sometimes say this plainly (10.2) and sometimes take it for granted. Reading them honestly means noticing both the reach of the Greek idea and its limits.

Reading Them Today

The translations in this book are Victorian or older, and their English is formal. Give it time. Read difficult paragraphs aloud. Use the notes but do not let them stop you; the general drift is usually clear on a first reading, and the details come on the second.

Above all, argue with these writers. They were arguing with each other. Ask of each passage what problem it is trying to solve, what it fears,

what it hopes for, and whether its answer still holds. The questions after each reading are only a start.

A Note on the Texts

Every reading in this book is copied word for word from a translation published before 1929 by a translator who died before 1956. Nothing in the readings has been modernized, corrected or abridged. Where a translator or printer made a slip, it stays, and the Notes on the Texts point it out. Each reading is one continuous passage; where the book needed two separate passages from the same work, they appear as two readings.

Five of the translators were Victorian scholars; the sixth, William Ellis, worked in the eighteenth century. Aubrey Stewart translated Plutarch's Life of Solon for a Bell edition of 1880 to 1882; the text here comes from the 1894 printing. G. C. Macaulay's Herodotus first appeared in 1890. E. H. Plumptre's verse Aeschylus first appeared in the 1860s; the text here is from an edition of 1901. Benjamin Jowett's Plato is the third edition of 1892, and Richard Crawley's Thucydides dates from 1874. The oldest is William Ellis's version of Aristotle's *Politics*, first published in 1776 and reprinted in Everyman's Library from 1912.

Their styles differ. Stewart spells Greek names as the Greeks did, so Solon's world is full of Kylon, Drakon and Lykurgus, where this book's own prose uses the familiar Cylon, Draco and Lycurgus. Plumptre writes Skythia and Ægeus. Crawley writes Mitylene for Mytilene. Ellis writes in the long, loose sentences of the 1770s and sometimes uses words in older senses: his "mediocrity" means a middle condition, not dullness. Jowett is the easiest to read.

A few features of the printed books are left out here. The translators' own notes and the footnote markers that point to them are omitted. So are the chapter or section numbers printed inside the paragraphs of Plut-

arch and Herodotus, the bracketed page numbers of the standard Greek edition in Ellis's Aristotle, and the line numbers in Plumptre's margin. The headnotes give the traditional chapter, section or line references instead. Solon's verses, which Stewart sets as separate lines, run on here inside their paragraphs.

Plumptre's line numbers, and so the numbers in this book, do not match the standard numbering of the Greek text. Where it helps, the headnotes give both.

1. The Lawgiver Who Would Not Be King

Athens in the early sixth century BC was close to breaking apart. A few families owned most of the land. Poor farmers who borrowed against their own bodies could be sold as slaves, and some sold their children. The city's factions were regional as well as economic: the hill people, the plain people and the coast people each wanted a different kind of government. Many expected the crisis to end the way it ended in other Greek cities, with one strong man taking power as tyrant.

Instead the Athenians turned to Solon. He was a poet and a man of moderate means, trusted by the rich because he had property and by the poor because he was honest. Chosen archon in about 594 BC, he was given authority to rewrite the city's laws. He canceled debts, freed those enslaved for debt, divided the citizens into four classes by income and gave even the poorest a voice in the assembly and a seat on the juries. Then, by Plutarch's account, he refused the crown his friends begged him to take.

This reading comes from Plutarch's Life of Solon, chapters 13 through 19, in the translation of Aubrey Stewart. Plutarch, a Greek writer born at Chaeronea in AD 46, paired the lives of famous Greeks and Romans. He wrote long after Solon, and he weighs his sources openly: Phanias says one thing, Androtion another, Solon's own poems a third. Listen for those poems. They are the oldest words in this book, and in them Solon speaks for himself, mocking his critics, defending his compromise and claiming that he gave each side enough to stop it from crushing the other.

Reading 1. *Solon's reforms. Plutarch, Life of Solon (chapters 13–19), translated by Aubrey Stewart.*

❧

1 When the troubles about Kylon were over, and the accursed men cast out of the country, the Athenians relapsed into their old dispute about the constitution. The state was divided into as many factions as there were parts of the country, for the Diakrii, or mountaineers, favoured democracy; the Pedioei, oligarchy; while those who dwelt along the seashore, called Parali, preferred a constitution midway between these two forms, and thus prevented either of the other parties from carrying their point. Moreover, the state was on the verge of revolution, because of the excessive poverty of some citizens, and the enormous wealth of others, and it appeared that the only means of putting an end to these disorders was by establishing an absolute despotism. The whole people were in debt to a few wealthy men; they either cultivated their farms, in which case they were obliged to pay one-sixth of the profit to their creditors, and were called Hektemori, or servants, or else they had raised loans upon personal security, and had become the slaves of their creditors, who either employed them at home, or sold them to foreigners. Many were even compelled to sell their own children, which was not illegal, and to leave the country because of the harshness of their creditors.

2 The greater part, and those of most spirit, combined together, and encouraged one another not to suffer such oppression any longer, but to choose some trustworthy person to protect their interests, to set free all enslaved debtors, redistribute the land, and, in a word, entirely remodel the constitution.

3 In this position of affairs, the most sensible men in Athens perceived that Solon was a person who shared the vices of neither faction, as he took no part in the oppressive conduct of the wealthy, and yet had sufficient fortune to save him from the straits to which the poor were reduced. In consequence of this, they begged him to come forward and end their dis-

putes. But Phanias of Lesbos says that Solon deceived both parties, in order to save the state, promising the poor a redistribution of lands, and the rich a confirmation of their securities. However, Solon himself tells us that it was with reluctance that he interfered, as he was threatened by the avarice of the one party, and the desperation of the other. He was chosen archon next after Philombrotus, to act as an arbitrator and lawgiver at once, because the rich had confidence in him as a man of easy fortune, and the poor trusted him as a good man. It is said also that a saying which he had let fall some time before, that "equality does not breed strife," was much circulated at the time, and pleased both parties, because the rich thought it meant that property should be distributed according to merit and desert, while the poor thought it meant according to rule and measure. Both parties were now elate with hope, and their leaders urged Solon to seize the supreme power in the state, of which he was practically possessed, and make himself king. Many even of the more moderate class of politicians, who saw how weary and difficult a task it would be to reform the state by debates and legislative measures, were quite willing that so wise and honest a man should undertake the sole management of affairs. It is even said that Solon received an oracle as follows:

4 "Take thou the helm, the vessel guide, Athens will rally to thy side."

5 His intimate friends were loudest in their reproaches, pointing out that it was merely the name of despot from which he shrunk, and that in his case his virtues would lead men to regard him as a legitimate hereditary sovereign; instancing also Tunnondas, who in former times had been chosen by the Euboeans, and, at the present time, Pittakus, who had been chosen king of Mitylene. But nothing could shake Solon's determination. He told his friends that monarchy is indeed a pleasant place, but there is no way out of it; and he inserted the following verses in answer to Phokus, in one of his poems:

6 "But if I spared My country, and with dread tyrannic sway, Forbore to stain and to pollute my glory; I feel no shame at this; nay rather thus, I think that I excel mankind."

7 From which it is clear that he possessed a great reputation even before he became the lawgiver of Athens.

8 In answer to the reproaches of many of his friends at his refusal to make himself despot, he wrote as follows:

9 "Not a clever man was Solon, not a calculating mind, For he would not take the kingdom, which the gods to him inclined, In his net he caught the prey, but would not draw it forth to land, Overpowered by his terrors, feeble both of heart and hand; For a man of greater spirit would have occupied the throne, Proud to be the Lord of Athens, though 'twere for a day alone, Though the next day he and his into oblivion were thrown."

10 This is the way in which he says the masses, and low-minded men, spoke of him. He, however, firmly rejecting the throne, proceeded quietly to administer public affairs, in laying down his laws without any weak yielding to the powerful, or any attempt to court popularity. Such as were good, he did not meddle with, fearing that if he

11 "Disturbed and overset the state,"

12 he might not have sufficient power to

13 "Reconstitute and organise again,"

14 in the best way. He carried out his measures by persuasion, and, where he thought he could succeed, by force; in his own words,

15 "Combining Force and Justice both together."

16 Being afterwards asked whether he had composed the best possible laws for the Athenians, he answered, "The best that they would endure." And the habit of Athenians of later times, who soften down harsh words by using politer equivalents, calling harlots "mistresses," taxes "contribu-

tions," garrisons of cities "protectors," and the common prison "the house," was, it seems, first invented by Solon, who devised the name of "relief from burdens" for his measure to abolish all debts.

17 This was his first measure; namely, to put an end to all existing debts and obligations, and to forbid any one in future to lend money upon security of the person of the debtor. Some writers, among whom is Androtion, say that he benefited the poor, not by the absolute extinction of debt, but by establishing a lower rate of interest; and that this measure was called "Relief from burdens," and together with it the two other measures for the enlargement of measures and of the value of money, which were passed about the same time. For he ordered a mina, which was before constituted of seventy three drachmas, to contain a hundred, so that, though they paid the same amount, yet the value was less; thus those who had much to pay were benefited, and still their creditors were not cheated. But most writers say that the "Relief from burdens" meant the extinction of all securities whatever, and this agrees best with what we read in his poems. For Solon prides himself in these upon having

18 "Taken off the mortgages, which on the land were laid, And made the country free, which was formerly enslaved."

19 While he speaks of bringing back Athenian citizens who had been sold into slavery abroad,

20 "In distant lands who roam, Their native tongue forgot, Or here endure at home A slave's disgraceful lot,"

21 and of making them free men again.

22 It is said that in consequence of this measure he met with the greatest trouble of his life. As he was meditating how he might put an end to debt, and what words and preambles were best for the introduction of this law, he took counsel with his most intimate friends, such as Konon and Kleinias and Hipponikus, informing them that he had no intention of interfering with the tenure of land, but that he intended to abolishing

all existing securities. They instantly took time by the forelock, borrowed large sums from the wealthy, and bought up a great extent of land. Presently the decree came forth, and they remained in enjoyment of these estates, but did not repay their loan to their creditors. This brought Solon into great discredit, for the people believed that he had been their accomplice. But he soon proved that this must be false, by remitting a debt of five talents which he himself had lent; and some state the sum at fifteen talents, amongst whom is Polyzelus of Rhodes. However, his friends were for ever afterwards called "The Swindlers."

23 By this measure he pleased neither party, but the rich were dissatisfied at the loss of their securities, and the poor were still more so because the land was not divided afresh, as they hoped it would be, and because he had not, like Lykurgus, established absolute equality.

24 But Lykurgus was eleventh in direct descent from Herakles, and had reigned in Lacedaemon for many years, and had his own great reputation, friends, and interest to assist him in carrying out his reforms: and although he chose to effect his purpose by violence, so that his eye was actually knocked out, yet he succeeded in carrying that measure, so valuable for the safety and concord of the state, by which it was rendered impossible for any citizen to be either rich or poor. Solon's power could not reach this height, as he was only a commoner and a moderate man; yet he did all that was in his power, relying solely upon the confidence and goodwill of his countrymen.

25 It is clear that they were disappointed, and expected more from his legislation, from his own verses--

26 "Once they speculated gaily, what good luck should them befall, Now they look upon me coldly, as a traitor to them all."

27 Yet he says, if any one else had been in his position,

28 "He ne'er would have desisted from unsettling the laws, Till he himself got all the cream."

29 However, not long afterwards, they perceived the public benefits which he had conferred upon them, forgot their private grievances, and made a public sacrifice in honour of the Seisachtheia, or "Relief from burdens." Moreover, they constituted Solon supreme reformer and lawgiver, not over some departments only, but placing everything alike in his hands; magistracies, public assemblies, senate, and law-courts. He had full powers to confirm or abolish any of these, and to fix the proper qualifications for members of them, and their numbers and times of meeting.

30 First of all, then, he repealed all the laws of Drakon, except those relating to murder, because of their harshness and the excessive punishments which they awarded. For death was the punishment for almost every offence, so that even men convicted of idleness were executed, and those who stole pot-herbs or fruits suffered just like sacrilegious robbers and murderers. So that Demades afterwards made the joke that Drakon's laws were not written with ink, but with blood. It is said that Drakon himself, when asked why he had fixed the punishment of death for most offences, answered that he considered these lesser crimes to deserve it, and he had no greater punishment for more important ones.

31 In the next place, Solon, who wished to leave all magistracies as he found them, in the hands of the wealthy classes, but to give the people a share in the rest of the constitution, from which they were then excluded, took a census of the wealth of the citizens, and made a first class of those who had an annual income of not less than five hundred medimni of dry or liquid produce; these he called Pentakosiomedimni. The next class were the Hippeis, or knights, consisting of those who were able to keep a horse, or who had an income of three hundred medimni. The third class were the Zeugitae, whose property qualification was two hundred medimni of dry or liquid produce; and the last class were the Thetes, whom Solon did not permit to be magistrates, but whose only political privilege was the right of attending the public assemblies and sitting as jurymen in the law courts. This privilege was at first insignificant, but afterwards became of infinite importance, because most disputes were

settled before a jury. Even in those cases which he allowed the magistrates to settle, he provided a final appeal to the people.

32 Solon moreover is said to have purposely worded his laws vaguely and with several interpretations, in order to increase the powers of these juries, because persons who could not settle their disputes by the letter of the law were obliged to have recourse to juries of the people, and to refer all disputes to them, as being to a certain extent above the laws. He himself notices this in the following verses:

33 "I gave the people all the strength they needed, Yet kept the power of the nobles strong; Thus each from other's violence I shielded, Not letting either do the other wrong."

34 Thinking that the weakness of the populace required still further protection, he permitted any man to prosecute on behalf of any other who might be ill-treated. Thus if a man were struck or injured, any one else who was able and willing might prosecute on his behalf, and the lawgiver by this means endeavoured to make the whole body of citizens act together and feel as one. A saying of his is recorded which quite agrees with the spirit of this law. Being asked, what he thought was the best managed city? "That," he answered, "in which those who are not wronged espouse the cause of those who are, and punish their oppressors."

35 He established the senate of the Areopagus of those who had held the yearly office of archon, and himself became a member of it because he had been archon. But in addition to this, observing that the people were becoming turbulent and unruly, in consequence of their relief from debt, he formed a second senate, consisting of a hundred men selected from each of the four tribes, to deliberate on measures in the first instance, and he permitted no measures to be proposed before the general assembly, which had not been previously discussed in this senate. The upper senate he intended to exercise a general supervision, and to maintain the laws, and he thought that with these two senates as her anchors, the ship of the state would ride more securely, and that the people would be less inclined

to disorder. Most writers say that Solon constituted the senate of the Areopagus, as is related above; and this view is supported by the fact that Drakon nowhere mentions or names the Areopagites, but in all cases of murder refers to the Ephetai. However, the eighth law on the thirteenth table of the laws of Solon runs thus:--

36 "All citizens who were disfranchised before the magistracy of Solon shall resume their rights, except those who have been condemned by the Areopagus, or by the Ephetai, or by the king—archons, in the prytaneum, for murder or manslaughter, or attempts to overthrow the government and who were in exile when this law was made."

37 This again proves that the senate of the Areopagus existed before the time of Solon; for who could those persons be who were condemned by the court of the Areopagus, if Solon was the first who gave the senate of the Areopagus a criminal jurisdiction; though perhaps some words have been left out, or indistinctly written, and the law means "all those who had been condemned on the charges which now are judged by the court of the Areopagus, the Ephetai, or the Prytanies, when this law was made, must remain disfranchised, though the others become enfranchised?" Of these explanations the reader himself must consider which he prefers.

Questions

1. Solon's saying that "equality does not breed strife" pleased rich and poor for opposite reasons (1.3). What did each side hear in it? Can you think of a modern slogan that works the same way?
2. Solon's friends argued that his virtue would make him a good king (1.5). Why did he refuse? Was he right that monarchy "is indeed a pleasant place, but there is no way out of it"?
3. Asked whether his laws were the best possible, Solon said they were "The best that they would endure" (1.16). Is that a confession of failure or a description of good lawmaking?

4. Solon's best-managed city is one "in which those who are not wronged espouse the cause of those who are, and punish their oppressors" (1.34). What would it take for that to be true where you live?

2. Three Ways to Rule

In 522 BC the Persian empire, the largest state the Greeks knew, was briefly without a lawful king. A Magian, a member of a priestly tribe, had seized the throne by pretending to be the brother of the dead king Cambyses. Darius and other Persian nobles killed him. One of the seven, Darius, became king and ruled until 486 BC.

Herodotus tells how the seven, a few days after the killing, sat down to decide what kind of government Persia should have. Otanes speaks for the rule of the many, Megabyzus for the rule of a few of the best men, and Darius for the rule of one. The four others vote with Darius, and Otanes withdraws on one remarkable condition.

Herodotus knew his Greek audience would find the scene hard to believe, and he says so at the start (2.1). Later in his history he returns to it, reporting that a Persian general, Mardonius, set up popular governments in the Greek cities of Ionia, as if to prove that Persians could think such thoughts. Modern scholars are divided. Some think the debate is a Greek invention, out of place in Persia; others take Herodotus at his word.

Either way, the arguments still echo. Otanes names the marks of popular rule: offices filled by lot, magistrates who must render account, and decisions taken by the whole assembly. The Greek word Macaulay translates as "Equality" is *isonomia*, equality under the law. Megabyzus answers with an old complaint against democracy, that the crowd cannot know what it is doing. Darius answers both with history.

The reading is Book 3, sections 80 through 83, in G. C. Macaulay's translation.

Reading 2. *The debate on the three kinds of government. Herodotus, Histories (3.80–83), translated by G. C. Macaulay.*

1 When the tumult had subsided and more than five days had elapsed, those who had risen against the Magians began to take counsel about the general state, and there were spoken speeches which some of the Hellenes do not believe were really uttered, but spoken they were nevertheless. On the one hand Otanes urged that they should resign the government into the hands of the whole body of the Persians, and his words were as follows: "To me it seems best that no single one of us should henceforth be ruler, for that is neither pleasant nor profitable. Ye saw the insolent temper of Cambyses, to what lengths it went, and ye have had experience also of the insolence of the Magian: and how should the rule of one alone be a well-ordered thing, seeing that the monarch may do what he desires without rendering any account of his acts? Even the best of all men, if he were placed in this disposition, would be caused by it to change from his wonted disposition: for insolence is engendered in him by the good things which he possesses, and envy is implanted in man from the beginning; and having these two things, he has all vice: for he does many deeds of reckless wrong, partly moved by insolence proceeding from satiety, and partly by envy. And yet a despot at least ought to have been free from envy, seeing that he has all manner of good things. He is however naturally in just the opposite temper towards his subjects; for he grudges to the nobles that they should survive and live, but delights in the basest of citizens, and he is more ready than any other man to receive calumnies. Then of all things he is the most inconsistent; for if you express admiration of him moderately, he is offended that no very great court is paid to him, whereas if you pay court to him extravagantly, he is offended with you for being a flatterer. And the most important matter of all is that which I am about to say:—he disturbs the customs handed down from our fathers, he is a ravisher of women, and he puts men to death without

trial. On the other hand the rule of many has first a name attaching to it which is the fairest of all names, that is to say 'Equality'; next, the multitude does none of those things which the monarch does: offices of state are exercised by lot, and the magistrates are compelled to render account of their action: and finally all matters of deliberation are referred to the public assembly. I therefore give as my opinion that we let monarchy go and increase the power of the multitude; for in the many is contained everything."

2 This was the opinion expressed by Otanes; but Megabyzos urged that they should entrust matters to the rule of a few, saying these words: "That which Otanes said in opposition to a tyranny, let it be counted as said for me also, but in that which he said urging that we should make over the power to the multitude, he has missed the best counsel: for nothing is more senseless or insolent than a worthless crowd; and for men flying from the insolence of a despot to fall into that of unrestrained popular power, is by no means to be endured: for he, if he does anything, does it knowing what he does, but the people cannot even know; for how can that know which has neither been taught anything noble by others nor perceived anything of itself, but pushes on matters with violent impulse and without understanding, like a torrent stream? Rule of the people then let them adopt who are foes to the Persians; but let us choose a company of the best men, and to them attach the chief power; for in the number of these we shall ourselves also be, and it is likely that the resolutions taken by the best men will be the best."

3 This was the opinion expressed by Megabyzos; and thirdly Darius proceeded to declare his opinion, saying: "To me it seems that in those things which Megabyzos said with regard to the multitude he spoke rightly, but in those which he said with regard to the rule of a few, not rightly: for whereas there are three things set before us, and each is supposed to be the best in its own kind, that is to say a good popular government, and the rule of a few, and thirdly the rule of one, I say that this last is by far superior to the others; for nothing better can be found than the rule of

an individual man of the best kind; seeing that using the best judgment he would be guardian of the multitude without reproach; and resolutions directed against enemies would so best be kept secret. In an oligarchy however it happens often that many, while practising virtue with regard to the commonwealth, have strong private enmities arising among themselves; for as each man desires to be himself the leader and to prevail in counsels, they come to great enmities with one another, whence arise factions among them, and out of the factions comes murder, and from murder results the rule of one man; and thus it is shown in this instance by how much that is the best. Again, when the people rules, it is impossible that corruption should not arise, and when corruption arises in the commonwealth, there arise among the corrupt men not enmities but strong ties of friendship: for they who are acting corruptly to the injury of the commonwealth put their heads together secretly to do so. And this continues so until at last someone takes the leadership of the people and stops the course of such men. By reason of this the man of whom I speak is admired by the people, and being so admired he suddenly appears as monarch. Thus he too furnishes herein an example to prove that the rule of one is the best thing. Finally, to sum up all in a single word, whence arose the liberty which we possess, and who gave it to us? Was it a gift of the people or of an oligarchy or of a monarch? I therefore am of opinion that we, having been set free by one man, should preserve that form of rule, and in other respects also that we should not annul the customs of our fathers which are ordered well; for that is not the better way."

4 These three opinions then had been proposed, and the other four men of the seven gave their assent to the last. So when Otanes, who was desirous to give equality to the Persians, found his opinion defeated, he spoke to those assembled thus: "Partisans, it is clear that some one of us must become king, selected either by casting lots, or by entrusting the decision to the multitude of the Persians and taking him whom it shall choose, or by some other means. I therefore shall not be a competitor with you, for I do not desire either to rule or to be ruled; and on this condition I with-

draw from my claim to rule, namely that I shall not be ruled by any of you, either I myself or my descendants in future time." When he had said this, the six made agreement with him on those terms, and he was no longer a competitor with them, but withdrew from the assembly; and at the present time this house remains free alone of all the Persian houses, and submits to rule only so far as it wills to do so itself, not transgressing the laws of the Persians.

Questions

1. Otanes says that even "the best of all men" would be changed by unchecked power (2.1). Why? Do you believe it?
2. Megabyzus compares the people to "a torrent stream" (2.2). What does the image capture, and what does it leave out?
3. Darius argues that each of the other systems ends in one-man rule anyway (2.3). Follow his reasoning step by step. Where is it strongest and where weakest?
4. Otanes asks only that he and his family be neither rulers nor ruled (2.4). What kind of freedom is that, and could a whole people have it?

3. A Court for the City

The *Eumenides* is the last play of Aeschylus's trilogy the *Oresteia*, first staged at Athens in 458 BC. The trilogy follows a curse through a royal house. Clytemnestra murders her husband Agamemnon; their son Orestes, at the god Apollo's bidding, kills his mother; and the Furies, the goddesses who embody his mother's curse, pursue him to Athens. Each killing calls for another. There seems to be no end.

Athena ends it. Rather than judge the case alone, she chooses citizens bound by oath to try it, and the trial is held on the Areopagus, the Hill of Ares at Athens. Reading 3 is her speech founding the court, given just before the jurors vote. The votes come out equal, Athena's own vote is for Orestes, and he goes free. The Furies are enraged, but Athena persuades them to stay as honored powers of the city. Reading 4 comes from the play's last scene: the Furies pray that civil strife may never rage in Athens, and Athena welcomes their change of heart. In Plumptre's stage direction they become the Eumenides, or Gentle Ones.

The play was written only a few years after the reformer Ephialtes, in 462 or 461 BC, took most of the old Areopagus council's powers away and left it chiefly a court for homicide. Ephialtes was murdered soon afterwards. Scholars disagree about what Aeschylus thought of the reform, and some have heard in the Furies' prayer a fear of civil war in those years, while others think it belongs simply to the drama.

The translation is E. H. Plumptre's. Reading 3 is lines 650 to 680 in his numbering, which begin at line 681 in the standard Greek numbering. Reading 4 begins with the prayer at lines 976 to 983 of the Greek and continues with Athena's reply. *Chor.* marks the chorus of Furies.

Reading 3. *Athena founds the court. Aeschylus, Eumenides (Plumptre's lines 650–680), translated by E. H. Plumptre.*

❧

Athena. Hear ye my order, O ye Attic people,
In act to judge your first great murder-cause.
And henceforth shall the host of Ægeus' race
For ever own this council-hall of judges:
And for this Ares' hill, the Amazons' seat
And camp when they, enraged with Theseus, came
In hostile march, and built as counterwork
This citadel high-reared, a city new,
And sacrificed to Ares, whence 'tis named
As Ares' hill and fortress: in this, I say,
The reverent awe its citizens shall own,
And fear, awe's kindred, shall restrain from wrong
By day, nor less by night, so long as they,
The burghers, alter not themselves their laws:
But if with drain of filth and tainted soil
Clear river thou pollute, no drink thou'lt find.
I give my counsel to you, citizens,
To reverence and guard well that form of state
Which is not lawless, nor tyrannical,
And not to cast all fear from out the city;
For what man lives devoid of fear and just?
But rightly shrinking, owning awe like this,
Ye then would have a bulwark of your land,
A safeguard for your city, such as none
Boast or in Skythia's or in Pelops' clime.
This council I establish pure from bribe,
Reverend, and keen to act, for those that sleep
An ever-watchful sentry of the land.
This charge of mine I thus have lengthened out
For you, my people, for all time to come.

And now 'tis meet ye rise, and take your ballots,
And so decide the cause, maintaining still
Your reverence for your oath. My speech is said.

Reading 4. *A prayer against civil strife. Aeschylus, Eumenides (the Furies' prayer, Greek lines 976–983, and Athena's reply), translated by E. H. Plumptre.*

❧

Chor. For this too I will pray,
That Discord, never satiate with ill,
May never ravine in this commonwealth,
Nor dust that drinks dark blood
From veins of citizens,
Through eager thirst for vengeance, from the State
Snatch woes as penalty
For deeds of murderous guilt.
But may they give instead
With friendly purpose acts of kind intent,
And if need be, may hate
With minds of one accord;
For this is healing found to mortal men
Of many a grievous woe.

Athena. Are they not then waxing wiser,
And at last the path discerning
Of a speech more good and gentle?
Now from these strange forms and fearful,
See I to my townsmen coming,
E'en to these, great meed of profit;
For if ye, with kindly welcome,
Honour these as kind protectors,
Then shall ye be famed as keeping,
Just and upright in all dealings,

25 Land and city evermore.

Questions

1. Athena tells the citizens "not to cast all fear from out the city" (3.20) and asks, "For what man lives devoid of fear and just?" (3.21). What kind of fear does she mean? Does a free society need it?
2. She calls the court "pure from bribe" and "An ever-watchful sentry of the land" (3.26–28). What would a court need, then or now, to deserve those words?
3. The Furies pray that, if need be, citizens may hate "With minds of one accord" (4.11–12). Why might a shared enemy heal a city? What are the dangers in that cure?
4. The Furies are not destroyed but given a home and honors (4.21–25). What does the play suggest a city should do with the old, fierce instinct for revenge?

4. Justice Shared by All

Protagoras of Abdera, born about 490 BC, was the most famous of the sophists, the traveling professional teachers of the later fifth century. He had close ties with Pericles, the leading Athenian of his day, and in 444 BC Pericles gave him the task of framing laws for Thurii, a new colony in Italy. Plato made him the main speaker of a dialogue set at Athens in the late 430s BC, in the house of Callias, crowded with teachers, students and two of Pericles' own sons.

When Protagoras promises to make men good citizens, Socrates objects that political virtue cannot be taught. His evidence is the Athenian assembly itself. On building ships or walls it listens only to experts, but on affairs of state it lets anyone speak, carpenter or cobbler, rich or poor. Even Pericles could not teach his own sons his political skill.

Protagoras answers with a story. When the gods made living things, Epimetheus handed out all the gifts to the animals and left humans with nothing. His brother Prometheus stole fire and craft from the gods to save them. But crafts were not enough: humans still could not live together. So Zeus sent reverence and justice, and sent them to everyone.

The reading runs from Socrates' challenge through the myth and the first part of Protagoras' long reply, his so-called Great Speech, which begins at the myth and continues well beyond this passage. Scholars widely assume the speech conveys Protagoras' ideas, though its mythical form may be Plato's own. The translation is Benjamin Jowett's. Socrates narrates the scene, so "I said" is Socrates speaking.

Reading 5. *Justice shared by all. Plato, Protagoras (Socrates' challenge and the opening of Protagoras' Great Speech), translated by Benjamin Jowett.*

❧

1 Do I understand you, I said; and is your meaning that you teach the art of politics, and that you promise to make men good citizens?

2 That, Socrates, is exactly the profession which I make.

3 Then, I said, you do indeed possess a noble art, if there is no mistake about this; for I will freely confess to you, Protagoras, that I have a doubt whether this art is capable of being taught, and yet I know not how to disbelieve your assertion. And I ought to tell you why I am of opinion that this art cannot be taught or communicated by man to man. I say that the Athenians are an understanding people, and indeed they are esteemed to be such by the other Hellenes. Now I observe that when we are met together in the assembly, and the matter in hand relates to building, the builders are summoned as advisers; when the question is one of shipbuilding, then the shipwrights; and the like of other arts which they think capable of being taught and learned. And if some person offers to give them advice who is not supposed by them to have any skill in the art, even though he be good-looking, and rich, and noble, they will not listen to him, but laugh and hoot at him, until either he is clamoured down and retires of himself; or if he persist, he is dragged away or put out by the constables at the command of the prytanes. This is their way of behaving about professors of the arts. But when the question is an affair of state, then everybody is free to have a say—carpenter, tinker, cobbler, sailor, passenger; rich and poor, high and low—anyone who likes gets up, and no one reproaches him, as in the former case, with not having learned, and having no teacher, and yet giving advice; evidently because they are under the impression that this sort of knowledge cannot be taught. And not only is this true of the state, but of individuals; the best and wisest of our citizens are unable to impart their political wisdom to others: as for example, Pericles, the father of these young men, who gave

them excellent instruction in all that could be learned from masters, in his own department of politics neither taught them, nor gave them teachers; but they were allowed to wander at their own free will in a sort of hope that they would light upon virtue of their own accord. Or take another example: there was Cleinias the younger brother of our friend Alcibiades, of whom this very same Pericles was the guardian; and he being in fact under the apprehension that Cleinias would be corrupted by Alcibiades, took him away, and placed him in the house of Ariphron to be educated; but before six months had elapsed, Ariphron sent him back, not knowing what to do with him. And I could mention numberless other instances of persons who were good themselves, and never yet made anyone else good, whether friend or stranger. Now I, Protagoras, having these examples before me, am inclined to think that virtue cannot be taught. But then again, when I listen to your words, I waver; and am disposed to think that there must be something in what you say, because I know that you have great experience, and learning, and invention. And I wish that you would, if possible, show me a little more clearly that virtue can be taught. Will you be so good?

4 That I will, Socrates, and gladly. But what would you like? Shall I, as an elder, speak to you as younger men in an apologue or myth, or shall I argue out the question?

5 To this several of the company answered that he should choose for himself.

6 Well, then, he said, I think that the myth will be more interesting.

7 Once upon a time there were gods only, and no mortal creatures. But when the time came that these also should be created, the gods fashioned them out of earth and fire and various mixtures of both elements in the interior of the earth; and when they were about to bring them into the light of day, they ordered Prometheus and Epimetheus to equip them, and to distribute to them severally their proper qualities. Epimetheus said to Prometheus: “Let me distribute, and do you inspect.” This was

agreed, and Epimetheus made the distribution. There were some to whom he gave strength without swiftness, while he equipped the weaker with swiftness; some he armed, and others he left unarmed; and devised for the latter some other means of preservation, making some large, and having their size as a protection, and others small, whose nature was to fly in the air or burrow in the ground; this was to be their way of escape. Thus did he compensate them with the view of preventing any race from becoming extinct. And when he had provided against their destruction by one another, he contrived also a means of protecting them against the seasons of heaven; clothing them with close hair and thick skins sufficient to defend them against the winter cold and able to resist the summer heat, so that they might have a natural bed of their own when they wanted to rest; also he furnished them with hoofs and hair and hard and callous skins under their feet. Then he gave them varieties of food—herb of the soil to some, to others fruits of trees, and to others roots, and to some again he gave other animals as food. And some he made to have few young ones, while those who were their prey were very prolific; and in this manner the race was preserved. Thus did Epimetheus, who, not being very wise, forgot that he had distributed among the brute animals all the qualities which he had to give—and when he came to man, who was still unprovided, he was terribly perplexed. Now while he was in this perplexity, Prometheus came to inspect the distribution, and he found that the other animals were suitably furnished, but that man alone was naked and shoeless, and had neither bed nor arms of defence. The appointed hour was approaching when man in his turn was to go forth into the light of day; and Prometheus, not knowing how he could devise his salvation, stole the mechanical arts of Hephaestus and Athene, and fire with them (they could neither have been acquired nor used without fire), and gave them to man. Thus man had the wisdom necessary to the support of life, but political wisdom he had not; for that was in the keeping of Zeus, and the power of Prometheus did not extend to entering into the citadel of heaven, where Zeus dwelt, who moreover had terrible sentinels;

but he did enter by stealth into the common workshop of Athene and Hephaestus, in which they used to practise their favourite arts, and carried off Hephaestus' art of working by fire, and also the art of Athene, and gave them to man. And in this way man was supplied with the means of life. But Prometheus is said to have been afterwards prosecuted for theft, owing to the blunder of Epimetheus.

8 Now man, having a share of the divine attributes, was at first the only one of the animals who had any gods, because he alone was of their kindred; and he would raise altars and images of them. He was not long in inventing articulate speech and names; and he also constructed houses and clothes and shoes and beds, and drew sustenance from the earth. Thus provided, mankind at first lived dispersed, and there were no cities. But the consequence was that they were destroyed by the wild beasts, for they were utterly weak in comparison of them, and their art was only sufficient to provide them with the means of life, and did not enable them to carry on war against the animals: food they had, but not as yet the art of government, of which the art of war is a part. After a while the desire of self-preservation gathered them into cities; but when they were gathered together, having no art of government, they evil intreated one another, and were again in process of dispersion and destruction. Zeus feared that the entire race would be exterminated, and so he sent Hermes to them, bearing reverence and justice to be the ordering principles of cities and the bonds of friendship and conciliation. Hermes asked Zeus how he should impart justice and reverence among men:—Should he distribute them as the arts are distributed; that is to say, to a favoured few only, one skilled individual having enough of medicine or of any other art for many unskilled ones? "Shall this be the manner in which I am to distribute justice and reverence among men, or shall I give them to all?" "To all," said Zeus; "I should like them all to have a share; for cities cannot exist, if a few only share in the virtues, as in the arts. And further, make a law by my order, that he who has no part in reverence and justice shall be put to death, for he is a plague of the state."

9 And this is the reason, Socrates, why the Athenians and mankind in general, when the question relates to carpentering or any other mechanical art, allow but a few to share in their deliberations; and when anyone else interferes, then, as you say, they object, if he be not of the favoured few; which, as I reply, is very natural. But when they meet to deliberate about political virtue, which proceeds only by way of justice and wisdom, they are patient enough of any man who speaks of them, as is also natural, because they think that every man ought to share in this sort of virtue, and that states could not exist if this were otherwise. I have explained to you, Socrates, the reason of this phenomenon.

10 And that you may not suppose yourself to be deceived in thinking that all men regard every man as having a share of justice or honesty and of every other political virtue, let me give you a further proof, which is this. In other cases, as you are aware, if a man says that he is a good flute-player, or skilful in any other art in which he has no skill, people either laugh at him or are angry with him, and his relations think that he is mad and go and admonish him; but when honesty is in question, or some other political virtue, even if they know that he is dishonest, yet, if the man comes publicly forward and tells the truth about his dishonesty, then, what in the other case was held by them to be good sense, they now deem to be madness. They say that all men ought to profess honesty whether they are honest or not, and that a man is out of his mind who says anything else. Their notion is, that a man must have some degree of honesty; and that if he has none at all he ought not to be in the world.

11 I have been showing that they are right in admitting every man as a counsellor about this sort of virtue, as they are of opinion that every man is a partaker of it. And I will now endeavour to show further that they do not conceive this virtue to be given by nature, or to grow spontaneously, but to be a thing which may be taught; and which comes to a man by taking pains. No one would instruct, no one would rebuke, or be angry with those whose calamities they suppose to be due to nature or chance; they do not try to punish or to prevent them from being what they are;

they do but pity them. Who is so foolish as to chastise or instruct the ugly, or the diminutive, or the feeble? And for this reason. Because he knows that good and evil of this kind is the work of nature and of chance; whereas if a man is wanting in those good qualities which are attained by study and exercise and teaching, and has only the contrary evil qualities, other men are angry with him, and punish and reprove him—of these evil qualities one is impiety, another injustice, and they may be described generally as the very opposite of political virtue. In such cases any man will be angry with another, and reprimand him—clearly because he thinks that by study and learning, the virtue in which the other is deficient may be acquired. If you will think, Socrates, of the nature of punishment, you will see at once that in the opinion of mankind virtue may be acquired; no one punishes the evildoer under the notion, or for the reason, that he has done wrong—only the unreasonable fury of a beast acts in that manner. But he who desires to inflict rational punishment does not retaliate for a past wrong which cannot be undone; he has regard to the future, and is desirous that the man who is punished, and he who sees him punished, may be deterred from doing wrong again. He punishes for the sake of prevention, thereby clearly implying that virtue is capable of being taught. This is the notion of all who retaliate upon others either privately or publicly. And the Athenians, too, your own citizens, like other men, punish and take vengeance on all whom they regard as evil doers; and hence, we may infer them to be of the number of those who think that virtue may be acquired and taught. Thus far, Socrates, I have shown you clearly enough, if I am not mistaken, that your countrymen are right in admitting the tinker and the cobbler to advise about politics, and also that they deem virtue to be capable of being taught and acquired.

Questions

1. Socrates notes that in the assembly the experts are heard on building but anyone may speak on affairs of state: "carpenter, tinker, cobbler, sailor, passenger" (5.3). Is that a weakness of democracy or its point?
2. In the myth, Zeus sends "reverence and justice to be the ordering principles of cities" (5.8). Why both? What does reverence add that justice alone does not supply?
3. Zeus insists that these virtues go to everyone, not a skilled few, because "cities cannot exist, if a few only share in the virtues, as in the arts" (5.8). Do you agree?
4. Protagoras argues that we punish wrongdoers to teach and deter, not to repay the past (5.11). How does that argument support his claim that citizenship can be learned?

5. Second Thoughts in the Assembly

The war between Athens and Sparta began in 431 BC, and Thucydides fought in it. Athens led an empire of subject allies, which Cleon in this reading calls a despotism (6.2). In 428 BC Mytilene, on the island of Lesbos, revolted. As Thucydides notes, it had not been, like the rest, subjected to the empire, and a Peloponnesian fleet had sailed to support it, which made the revolt seem all the worse (6.1). Athens blockaded the city, and in 427 BC it surrendered to the Athenian general Paches.

What happened next is one of the most famous scenes in history. In the fury of the moment the Athenian assembly voted to kill every adult man of Mytilene and enslave the women and children, and sent a ship with the order. The next day many regretted it, and a second assembly was called. Cleon, the most powerful speaker in Athens since the death of Pericles two years before, defended the decree. Diodotus, of whom we know nothing except this speech, opposed it. The vote was close. A second ship set out after the first.

Read the two speeches as a pair. Both men claim to be unmoved by pity. Both talk about Athens' interest. Yet they disagree about almost everything: about whether an assembly should ever reconsider, about whether speakers can be trusted, about what punishment can achieve, and about how to keep an empire.

The reading is Book 3, sections 36 through 50, in Richard Crawley's translation. It ends with the fate of the men Paches had sent to Athens as leaders of the revolt.

Reading 6. *The Mytilene debate. Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War (3.36–50), translated by Richard Crawley.*

❧

1 Upon the arrival of the prisoners with Salaethus, the Athenians at once put the latter to death, although he offered, among other things, to procure the withdrawal of the Peloponnesians from Plataea, which was still under siege; and after deliberating as to what they should do with the former, in the fury of the moment determined to put to death not only the prisoners at Athens, but the whole adult male population of Mitylene, and to make slaves of the women and children. It was remarked that Mitylene had revolted without being, like the rest, subjected to the empire; and what above all swelled the wrath of the Athenians was the fact of the Peloponnesian fleet having ventured over to Ionia to her support, a fact which was held to argue a long meditated rebellion. They accordingly sent a galley to communicate the decree to Paches, commanding him to lose no time in dispatching the Mitylenians. The morrow brought repentance with it and reflection on the horrid cruelty of a decree, which condemned a whole city to the fate merited only by the guilty. This was no sooner perceived by the Mitylenian ambassadors at Athens and their Athenian supporters, than they moved the authorities to put the question again to the vote; which they the more easily consented to do, as they themselves plainly saw that most of the citizens wished someone to give them an opportunity for reconsidering the matter. An assembly was therefore at once called, and after much expression of opinion upon both sides, Cleon, son of Cleaenetus, the same who had carried the former motion of putting the Mitylenians to death, the most violent man at Athens, and at that time by far the most powerful with the commons, came forward again and spoke as follows:

2 "I have often before now been convinced that a democracy is incapable of empire, and never more so than by your present change of mind in the matter of Mitylene. Fears or plots being unknown to you in your daily

relations with each other, you feel just the same with regard to your allies, and never reflect that the mistakes into which you may be led by listening to their appeals, or by giving way to your own compassion, are full of danger to yourselves, and bring you no thanks for your weakness from your allies; entirely forgetting that your empire is a despotism and your subjects disaffected conspirators, whose obedience is ensured not by your suicidal concessions, but by the superiority given you by your own strength and not their loyalty. The most alarming feature in the case is the constant change of measures with which we appear to be threatened, and our seeming ignorance of the fact that bad laws which are never changed are better for a city than good ones that have no authority; that unlearned loyalty is more serviceable than quick-witted insubordination; and that ordinary men usually manage public affairs better than their more gifted fellows. The latter are always wanting to appear wiser than the laws, and to overrule every proposition brought forward, thinking that they cannot show their wit in more important matters, and by such behaviour too often ruin their country; while those who mistrust their own cleverness are content to be less learned than the laws, and less able to pick holes in the speech of a good speaker; and being fair judges rather than rival athletes, generally conduct affairs successfully. These we ought to imitate, instead of being led on by cleverness and intellectual rivalry to advise your people against our real opinions.

3 "For myself, I adhere to my former opinion, and wonder at those who have proposed to reopen the case of the Mitylenians, and who are thus causing a delay which is all in favour of the guilty, by making the sufferer proceed against the offender with the edge of his anger blunted; although where vengeance follows most closely upon the wrong, it best equals it and most amply requites it. I wonder also who will be the man who will maintain the contrary, and will pretend to show that the crimes of the Mitylenians are of service to us, and our misfortunes injurious to the allies. Such a man must plainly either have such confidence in his rhetoric as to adventure to prove that what has been once for all decided is still

undetermined, or be bribed to try to delude us by elaborate sophisms. In such contests the state gives the rewards to others, and takes the dangers for herself. The persons to blame are you who are so foolish as to institute these contests; who go to see an oration as you would to see a sight, take your facts on hearsay, judge of the practicability of a project by the wit of its advocates, and trust for the truth as to past events not to the fact which you saw more than to the clever strictures which you heard; the easy victims of newfangled arguments, unwilling to follow received conclusions; slaves to every new paradox, despisers of the commonplace; the first wish of every man being that he could speak himself, the next to rival those who can speak by seeming to be quite up with their ideas by applauding every hit almost before it is made, and by being as quick in catching an argument as you are slow in foreseeing its consequences; asking, if I may so say, for something different from the conditions under which we live, and yet comprehending inadequately those very conditions; very slaves to the pleasure of the ear, and more like the audience of a rhetorician than the council of a city.

4 "In order to keep you from this, I proceed to show that no one state has ever injured you as much as Mitylene. I can make allowance for those who revolt because they cannot bear our empire, or who have been forced to do so by the enemy. But for those who possessed an island with fortifications; who could fear our enemies only by sea, and there had their own force of galleys to protect them; who were independent and held in the highest honour by you—to act as these have done, this is not revolt—revolt implies oppression; it is deliberate and wanton aggression; an attempt to ruin us by siding with our bitterest enemies; a worse offence than a war undertaken on their own account in the acquisition of power. The fate of those of their neighbours who had already rebelled and had been subdued was no lesson to them; their own prosperity could not dissuade them from affronting danger; but blindly confident in the future, and full of hopes beyond their power though not beyond their ambition, they declared war and made their decision to prefer might to

right, their attack being determined not by provocation but by the moment which seemed propitious. The truth is that great good fortune coming suddenly and unexpectedly tends to make a people insolent; in most cases it is safer for mankind to have success in reason than out of reason; and it is easier for them, one may say, to stave off adversity than to preserve prosperity. Our mistake has been to distinguish the Mitylenians as we have done: had they been long ago treated like the rest, they never would have so far forgotten themselves, human nature being as surely made arrogant by consideration as it is awed by firmness. Let them now therefore be punished as their crime requires, and do not, while you condemn the aristocracy, absolve the people. This is certain, that all attacked you without distinction, although they might have come over to us and been now again in possession of their city. But no, they thought it safer to throw in their lot with the aristocracy and so joined their rebellion! Consider therefore: if you subject to the same punishment the ally who is forced to rebel by the enemy, and him who does so by his own free choice, which of them, think you, is there that will not rebel upon the slightest pretext; when the reward of success is freedom, and the penalty of failure nothing so very terrible? We meanwhile shall have to risk our money and our lives against one state after another; and if successful, shall receive a ruined town from which we can no longer draw the revenue upon which our strength depends; while if unsuccessful, we shall have an enemy the more upon our hands, and shall spend the time that might be employed in combating our existing foes in warring with our own allies.

5 "No hope, therefore, that rhetoric may instil or money purchase, of the mercy due to human infirmity must be held out to the Mitylenians. Their offence was not involuntary, but of malice and deliberate; and mercy is only for unwilling offenders. I therefore, now as before, persist against your reversing your first decision, or giving way to the three failings most fatal to empire—pity, sentiment, and indulgence. Compassion is due to those who can reciprocate the feeling, not to those who will

never pity us in return, but are our natural and necessary foes: the orators who charm us with sentiment may find other less important arenas for their talents, in the place of one where the city pays a heavy penalty for a momentary pleasure, themselves receiving fine acknowledgments for their fine phrases; while indulgence should be shown towards those who will be our friends in future, instead of towards men who will remain just what they were, and as much our enemies as before. To sum up shortly, I say that if you follow my advice you will do what is just towards the Mitylenians, and at the same time expedient; while by a different decision you will not oblige them so much as pass sentence upon yourselves. For if they were right in rebelling, you must be wrong in ruling. However, if, right or wrong, you determine to rule, you must carry out your principle and punish the Mitylenians as your interest requires; or else you must give up your empire and cultivate honesty without danger. Make up your minds, therefore, to give them like for like; and do not let the victims who escaped the plot be more insensible than the conspirators who hatched it; but reflect what they would have done if victorious over you, especially as they were the aggressors. It is they who wrong their neighbour without a cause, that pursue their victim to the death, on account of the danger which they foresee in letting their enemy survive; since the object of a wanton wrong is more dangerous, if he escape, than an enemy who has not this to complain of. Do not, therefore, be traitors to yourselves, but recall as nearly as possible the moment of suffering and the supreme importance which you then attached to their reduction; and now pay them back in their turn, without yielding to present weakness or forgetting the peril that once hung over you. Punish them as they deserve, and teach your other allies by a striking example that the penalty of rebellion is death. Let them once understand this and you will not have so often to neglect your enemies while you are fighting with your own confederates."

6 Such were the words of Cleon. After him Diodotus, son of Eucrates, who had also in the previous assembly spoken most strongly against putting the Mitylenians to death, came forward and spoke as follows:

7 "I do not blame the persons who have reopened the case of the Mitylenians, nor do I approve the protests which we have heard against important questions being frequently debated. I think the two things most opposed to good counsel are haste and passion; haste usually goes hand in hand with folly, passion with coarseness and narrowness of mind. As for the argument that speech ought not to be the exponent of action, the man who uses it must be either senseless or interested: senseless if he believes it possible to treat of the uncertain future through any other medium; interested if, wishing to carry a disgraceful measure and doubting his ability to speak well in a bad cause, he thinks to frighten opponents and hearers by well-aimed calumny. What is still more intolerable is to accuse a speaker of making a display in order to be paid for it. If ignorance only were imputed, an unsuccessful speaker might retire with a reputation for honesty, if not for wisdom; while the charge of dishonesty makes him suspected, if successful, and thought, if defeated, not only a fool but a rogue. The city is no gainer by such a system, since fear deprives it of its advisers; although in truth, if our speakers are to make such assertions, it would be better for the country if they could not speak at all, as we should then make fewer blunders. The good citizen ought to triumph not by frightening his opponents but by beating them fairly in argument; and a wise city, without over-distinguishing its best advisers, will nevertheless not deprive them of their due, and, far from punishing an unlucky counsellor, will not even regard him as disgraced. In this way successful orators would be least tempted to sacrifice their convictions to popularity, in the hope of still higher honours, and unsuccessful speakers to resort to the same popular arts in order to win over the multitude.

8 "This is not our way; and, besides, the moment that a man is suspected of giving advice, however good, from corrupt motives, we feel such a grudge against him for the gain which after all we are not certain he will

receive, that we deprive the city of its certain benefit. Plain good advice has thus come to be no less suspected than bad; and the advocate of the most monstrous measures is not more obliged to use deceit to gain the people, than the best counsellor is to lie in order to be believed. The city and the city only, owing to these refinements, can never be served openly and without disguise; he who does serve it openly being always suspected of serving himself in some secret way in return. Still, considering the magnitude of the interests involved, and the position of affairs, we orators must make it our business to look a little farther than you who judge offhand; especially as we, your advisers, are responsible, while you, our audience, are not so. For if those who gave the advice, and those who took it, suffered equally, you would judge more calmly; as it is, you visit the disasters into which the whim of the moment may have led you upon the single person of your adviser, not upon yourselves, his numerous companions in error.

9 "However, I have not come forward either to oppose or to accuse in the matter of Mitylene; indeed, the question before us as sensible men is not their guilt, but our interests. Though I prove them ever so guilty, I shall not, therefore, advise their death, unless it be expedient; nor though they should have claims to indulgence, shall I recommend it, unless it be dearly for the good of the country. I consider that we are deliberating for the future more than for the present; and where Cleon is so positive as to the useful deterrent effects that will follow from making rebellion capital, I, who consider the interests of the future quite as much as he, as positively maintain the contrary. And I require you not to reject my useful considerations for his specious ones: his speech may have the attraction of seeming the more just in your present temper against Mitylene; but we are not in a court of justice, but in a political assembly; and the question is not justice, but how to make the Mitylenians useful to Athens.

10 "Now of course communities have enacted the penalty of death for many offences far lighter than this: still hope leads men to venture, and no one ever yet put himself in peril without the inward conviction that he would

succeed in his design. Again, was there ever city rebelling that did not believe that it possessed either in itself or in its alliances resources adequate to the enterprise? All, states and individuals, are alike prone to err, and there is no law that will prevent them; or why should men have exhausted the list of punishments in search of enactments to protect them from evildoers? It is probable that in early times the penalties for the greatest offences were less severe, and that, as these were disregarded, the penalty of death has been by degrees in most cases arrived at, which is itself disregarded in like manner. Either then some means of terror more terrible than this must be discovered, or it must be owned that this restraint is useless; and that as long as poverty gives men the courage of necessity, or plenty fills them with the ambition which belongs to insolence and pride, and the other conditions of life remain each under the thraldom of some fatal and master passion, so long will the impulse never be wanting to drive men into danger. Hope also and cupidity, the one leading and the other following, the one conceiving the attempt, the other suggesting the facility of succeeding, cause the widest ruin, and, although invisible agents, are far stronger than the dangers that are seen. Fortune, too, powerfully helps the delusion and, by the unexpected aid that she sometimes lends, tempts men to venture with inferior means; and this is especially the case with communities, because the stakes played for are the highest, freedom or empire, and, when all are acting together, each man irrationally magnifies his own capacity. In fine, it is impossible to prevent, and only great simplicity can hope to prevent, human nature doing what it has once set its mind upon, by force of law or by any other deterrent force whatsoever.

11 "We must not, therefore, commit ourselves to a false policy through a belief in the efficacy of the punishment of death, or exclude rebels from the hope of repentance and an early atonement of their error. Consider a moment. At present, if a city that has already revolted perceive that it cannot succeed, it will come to terms while it is still able to refund expenses, and pay tribute afterwards. In the other case, what city, think

you, would not prepare better than is now done, and hold out to the last against its besiegers, if it is all one whether it surrender late or soon? And how can it be otherwise than hurtful to us to be put to the expense of a siege, because surrender is out of the question; and if we take the city, to receive a ruined town from which we can no longer draw the revenue which forms our real strength against the enemy? We must not, therefore, sit as strict judges of the offenders to our own prejudice, but rather see how by moderate chastisements we may be enabled to benefit in future by the revenue-producing powers of our dependencies; and we must make up our minds to look for our protection not to legal terrors but to careful administration. At present we do exactly the opposite. When a free community, held in subjection by force, rises, as is only natural, and asserts its independence, it is no sooner reduced than we fancy ourselves obliged to punish it severely; although the right course with freemen is not to chastise them rigorously when they do rise, but rigorously to watch them before they rise, and to prevent their ever entertaining the idea, and, the insurrection suppressed, to make as few responsible for it as possible.

12 "Only consider what a blunder you would commit in doing as Cleon recommends. As things are at present, in all the cities the people is your friend, and either does not revolt with the oligarchy, or, if forced to do so, becomes at once the enemy of the insurgents; so that in the war with the hostile city you have the masses on your side. But if you butcher the people of Mitylene, who had nothing to do with the revolt, and who, as soon as they got arms, of their own motion surrendered the town, first you will commit the crime of killing your benefactors; and next you will play directly into the hands of the higher classes, who when they induce their cities to rise, will immediately have the people on their side, through your having announced in advance the same punishment for those who are guilty and for those who are not. On the contrary, even if they were guilty, you ought to seem not to notice it, in order to avoid alienating the only class still friendly to us. In short, I consider it far more useful for the

preservation of our empire voluntarily to put up with injustice, than to put to death, however justly, those whom it is our interest to keep alive. As for Cleon's idea that in punishment the claims of justice and expediency can both be satisfied, facts do not confirm the possibility of such a combination.

13 "Confess, therefore, that this is the wisest course, and without conceding too much either to pity or to indulgence, by neither of which motives do I any more than Cleon wish you to be influenced, upon the plain merits of the case before you, be persuaded by me to try calmly those of the Mitylenians whom Paches sent off as guilty, and to leave the rest undisturbed. This is at once best for the future, and most terrible to your enemies at the present moment; inasmuch as good policy against an adversary is superior to the blind attacks of brute force."

14 Such were the words of Diodotus. The two opinions thus expressed were the ones that most directly contradicted each other; and the Athenians, notwithstanding their change of feeling, now proceeded to a division, in which the show of hands was almost equal, although the motion of Diodotus carried the day. Another galley was at once sent off in haste, for fear that the first might reach Lesbos in the interval, and the city be found destroyed; the first ship having about a day and a night's start. Wine and barley-cakes were provided for the vessel by the Mitylenian ambassadors, and great promises made if they arrived in time; which caused the men to use such diligence upon the voyage that they took their meals of barley-cakes kneaded with oil and wine as they rowed, and only slept by turns while the others were at the oar. Luckily they met with no contrary wind, and the first ship making no haste upon so horrid an errand, while the second pressed on in the manner described, the first arrived so little before them, that Paches had only just had time to read the decree, and to prepare to execute the sentence, when the second put into port and prevented the massacre. The danger of Mitylene had indeed been great.

15 The other party whom Paches had sent off as the prime movers in the rebellion, were upon Cleon's motion put to death by the Athenians, the number being rather more than a thousand. The Athenians also demolished the walls of the Mitylenians, and took possession of their ships. Afterwards tribute was not imposed upon the Lesbians; but all their land, except that of the Methymnians, was divided into three thousand allotments, three hundred of which were reserved as sacred for the gods, and the rest assigned by lot to Athenian shareholders, who were sent out to the island. With these the Lesbians agreed to pay a rent of two minae a year for each allotment, and cultivated the land themselves. The Athenians also took possession of the towns on the continent belonging to the Mitylenians, which thus became for the future subject to Athens. Such were the events that took place at Lesbos.

Questions

1. Cleon says "a democracy is incapable of empire" and that "bad laws which are never changed are better for a city than good ones that have no authority" (6.2). Is there any truth in this? What would a city lose by following it?
2. Cleon accuses the Athenians of being "more like the audience of a rhetorician than the council of a city" (6.3). Diodotus answers that the city should not punish its advisers for honest mistakes (6.7–8). Which complaint about public debate rings truer today?
3. Diodotus says "we are not in a court of justice, but in a political assembly" (6.9). Why does he set justice aside? Is he right to?
4. Diodotus argues that the death penalty does not deter people driven by hope and need (6.10). Test his argument against something you know.

6. When Words Change Their Meaning

Corcyra, the island now called Corfu, lies in the Ionian Sea off northwest Greece. It was founded as a colony of Corinth in the eighth century BC and was often at odds with its mother city, and its quarrel with Corinth helped bring on the great war. In 427 BC, the same year as the Mytilene debate, Corcyra fell into civil war. The party of the people looked to Athens, the party of the few to Sparta (7.2), and fleets from both sides were near the island.

This reading begins as the Peloponnesian fleet slips away and the Athenian general Eurymedon arrives with sixty ships. The popular party, now safe, turns on its enemies. Thucydides describes the slaughter in one dense paragraph (7.1). Then he stops the story and explains. Corcyra, he says, was one of the first of many cities torn apart in this way, and what happened there will happen again as long as human nature stays the same.

His analysis of *stasis*, civil strife, follows. Its best-known sentence is short: "Words had to change their ordinary meaning" (7.2). Courage, prudence, moderation and loyalty were all renamed to suit the party in power. Readers in many ages have recognized their own times in it.

The reading is Book 3, sections 81 through 84, in Richard Crawley's translation. The last section, 3.84, has been questioned since ancient times, and some scholars think it was added by a later hand, while others defend it as part of Thucydides' design. It is printed here because it stands in the translation.

Reading 7. *Civil strife at Corcyra. Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War (3.81–84), translated by Richard Crawley.*

❧

1 The Peloponnesians accordingly at once set off in haste by night for home, coasting along shore; and hauling their ships across the Isthmus of Leucas, in order not to be seen doubling it, so departed. The Corcyraeans, made aware of the approach of the Athenian fleet and of the departure of the enemy, brought the Messenians from outside the walls into the town, and ordered the fleet which they had manned to sail round into the Hyllaic harbour; and while it was so doing, slew such of their enemies as they laid hands on, dispatching afterwards, as they landed them, those whom they had persuaded to go on board the ships. Next they went to the sanctuary of Hera and persuaded about fifty men to take their trial, and condemned them all to death. The mass of the suppliants who had refused to do so, on seeing what was taking place, slew each other there in the consecrated ground; while some hanged themselves upon the trees, and others destroyed themselves as they were severally able. During seven days that Eurymedon stayed with his sixty ships, the Corcyraeans were engaged in butchering those of their fellow citizens whom they regarded as their enemies: and although the crime imputed was that of attempting to put down the democracy, some were slain also for private hatred, others by their debtors because of the moneys owed to them. Death thus raged in every shape; and, as usually happens at such times, there was no length to which violence did not go; sons were killed by their fathers, and suppliants dragged from the altar or slain upon it; while some were even walled up in the temple of Dionysus and died there.

2 So bloody was the march of the revolution, and the impression which it made was the greater as it was one of the first to occur. Later on, one may say, the whole Hellenic world was convulsed; struggles being everywhere made by the popular chiefs to bring in the Athenians, and by the olig-

archs to introduce the Lacedaemonians. In peace there would have been neither the pretext nor the wish to make such an invitation; but in war, with an alliance always at the command of either faction for the hurt of their adversaries and their own corresponding advantage, opportunities for bringing in the foreigner were never wanting to the revolutionary parties. The sufferings which revolution entailed upon the cities were many and terrible, such as have occurred and always will occur, as long as the nature of mankind remains the same; though in a severer or milder form, and varying in their symptoms, according to the variety of the particular cases. In peace and prosperity, states and individuals have better sentiments, because they do not find themselves suddenly confronted with imperious necessities; but war takes away the easy supply of daily wants, and so proves a rough master, that brings most men's characters to a level with their fortunes. Revolution thus ran its course from city to city, and the places which it arrived at last, from having heard what had been done before, carried to a still greater excess the refinement of their inventions, as manifested in the cunning of their enterprises and the atrocity of their reprisals. Words had to change their ordinary meaning and to take that which was now given them. Reckless audacity came to be considered the courage of a loyal ally; prudent hesitation, specious cowardice; moderation was held to be a cloak for unmanliness; ability to see all sides of a question, inaptness to act on any. Frantic violence became the attribute of manliness; cautious plotting, a justifiable means of self-defence. The advocate of extreme measures was always trustworthy; his opponent a man to be suspected. To succeed in a plot was to have a shrewd head, to divine a plot a still shrewder; but to try to provide against having to do either was to break up your party and to be afraid of your adversaries. In fine, to forestall an intending criminal, or to suggest the idea of a crime where it was wanting, was equally commended until even blood became a weaker tie than party, from the superior readiness of those united by the latter to dare everything without reserve; for such associations had not in view the blessings derivable from established insti-

tutions but were formed by ambition for their overthrow; and the confidence of their members in each other rested less on any religious sanction than upon complicity in crime. The fair proposals of an adversary were met with jealous precautions by the stronger of the two, and not with a generous confidence. Revenge also was held of more account than self-preservation. Oaths of reconciliation, being only proffered on either side to meet an immediate difficulty, only held good so long as no other weapon was at hand; but when opportunity offered, he who first ventured to seize it and to take his enemy off his guard, thought this perfidious vengeance sweeter than an open one, since, considerations of safety apart, success by treachery won him the palm of superior intelligence. Indeed it is generally the case that men are readier to call rogues clever than simpletons honest, and are as ashamed of being the second as they are proud of being the first. The cause of all these evils was the lust for power arising from greed and ambition; and from these passions proceeded the violence of parties once engaged in contention. The leaders in the cities, each provided with the fairest professions, on the one side with the cry of political equality of the people, on the other of a moderate aristocracy, sought prizes for themselves in those public interests which they pretended to cherish, and, recoiling from no means in their struggles for ascendancy engaged in the direst excesses; in their acts of vengeance they went to even greater lengths, not stopping at what justice or the good of the state demanded, but making the party caprice of the moment their only standard, and invoking with equal readiness the condemnation of an unjust verdict or the authority of the strong arm to glut the animosities of the hour. Thus religion was in honour with neither party; but the use of fair phrases to arrive at guilty ends was in high reputation. Meanwhile the moderate part of the citizens perished between the two, either for not joining in the quarrel, or because envy would not suffer them to escape.

3 Thus every form of iniquity took root in the Hellenic countries by reason of the troubles. The ancient simplicity into which honour so largely entered was laughed down and disappeared; and society became divided

into camps in which no man trusted his fellow. To put an end to this, there was neither promise to be depended upon, nor oath that could command respect; but all parties dwelling rather in their calculation upon the hopelessness of a permanent state of things, were more intent upon self-defence than capable of confidence. In this contest the blunter wits were most successful. Apprehensive of their own deficiencies and of the cleverness of their antagonists, they feared to be worsted in debate and to be surprised by the combinations of their more versatile opponents, and so at once boldly had recourse to action: while their adversaries, arrogantly thinking that they should know in time, and that it was unnecessary to secure by action what policy afforded, often fell victims to their want of precaution.

4 Meanwhile Corcyra gave the first example of most of the crimes alluded to; of the reprisals exacted by the governed who had never experienced equitable treatment or indeed aught but insolence from their rulers—when their hour came; of the iniquitous resolves of those who desired to get rid of their accustomed poverty, and ardently coveted their neighbours' goods; and lastly, of the savage and pitiless excesses into which men who had begun the struggle, not in a class but in a party spirit, were hurried by their ungovernable passions. In the confusion into which life was now thrown in the cities, human nature, always rebelling against the law and now its master, gladly showed itself ungoverned in passion, above respect for justice, and the enemy of all superiority; since revenge would not have been set above religion, and gain above justice, had it not been for the fatal power of envy. Indeed men too often take upon themselves in the prosecution of their revenge to set the example of doing away with those general laws to which all alike can look for salvation in adversity, instead of allowing them to subsist against the day of danger when their aid may be required.

Questions

1. Thucydides says war "proves a rough master, that brings most men's characters to a level with their fortunes" (7.2). What does he mean? Have you seen hard times change how people judge right and wrong?
2. Go through the list of renamed virtues in 7.2. Which of these renamings can you hear in public life now?
3. Why, according to Thucydides, did "the moderate part of the citizens" perish "between the two" (7.2)? What does a moderate need in order to survive a quarrel like this?
4. The last paragraph laments the loss of "those general laws to which all alike can look for salvation in adversity" (7.4). Why would partisans destroy protections they might one day need themselves?

7. How Freedom Becomes Tyranny

Plato was born in 428 or 427 BC into an aristocratic Athenian family. He was a young man when Athens lost the war in 404 BC and the Spartans set up the oligarchy called the Thirty, among them relatives of his. He was still in his twenties when Athens put his teacher Socrates to death in 399 BC. All of this lies behind the *Republic*, written in his middle years, probably between about 380 and 360 BC.

In the *Republic* Socrates describes a perfectly just city ruled by philosophers. Then, in Book VIII, he describes how even the best city would decay, one constitution giving way to the next: first to the rule of the ambitious, which he calls timocracy, then to oligarchy, the rule of the rich, then to democracy, and last to tyranny. With each kind of city goes a kind of person.

These readings come from that book. Socrates is narrating, and his partner in conversation here is Adeimantus, Plato's older brother, whose answers are the short lines. In Reading 8 democracy is born when the poor defeat the rich, and Socrates describes the city that results, free, various, tolerant and careless, like a market where every way of life is on sale. In Reading 9, after a long portrait of the democratic man that is not printed here, he explains how tyranny grows out of democracy: freedom pursued without limit dissolves every kind of authority, idle and ambitious men lead the people against the rich, and the people raise up a champion who turns into a wolf.

Plato is not describing Athens exactly, and he writes with irony; his praise of democracy's charm is barbed. But much of the picture would have been familiar to his readers. The translation is Benjamin Jowett's.

Reading 8. *The democratic city. Plato, Republic (Book VIII, on democracy), translated by Benjamin Jowett.*

1 And then democracy comes into being after the poor have conquered their opponents, slaughtering some and banishing some, while to the remainder they give an equal share of freedom and power; and this is the form of government in which the magistrates are commonly elected by lot.

2 Yes, he said, that is the nature of democracy, whether the revolution has been effected by arms, or whether fear has caused the opposite party to withdraw.

3 And now what is their manner of life, and what sort of a government have they? for as the government is, such will be the man.

4 Clearly, he said.

5 In the first place, are they not free; and is not the city full of freedom and frankness—a man may say and do what he likes?

6 'Tis said so, he replied.

7 And where freedom is, the individual is clearly able to order for himself his own life as he pleases?

8 Clearly.

9 Then in this kind of State there will be the greatest variety of human natures?

10 There will.

11 This, then, seems likely to be the fairest of States, being like an embroidered robe which is spangled with every sort of flower. And just as women and children think a variety of colours to be of all things most charming, so there are many men to whom this State, which is spangled

with the manners and characters of mankind, will appear to be the fairest of States.

12 Yes.

13 Yes, my good Sir, and there will be no better in which to look for a government.

14 Why?

15 Because of the liberty which reigns there—they have a complete assortment of constitutions; and he who has a mind to establish a State, as we have been doing, must go to a democracy as he would to a bazaar at which they sell them, and pick out the one that suits him; then, when he has made his choice, he may found his State.

16 He will be sure to have patterns enough.

17 And there being no necessity, I said, for you to govern in this State, even if you have the capacity, or to be governed, unless you like, or go to war when the rest go to war, or to be at peace when others are at peace, unless you are so disposed—there being no necessity also, because some law forbids you to hold office or be a dicast, that you should not hold office or be a dicast, if you have a fancy—is not this a way of life which for the moment is supremely delightful?

18 For the moment, yes.

19 And is not their humanity to the condemned in some cases quite charming? Have you not observed how, in a democracy, many persons, although they have been sentenced to death or exile, just stay where they are and walk about the world—the gentleman parades like a hero, and nobody sees or cares?

20 Yes, he replied, many and many a one.

21 See too, I said, the forgiving spirit of democracy, and the "don't care" about trifles, and the disregard which she shows of all the fine principles which we solemnly laid down at the foundation of the city—as when we

said that, except in the case of some rarely gifted nature, there never will be a good man who has not from his childhood been used to play amid things of beauty and make of them a joy and a study—how grandly does she trample all these fine notions of ours under her feet, never giving a thought to the pursuits which make a statesman, and promoting to honour anyone who professes to be the people's friend.

22 Yes, she is of a noble spirit.

23 These and other kindred characteristics are proper to democracy, which is a charming form of government, full of variety and disorder, and dispensing a sort of equality to equals and unequals alike.

24 We know her well.

Reading 9. *How tyranny arises. Plato, Republic (Book VIII, on the rise of tyranny), translated by Benjamin Jowett.*

1 Last of all comes the most beautiful of all, man and State alike, tyranny and the tyrant; these we have now to consider.

2 Quite true, he said.

3 Say then, my friend, In what manner does tyranny arise?—that it has a democratic origin is evident.

4 Clearly.

5 And does not tyranny spring from democracy in the same manner as democracy from oligarchy—I mean, after a sort?

6 How?

7 The good which oligarchy proposed to itself and the means by which it was maintained was excess of wealth—am I not right?

8 Yes.

9 And the insatiable desire of wealth and the neglect of all other things for the sake of money-getting was also the ruin of oligarchy?

10 True.

11 And democracy has her own good, of which the insatiable desire brings her to dissolution?

12 What good?

13 Freedom, I replied; which, as they tell you in a democracy, is the glory of the State—and that therefore in a democracy alone will the freeman of nature deign to dwell.

14 Yes; the saying is in everybody's mouth.

15 I was going to observe, that the insatiable desire of this and the neglect of other things introduces the change in democracy, which occasions a demand for tyranny.

16 How so?

17 When a democracy which is thirsting for freedom has evil cupbearers presiding over the feast, and has drunk too deeply of the strong wine of freedom, then, unless her rulers are very amenable and give a plentiful draught, she calls them to account and punishes them, and says that they are cursed oligarchs.

18 Yes, he replied, a very common occurrence.

19 Yes, I said; and loyal citizens are insultingly termed by her slaves who hug their chains and men of naught; she would have subjects who are like rulers, and rulers who are like subjects: these are men after her own heart, whom she praises and honours both in private and public. Now, in such a State, can liberty have any limit?

20 Certainly not.

21 By degrees the anarchy finds a way into private houses, and ends by getting among the animals and infecting them.

22 How do you mean?

23 I mean that the father grows accustomed to descend to the level of his sons and to fear them, and the son is on a level with his father, he having no respect or reverence for either of his parents; and this is his freedom, and the metic is equal with the citizen and the citizen with the metic, and the stranger is quite as good as either.

24 Yes, he said, that is the way.

25 And these are not the only evils, I said—there are several lesser ones: In such a state of society the master fears and flatters his scholars, and the scholars despise their masters and tutors; young and old are all alike; and the young man is on a level with the old, and is ready to compete with him in word or deed; and old men condescend to the young and are full of pleasantry and gaiety; they are loth to be thought morose and authoritative, and therefore they adopt the manners of the young.

26 Quite true, he said.

27 The last extreme of popular liberty is when the slave bought with money, whether male or female, is just as free as his or her purchaser; nor must I forget to tell of the liberty and equality of the two sexes in relation to each other.

28 Why not, as Aeschylus says, utter the word which rises to our lips?

29 That is what I am doing, I replied; and I must add that no one who does not know would believe, how much greater is the liberty which the animals who are under the dominion of man have in a democracy than in any other State: for truly, the she-dogs, as the proverb says, are as good as their she-mistresses, and the horses and asses have a way of marching along with all the rights and dignities of freemen; and they will run at anybody who comes in their way if he does not leave the road clear for them: and all things are just ready to burst with liberty.

30 When I take a country walk, he said, I often experience what you describe. You and I have dreamed the same thing.

31 And above all, I said, and as the result of all, see how sensitive the citizens become; they chafe impatiently at the least touch of authority, and at length, as you know, they cease to care even for the laws, written or unwritten; they will have no one over them.

32 Yes, he said, I know it too well.

33 Such, my friend, I said, is the fair and glorious beginning out of which springs tyranny.

34 Glorious indeed, he said. But what is the next step?

35 The ruin of oligarchy is the ruin of democracy; the same disease magnified and intensified by liberty overmasters democracy—the truth being that the excessive increase of anything often causes a reaction in the opposite direction; and this is the case not only in the seasons and in vegetable and animal life, but above all in forms of government.

36 True.

37 The excess of liberty, whether in States or individuals, seems only to pass into excess of slavery.

38 Yes, the natural order.

39 And so tyranny naturally arises out of democracy, and the most aggravated form of tyranny and slavery out of the most extreme form of liberty?

40 As we might expect.

41 That, however, was not, as I believe, your question—you rather desired to know what is that disorder which is generated alike in oligarchy and democracy, and is the ruin of both?

42 Just so, he replied.

43 Well, I said, I meant to refer to the class of idle spendthrifts, of whom the more courageous are the leaders and the more timid the followers, the same whom we were comparing to drones, some stingless, and others having stings.

44 A very just comparison.

45 These two classes are the plagues of every city in which they are generated, being what phlegm and bile are to the body. And the good physician and lawgiver of the State ought, like the wise bee-master, to keep them at a distance and prevent, if possible, their ever coming in; and if they have anyhow found a way in, then he should have them and their cells cut out as speedily as possible.

46 Yes, by all means, he said.

47 Then, in order that we may see clearly what we are doing, let us imagine democracy to be divided, as indeed it is, into three classes; for in the first place freedom creates rather more drones in the democratic than there were in the oligarchical State.

48 That is true.

49 And in the democracy they are certainly more intensified.

50 How so?

51 Because in the oligarchical State they are disqualified and driven from office, and therefore they cannot train or gather strength; whereas in a democracy they are almost the entire ruling power, and while the keener sort speak and act, the rest keep buzzing about the bema and do not suffer a word to be said on the other side; hence in democracies almost everything is managed by the drones.

52 Very true, he said.

53 Then there is another class which is always being severed from the mass.

54 What is that?

55 They are the orderly class, which in a nation of traders is sure to be the richest.

56 Naturally so.

57 They are the most squeezable persons and yield the largest amount of honey to the drones.

58 Why, he said, there is little to be squeezed out of people who have little.

59 And this is called the wealthy class, and the drones feed upon them.

60 That is pretty much the case, he said.

61 The people are a third class, consisting of those who work with their own hands; they are not politicians, and have not much to live upon. This, when assembled, is the largest and most powerful class in a democracy.

62 True, he said; but then the multitude is seldom willing to congregate unless they get a little honey.

63 And do they not share? I said. Do not their leaders deprive the rich of their estates and distribute them among the people; at the same time taking care to reserve the larger part for themselves?

64 Why, yes, he said, to that extent the people do share.

65 And the persons whose property is taken from them are compelled to defend themselves before the people as they best can?

66 What else can they do?

67 And then, although they may have no desire of change, the others charge them with plotting against the people and being friends of oligarchy?

68 True.

69 And the end is that when they see the people, not of their own accord, but through ignorance, and because they are deceived by informers, seeking to do them wrong, then at last they are forced to become oligarchs in reality; they do not wish to be, but the sting of the drones torments them and breeds revolution in them.

70 That is exactly the truth.

71 Then come impeachments and judgments and trials of one another.

72 True.

73 The people have always some champion whom they set over them and nurse into greatness.

74 Yes, that is their way.

75 This and no other is the root from which a tyrant springs; when he first appears above ground he is a protector.

76 Yes, that is quite clear.

77 How then does a protector begin to change into a tyrant? Clearly when he does what the man is said to do in the tale of the Arcadian temple of Lycaean Zeus.

78 What tale?

79 The tale is that he who has tasted the entrails of a single human victim minced up with the entrails of other victims is destined to become a wolf. Did you never hear it?

80 Oh, yes.

81 And the protector of the people is like him; having a mob entirely at his disposal, he is not restrained from shedding the blood of kinsmen; by the favourite method of false accusation he brings them into court and murders them, making the life of man to disappear, and with unholy tongue and lips tasting the blood of his fellow citizens; some he kills and others he banishes, at the same time hinting at the abolition of debts and partition of lands: and after this, what will be his destiny? Must he not either perish at the hands of his enemies, or from being a man become a wolf—that is, a tyrant?

82 Inevitably.

83 This, I said, is he who begins to make a party against the rich?

84 The same.

85 After a while he is driven out, but comes back, in spite of his enemies, a tyrant full grown.

86 That is clear.

87 And if they are unable to expel him, or to get him condemned to death by a public accusation, they conspire to assassinate him.

88 Yes, he said, that is their usual way.

89 Then comes the famous request for a bodyguard, which is the device of all those who have got thus far in their tyrannical career—"Let not the people's friend," as they say, "be lost to them."

90 Exactly.

91 The people readily assent; all their fears are for him—they have none for themselves.

92 Very true.

93 And when a man who is wealthy and is also accused of being an enemy of the people sees this, then, my friend, as the oracle said to Croesus,

94 "By pebbly Hermus' shore he flees and rests not, and is not ashamed to be a coward."

95 And quite right too, said he, for if he were, he would never be ashamed again.

96 But if he is caught he dies.

97 Of course.

98 And he, the protector of whom we spoke, is to be seen, not "larding the plain" with his bulk, but himself the overthrower of many, standing up in the chariot of State with the reins in his hand, no longer protector, but tyrant absolute.

99 No doubt, he said.

Questions

1. Socrates calls democracy "like an embroidered robe" and a place to shop for constitutions "as he would to a bazaar" (8.11, 8.15). How much of this is praise and how much mockery?
2. Democracy, he says, deals out "a sort of equality to equals and unequals alike" (8.23). What does he object to? Is there a kind of equality you would defend against him?
3. "The excess of liberty, whether in States or individuals, seems only to pass into excess of slavery" (9.37). Trace the steps by which Socrates thinks this happens (9.17–39). Which step seems least convincing?
4. The tyrant begins as the people's protector (9.73–75) and ends "no longer protector, but tyrant absolute" (9.98). What warning signs does Socrates list along the way? Which would you watch for?

8. The Citizen and the Middle

Aristotle was born in 384 BC at Stagira in northern Greece and came to Athens at about seventeen to study in Plato's Academy, where he stayed some twenty years. Later he became tutor to the young Alexander of Macedon. In 335 BC he founded his own school at Athens, the Lyceum, and there his students gathered accounts of the constitutions of 158 Greek cities. Though he lived most of his life in Athens, he was never a citizen there. He died at Chalcis in 322 BC.

His *Politics* survives probably as lecture notes, and it reads like a teacher thinking aloud: defining terms, raising objections, testing claims against examples. Aristotle sorts constitutions by who rules. Rule by one, by a few or by many each has a correct form and a corrupt one: monarchy and tyranny, aristocracy and oligarchy, polity and democracy. His name for the good form of rule by the many is polity, a mixture of oligarchy and democracy.

Reading 10 is the opening chapter of Book III. Before he can say what a city is, Aristotle must say who belongs to it, and his answer is a working definition of the citizen as one who shares in judging and in holding office. He notices at once that this fits a democracy better than other constitutions. Reading 11 is chapter 11 of Book IV. Here he asks not what the ideal state would be but what constitution most cities could actually achieve, and he finds it in the middle class.

The translation is William Ellis's, first published in 1776, and its English is older than any other in this book. Its sentences are long and loosely joined, and some words have shifted meaning. Read slowly, and let the notes help.

Reading 10. *What is a citizen? Aristotle, Politics (Book III, chapter 1), translated by William Ellis.*

❧

1 Every one who inquires into the nature of government, and what are its different forms, should make this almost his first question, What is a city? For upon this there is a dispute: for some persons say the city did this or that, while others say, not the city, but the oligarchy, or the tyranny. We see that the city is the only object which both the politician and legislator have in view in all they do: but government is a certain ordering of those who inhabit a city. As a city is a collective body, and, like other wholes, composed of many parts, it is evident our first inquiry must be, what a citizen is: for a city is a certain number of citizens. So that we must consider whom we ought to call citizen, and who is one; for this is often doubtful: for every one will not allow that this character is applicable to the same person; for that man who would be a citizen in a republic would very often not be one in an oligarchy. We do not include in this inquiry many of those who acquire this appellation out of the ordinary way, as honorary persons, for instance, but those only who have a natural right to it.

2 Now it is not residence which constitutes a man a citizen; for in this sojourners and slaves are upon an equality with him; nor will it be sufficient for this purpose, that you have the privilege of the laws, and may plead or be impleaded, for this all those of different nations, between whom there is a mutual agreement for that purpose, are allowed; although it very often happens, that sojourners have not a perfect right therein without the protection of a patron, to whom they are obliged to apply, which shows that their share in the community is incomplete. In like manner, with respect to boys who are not yet enrolled, or old men who are past war, we admit that they are in some respects citizens, but not completely so, but with some exceptions, for these are not yet arrived to years of maturity, and those are past service; nor is there any difference between them. But

what we mean is sufficiently intelligible and clear, we want a complete citizen, one in whom there is no deficiency to be corrected to make him so. As to those who are banished, or infamous, there may be the same objections made and the same answer given. There is nothing that more characterises a complete citizen than having a share in the judicial and executive part of the government.

3 With respect to offices, some are fixed to a particular time, so that no person is, on any account, permitted to fill them twice; or else not till some certain period has intervened; others are not fixed, as a juryman's, and a member of the general assembly: but probably some one may say these are not offices, nor have the citizens in these capacities any share in the government; though surely it is ridiculous to say that those who have the principal power in the state bear no office in it. But this objection is of no weight, for it is only a dispute about words; as there is no general term which can be applied both to the office of a juryman and a member of the assembly. For the sake of distinction, suppose we call it an indeterminate office: but I lay it down as a maxim, that those are citizens who could exercise it. Such then is the description of a citizen who comes nearest to what all those who are called citizens are. Every one also should know, that of the component parts of those things which differ from each other in species, after the first or second remove, those which follow have either nothing at all or very little common to each.

4 Now we see that governments differ from each other in their form, and that some of them are defective, others as excellent as possible: for it is evident, that those which have many deficiencies and degeneracies in them must be far inferior to those which are without such faults. What I mean by degeneracies will be hereafter explained. Hence it is clear that the office of a citizen must differ as governments do from each other: for which reason he who is called a citizen has, in a democracy, every privilege which that station supposes. In other forms of government he may

enjoy them; but not necessarily: for in some states the people have no power; nor have they any general assembly, but a few select men.

5 The trial also of different causes is allotted to different persons; as at Lacedaemon all disputes concerning contracts are brought before some of the ephori: the senate are the judges in cases of murder, and so on; some being to be heard by one magistrate, others by another: and thus at Carthage certain magistrates determine all causes. But our former description of a citizen will admit of correction; for in some governments the office of a juryman and a member of the general assembly is not an indeterminate one; but there are particular persons appointed for these purposes, some or all of the citizens being appointed jurymen or members of the general assembly, and this either for all causes and all public business whatsoever, or else for some particular one: and this may be sufficient to show what a citizen is; for he who has a right to a share in the judicial and executive part of government in any city, him we call a citizen of that place; and a city, in one word, is a collective body of such persons sufficient in themselves to all the purposes of life.

Reading 11. *The middle class. Aristotle, Politics (Book IV, chapter 11), translated by William Ellis.*

1 We proceed now to inquire what form of government and what manner of life is best for communities in general, not adapting it to that superior virtue which is above the reach of the vulgar, or that education which every advantage of nature and fortune only can furnish, nor to those imaginary plans which may be formed at pleasure; but to that mode of life which the greater part of mankind can attain to, and that government which most cities may establish: for as to those aristocracies which we have now mentioned, they are either too perfect for a state to support, or

one so nearly alike to that state we now going to inquire into, that we shall treat of them both as one.

2 The opinions which we form upon these subjects must depend upon one common principle: for if what I have said in my treatise on Morals is true, a happy life must arise from an uninterrupted course of virtue; and if virtue consists in a certain medium, the middle life must certainly be the happiest; which medium is attainable by every one. The boundaries of virtue and vice in the state must also necessarily be the same as in a private person; for the form of government is the life of the city. In every city the people are divided into three sorts; the very rich, the very poor, and those who are between them. If this is universally admitted, that the mean is best, it is evident that even in point of fortune mediocrity is to be preferred; for that state is most submissive to reason; for those who are very handsome, or very strong, or very noble, or very rich; or, on the contrary; those who are very poor, or very weak, or very mean, with difficulty obey it; for the one are capricious and greatly flagitious, the other rascally and mean, the crimes of each arising from their different excesses: nor will they go through the different offices of the state; which is detrimental to it: besides, those who excel in strength, in riches, or friends, or the like, neither know how nor are willing to submit to command: and this begins at home when they are boys; for there they are brought up too delicately to be accustomed to obey their preceptors: as for the very poor, their general and excessive want of what the rich enjoy reduces them to a state too mean: so that the one know not how to command, but to be commanded as slaves, the others know not how to submit to any command, nor to command themselves but with despotic power.

3 A city composed of such men must therefore consist of slaves and masters, not freemen; where one party must hate, and the other despise, where there could be no possibility of friendship or political community: for community supposes affection; for we do not even on the road associate with our enemies. It is also the genius of a city to be composed as much as possible of equals; which will be most so when the inhabitants

are in the middle state: from whence it follows, that that city must be best framed which is composed of those whom we say are naturally its proper members. It is men of this station also who will be best assured of safety and protection; for they will neither covet what belongs to others, as the poor do; nor will others covet what is theirs, as the poor do what belongs to the rich; and thus, without plotting against any one, or having any one plot against them, they will live free from danger: for which reason Phocylides wisely wishes for the middle state, as being most productive of happiness. It is plain, then, that the most perfect political community must be amongst those who are in the middle rank, and those states are best instituted wherein these are a larger and more respectable part, if possible, than both the other; or, if that cannot be, at least than either of them separate; so that being thrown into the balance it may prevent either scale from preponderating.

4 It is therefore the greatest happiness which the citizens can enjoy to possess a moderate and convenient fortune; for when some possess too much, and others nothing at all, the government must either be in the hands of the meanest rabble or else a pure oligarchy; or, from the excesses of both, a tyranny; for this arises from a headstrong democracy or an oligarchy, but very seldom when the members of the community are nearly on an equality with each other. We will assign a reason for this when we come to treat of the alterations which different states are likely to undergo. The middle state is therefore best, as being least liable to those seditions and insurrections which disturb the community; and for the same reason extensive governments are least liable to these inconveniences; for there those in a middle state are very numerous, whereas in small ones it is easy to pass to the two extremes, so as hardly to have any in a medium remaining, but the one half rich, the other poor: and from the same principle it is that democracies are more firmly established and of longer continuance than oligarchies; but even in those when there is a want of a proper number of men of middling fortune, the poor extend their power too far, abuses arise, and the government is soon at an end.

5 We ought to consider as a proof of what I now advance, that the best lawgivers themselves were those in the middle rank of life, amongst whom was Solon, as is evident from his poems, and Lycurgus, for he was not a king, and Charondas, and indeed most others. What has been said will show us why of so many free states some have changed to democracies, others to oligarchies: for whenever the number of those in the middle state has been too small, those who were the more numerous, whether the rich or the poor, always overpowered them and assumed to themselves the administration of public affairs; from hence arose either a democracy or an oligarchy. Moreover, when in consequence of their disputes and quarrels with each other, either the rich get the better of the poor, or the poor of the rich, neither of them will establish a free state; but, as the record of their victory, one which inclines to their own principles, and form either a democracy or an oligarchy.

6 Those who made conquests in Greece, having all of them an eye to the respective forms of government in their own cities, established either democracies or oligarchies, not considering what was serviceable to the state, but what was similar to their own; for which reason a government has never been established where the supreme power has been placed amongst those of the middling rank, or very seldom; and, amongst a few, one man only of those who have yet been conquerors has been persuaded to give the preference to this order of men: it is indeed an established custom with the inhabitants of most cities not to desire an equality, but either to aspire to govern, or when they are conquered, to submit.

7 Thus we have shown what the best state is, and why. It will not be difficult to perceive of the many states which there are, for we have seen that there are various forms both of democracies and oligarchies, to which we should give the first place, to which the second, and in the same manner the next also; and to observe what are the particular excellences and defects of each, after we have first described the best possible; for that must be the best which is nearest to this, that worst which is most distant from the medium, without any one has a particular plan of his own which he

judges by. I mean by this, that it may happen, that although one form of government may be better than another, yet there is no reason to prevent another from being preferable thereunto in particular circumstances and for particular purposes.

Questions

1. Aristotle says "it is not residence which constitutes a man a citizen" (10.2). What does, in his view? What makes someone a citizen in your country, and is it the same thing?
2. He admits that his definition fits a democracy best (10.4). Is that a strength or a weakness of the definition?
3. Why does Aristotle think a city of the very rich and the very poor becomes a city of "slaves and masters, not freemen" (11.3)? Do you see that danger today?
4. He holds up Solon as a lawgiver from the middle rank (11.5). Looking back to Reading 1, does Solon fit Aristotle's picture?

Notes on the Texts

1.1 Kylon is Cylon, an Athenian nobleman who tried to seize power in 636 or 632 BC. His followers took refuge at Athena's temple on the Acropolis, left under a promise of safety and were killed. The archons held responsible, under Megacles, brought a curse on his family, the Alcmaeonids, who were exiled; those are the "accursed men cast out of the country."

1.1 The Diakrii, Pedioei and Parali are the people of the hills, the plain and the coast. Plutarch treats them as parties with different aims.

1.1 Hektemori, sixth-parters, worked the land of the rich and owed them one-sixth of the produce. Stewart glosses the word as servants.

1.3 "Equality does not breed strife": the rich heard equality as proportion to merit, the poor as equal shares. Plutarch shows how a slogan can unite people who mean opposite things.

1.4 The oracle pictures Athens as a ship and Solon at the helm. The same image returns at 1.35, where his two councils are the city's anchors.

1.5 Tunnondas, chosen by the Euboeans, and Pittakus (Pittacus), chosen king of Mitylene, are Plutarch's examples of rulers given power by their own people.

1.6 Here and at 1.9, 1.11, 1.13, 1.15, 1.18, 1.20, 1.26, 1.28 and 1.33, Plutarch quotes Solon's poems. Phokus, to whom the first lines answer, is not otherwise identified here. Stewart sets them as verse; in this book they run on inside the paragraph.

1.16 "The best that they would endure" is Solon's reply to a question about his laws. Plutarch adds that Solon also gave the cancellation of debts a softening name, "relief from burdens," the Seisachtheia of 1.29.

1.17 Androtion is another of Plutarch's sources. His alternative account, that Solon only lowered interest rates and changed the coinage, shows that the ancients themselves disagreed about what the Seisachtheia was.

1.17 A mina was a sum of money. Solon's change, as Plutarch reports it, made a mina worth a hundred drachmas instead of seventy-three, so that debts fell in real value.

1.18 The mortgages on the land were marked by stones called horoi, set on the fields of the hektemoroi; Solon had them taken away.

1.22 "He intended to abolishing all existing securities" is printed so in this edition; the grammar slips, but the sense is clear.

1.24 Lykurgus (Lycurgus) was the lawgiver traditionally credited with Sparta's institutions. Scholars cannot say for certain whether he was a historical person.

1.30 Drakon is Draco, whose law code is generally dated to 621 BC. Solon kept only his laws on homicide.

1.31 The four classes were measured in medimni, a Greek measure of grain. The Zeugitae served as armored infantry, the hoplites, and the Thetes were the laborers.

1.31 Plutarch sees that the Thetes' right to sit on juries, "at first insignificant," later became the center of popular power, because so much was decided in the courts.

1.34 The law allowing anyone to prosecute on behalf of a wronged person turned justice into every citizen's business. The saying that follows makes the same point.

1.35 The Areopagus, named for the Hill of Ares, was the council of former archons. The "second senate" is the Council of Four Hundred, which prepared business for the assembly. Plutarch's two anchors return to the ship of state.

1.36 The Ephetai, Plutarch says at 1.35, were the judges Drakon named in cases of murder. The source prints "king–archons" with a double hyphen, shown in this edition as a dash.

2.1 The Magians had ruled through a man who pretended to be Smerdis, brother of the king Cambyses. Herodotus himself defends the truth of the speeches against Greek doubters.

2.1 Otanes lists three marks of popular government: offices filled by lot, magistrates who render account of their acts, and decisions by the assembly. Athenian magistrates faced just such a public audit, the euthyna.

2.1 "Equality" translates *isonomia*, equality under law. Otanes never uses the word *demokratia*; Herodotus later does, at 6.43, describing his proposal.

2.2 Megabyzos is Macaulay's spelling of Megabyzus. His proposal, rule by "a company of the best men," is aristocracy, and he notes candidly that the speakers would be among them.

2.3 Darius argues from what happens in practice: rivalry among the few breeds faction and murder, corruption among the many breeds a popular leader, and both end in a monarch. Plato tells a similar story about democracy at 9.73–98.

2.3 Darius' last argument is from gratitude: the Persians were "set free by one man," so they should keep the rule of one and the customs of their fathers.

2.4 Otanes' house kept its exemption into Herodotus' own day, he says, bound only by the laws of the Persians. The other four of the seven had voted with Darius.

3.2 "Your first great murder-cause": in the play this is the first trial for bloodshed ever held, the founding case of the Areopagus as a homicide court.

3.3 The host of Ægeus' race are the Athenians, the citizens who will keep this court for ever.

3.5–10 Athena explains the name: the Amazons, at war with Theseus, camped on this hill and sacrificed to Ares, so it was called Ares' hill.

3.11–14 Reverence and fear will keep citizens from wrong so long as "The burghers, alter not themselves their laws." The danger Athena foresees comes from within.

3.19 "Which is not lawless, nor tyrannical": the same middle path between anarchy and despotism appears in Solon's poems (1.33) and Aristotle's middle class (11.4).

3.25 Athena names two lands far from Athens: Skythia and Pelops' clime, the Peloponnese, whose name means island of Pelops, a legendary hero.

4.1 *Chor.* is the chorus of Furies, now reconciled to Athens.

4.2–8 The Furies pray that Discord may never "ravine," that is, devour like a beast of prey, and that the city's dust may never drink the blood of citizens in revenge. These are the lines some scholars connect with the murder of Ephialtes; others read them simply as part of the drama.

4.11–12 To hate "With minds of one accord" turns hostility outward, against common enemies, instead of inward.

5.3 The prytanes were the members of the council presiding in turn over the assembly; their constables removed speakers the assembly would not hear.

5.3 The young men are Paralus and Xanthippus, sons of Pericles, who are among Protagoras' listeners. Cleinias was the younger brother of Alcibiades; Pericles was their guardian.

5.7 Prometheus steals fire and the mechanical arts so that humans can survive, but the myth shows that these gifts are not enough to hold a city together.

5.7 The sentence beginning "Thus did Epimetheus" breaks off and starts again; it stands so in Jowett's text.

5.8 Zeus sends reverence and justice by Hermes, and to everyone, not to a skilled few as with the arts.

5.8 The law that whoever has no share in reverence and justice "shall be put to death, for he is a plague of the state" is harsh, and Protagoras means it: a city cannot tolerate someone wholly without them.

5.11 Protagoras' account of punishment as prevention, not revenge, answers Cleon's call for vengeance in the next chapter (6.3).

6.1 Salaethus offered, in vain, to have the Peloponnesians withdraw from Plataea, then under siege. Thucydides adds that Mitylene had revolted though not, like the rest, subjected to the empire.

6.1 Paches was the Athenian general who had taken Mitylene, Crawley's spelling of Mytilene.

6.1 Cleon is called "the most violent man at Athens." He led the people after Pericles died in 429 BC and was killed in battle at Amphipolis in 422 BC.

6.2 "Your empire is a despotism": Cleon says openly what the empire was: rule over disaffected subjects, held by strength and not by their loyalty.

6.6 Diodotus son of Eucrates is known only from this passage. Some scholars have even suggested that Thucydides invented him.

6.9 "Unless it be dearly for the good of the country" reads like a misprint for "clearly" but is printed so here.

6.12 Diodotus argues that the common people in allied cities are Athens' friends, and that killing them would hand every future revolt to the oligarchs.

6.14 Barley-cakes kneaded with oil and wine let the rowers eat at their oars. The first ship sailed slowly, Thucydides notes, on so horrid an errand.

6.15 The land of Lesbos, except that of the Methymnians, was divided into three thousand lots for Athenian shareholders, though the Lesbians kept farming it and paid them rent.

7.1 Eurymedon commanded the Athenian fleet of sixty ships, whose approach freed the popular party to take revenge. The sanctuary of Hera was where the defeated party had taken refuge as suppliants.

7.2 The popular chiefs looked to Athens and the oligarchs to Sparta; Thucydides' point is that war gave every faction a foreign power to call in.

7.2 "Words had to change their ordinary meaning": in Crawley's long list that follows, each virtue gets a new name that suits the party in power.

7.2 The two cries, "political equality of the people" and "a moderate aristocracy," are the slogans of democrats and oligarchs; Thucydides calls them fair professions that covered a struggle for power.

7.4 This paragraph, Thucydides 3.84, has been suspected since ancient times of being a later addition. Its defenders argue that the passage on civil strife needs it to be complete.

8.1 Socrates speaks with Adeimantus, Plato's brother; the short answers are his. Election "by lot" is the democratic method Otanes praised at 2.1.

8.17 A dicast is Jowett's word for a juror in the Athenian courts.

8.21 The "fine principles" are those of the ideal city in earlier books of the *Republic*, where rulers are trained from childhood among things of beauty.

9.3 The capital in "In what manner" stands so in this text.

9.17 The image of evil cupbearers pouring the strong wine of freedom pictures popular leaders who give the people more liberty than they can handle.

9.23 A metic was a resident foreigner, free and protected by law but without the rights of a citizen.

9.43 The drones, idle spendthrifts, some with stings, were introduced earlier in the dialogue.

9.51 The bema was the speakers' platform in the assembly.

9.77–81 The tale of the temple of Lycaean Zeus in Arcadia, in which a man who tastes human flesh becomes a wolf, gives Socrates his image of the protector turned tyrant.

9.89 Socrates calls the request for a bodyguard the device of every would-be tyrant who has got this far.

9.93–94 The oracle quoted was given to Croesus, king of Lydia, as Herodotus tells in Book 1 of his history. The rich man, Socrates says, will flee without shame.

10.1 Ellis's republic is set here against oligarchy, as a constitution in which the people have a share; his government often means the constitution itself.

10.2 Sojourners are resident foreigners, who, Aristotle says, often could not go to law without a patron. He sets slaves, boys and the old outside the complete citizen body.

10.3 An "indeterminate office" is Aristotle's term for the open-ended membership of the assembly and the juries, as opposed to fixed magistracies.

10.5 Lacedaemon is Sparta, and the ephori were among its magistrates. Aristotle's definition must stretch to cover cities where only a few judge.

11.1 "That state we now going to inquire into" lacks a word, probably "are"; it stands so in Ellis's text.

11.2 The treatise on Morals is Aristotle's own ethical teaching, in which virtue consists in a medium. Ellis's mediocrity means the middle condition, not dullness.

11.3 Aristotle cites the poet Phocylides, who wished for the middle state as most productive of happiness.

11.4 Aristotle explains why a large middle class steadies a city: it holds the balance between rich and poor, and large states, which have more such men, are less prone to strife.

11.5 Aristotle names Solon, Lycurgus and Charondas as lawgivers from the middle rank. His claim about Solon matches Plutarch's portrait of a man of easy, not great, fortune (1.3, 1.24). The two writers part ways on Lycurgus: Aristotle says he "was not a king", while Plutarch at 1.24 says Lykurgus "had reigned in Lacedaemon for many years".

Glossary

Archon: One of the chief annual magistrates of Athens. Solon held the office in about 594 BC.

Areopagus: The Hill of Ares at Athens, and the council of former archons that met there. After the reforms of 462 or 461 BC it served mainly as a court for homicide.

Assembly: The meeting of all adult male citizens of Athens, which passed laws and decrees. It met in the open air on the Pnyx hill.

Council: A body that prepared business for the assembly. Solon's council had four hundred members; after Cleisthenes it had five hundred, fifty from each of ten tribes.

Demos: The people, the body of citizens; also the assembly itself. *Demokratia*, democracy, means rule of the demos.

Dicast: Jowett's word for a juror in the Athenian courts.

Drachma: A Greek unit of money. Solon, Plutarch reports, made a hundred drachmas equal one mina.

Erinyes: The Furies, goddesses of vengeance who embody a murdered mother's curse in the *Oresteia*. In the *Eumenides* they prosecute Orestes.

Eumenides: The Kindly or Gentle Ones, the name for the Furies once they are reconciled to Athens.

Euthyna: The public audit an Athenian official faced at the end of his year in office, the rendering of account Otanes praises.

Hektemoroi: Sixth-parters, poor Athenian farmers who owed one-sixth of their produce to the rich before Solon's reforms. Stewart spells it Hektemori.

Hippeis: Horsemen or knights, Solon's second property class.

Isonomia: Equality under the law, the word Herodotus gives Otanes for the rule of the many.

Lot: Selection by drawing names, the Athenian method of filling many offices and choosing jurors.

Medimnus: A Greek measure of grain, used by Solon to rank citizens by income. Plural medimni.

Metic: A resident foreigner in a Greek city, free and protected by law but not a citizen.

Mina: A sum of money; after Solon, a hundred drachmas.

Oligarchy: Rule by the few, usually the rich.

Pentakosiomedimnoi: Five-hundred-measure men, Solon's highest property class.

Pnyx: The hill at Athens where the assembly met.

Polity: Aristotle's name for good rule by the many, a mixture of oligarchy and democracy resting on a large middle class.

Prytanes: Members of the council serving in turn as its presiding committee for a tenth of the year.

Seisachtheia: The shaking off of burdens, Solon's cancellation of debts and ban on enslavement for debt.

Sophist: One of the traveling professional teachers of the later fifth century BC, of whom Protagoras was the most famous.

Stasis: Civil strife or faction within a city; the subject of Reading 7.

Thetes: Laborers, Solon's lowest property class, who could attend the assembly and sit on juries but not hold office.

Timocracy: In Plato's *Republic*, rule by the ambitious, the first step down from the ideal city, modeled on Sparta.

Tyrant: A ruler who took power outside the normal constitution. Early tyrants were often popular; later Greeks came to see tyranny as the opposite of democracy.

Zeugitae: Solon's third property class, men who could equip themselves as armored infantry.

Chronology

636 or 632 BC · Cylon tries to seize power at Athens and fails; his followers are killed.

c. 621 BC · Draco's law code at Athens.

c. 594 BC · Solon archon; his cancellation of debts and new laws (some date the laws about twenty years later).

546–510 BC · The final period of tyranny at Athens under Peisistratus and his sons, ended when the Spartans expel Hippias.

522 BC · A Magian seizes the Persian throne and is killed by seven nobles; Darius becomes king (ruled to 486 BC).

508 BC · Cleisthenes reorganizes the Athenian tribes and the council.

c. 484 BC · Herodotus is born, possibly in this year, at Halicarnassus.

462 or 461 BC · Ephialtes takes most powers from the Areopagus council and is murdered.

458 BC · Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, with the *Eumenides*, is staged at Athens.

444 BC · Protagoras frames laws for the new colony of Thurii.

late 430s BC · Dramatic setting of Plato's *Protagoras*.

431–404 BC · The Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta.

429 BC · Plague kills Pericles; Cleon becomes the leading politician at Athens.

428–427 BC · Revolt of Mytilene; the Mytilene debate; civil war at Corcyra.

422 BC · Cleon killed at Amphipolis.

404 BC · Athens surrenders; the Spartans install the Thirty.

399 BC · Trial and execution of Socrates.

c. 380–360 BC · Plato writes most of the *Republic*.

335 BC · Aristotle founds the Lyceum at Athens.

322 BC · After the Lamian War, Antipater of Macedon ends the Athenian democracy with a property qualification for citizens; Aristotle dies at Chalcis.

Further Reading

Edith Hamilton, *The Greek Way*, 1930. A warm, classic introduction to the Greek spirit for general readers.

M. I. Finley, *Democracy Ancient and Modern*, 1973. Short lectures comparing Athenian and modern democracy.

Mogens Herman Hansen, *The Athenian Democracy in the Age of Demosthenes*, 1991. The standard account of how the institutions worked.

Jennifer Tolbert Roberts, *Athens on Trial: The Antidemocratic Tradition in Western Thought*, 1994. How later ages judged Athenian democracy.

Robert B. Strassler, ed., *The Landmark Thucydides*, 1996. Crawley's translation revised, with maps and notes.

Paul Woodruff, *First Democracy: The Challenge of an Ancient Idea*, 2005. The ideals behind Athenian democracy, for general readers.

Robert B. Strassler, ed., *The Landmark Herodotus*, 2009. A modern translation by Andrea L. Purvis, with maps and notes.

Paul Cartledge, *Democracy: A Life*, 2016. A lively history of democracy from the Greeks onward.

Josiah Ober, *Demopolis: Democracy before Liberalism in Theory and Practice*, 2017. A political theorist's case for what Greek democracy can teach.

Sources of the Texts

- **Aubrey Stewart (1844–1918):** Plutarch, *Life of Solon*, in *Plutarch's Lives*, translated by Aubrey Stewart and George Long, volume I (George Bell & Sons, London; first issued 1880–82, this text from the 1894 printing); Reading 1. This edition leaves out Stewart's notes and the chapter numbers printed at the start of paragraphs.
- **G. C. Macaulay (1852–1915):** Herodotus, *The History of Herodotus* (Macmillan, 1890; this text follows the 1904 edition as prepared by Standard Ebooks); Reading 2. This edition leaves out the translator's notes, the footnote markers and the section numbers.
- **E. H. Plumptre (1821–1891):** Aeschylus, *Eumenides*, in *The Tragedies of Aeschylos* (first published 1868; this text from *Æschylos: Tragedies and Fragments*, D. C. Heath, Boston, 1901); Readings 3 and 4. This edition leaves out the translator's notes, the footnote markers and the margin line numbers.
- **Benjamin Jowett (1817–1893):** Plato, *Protagoras* and *Republic*, in *The Dialogues of Plato* (third edition, 1892, as prepared by Standard Ebooks); Readings 5, 8 and 9. This edition leaves out the translator's notes and the footnote markers.
- **Richard Crawley (1840–1893):** Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* (1874, as prepared by Standard Ebooks); Readings 6 and 7. This edition leaves out any translator's notes and the summaries at the head of each chapter.
- **William Ellis (1730–1801):** Aristotle, *A Treatise on Government* (first published 1776; this text from the Everyman's Library edition, J. M. Dent, London, and E. P. Dutton, New York, 1912, reprinted

1919, 1923 and 1928); Readings 10 and 11. This edition leaves out any translator's notes, the Everyman introduction and the bracketed page numbers of the standard Greek edition.

Edition Notes

The readings: The readings are reproduced word for word from public domain translations. Each translator, edition and date is listed under Sources of the Texts, with what this edition leaves out.

The apparatus: The introduction, headnotes, questions, reflections, practices, notes, glossary, chronology and reading list were drafted with the help of artificial intelligence and checked by hand against the readings and against published sources. Every quotation in them matches the readings printed in this book word for word, and every fact was checked against a published source before it was printed. The publisher keeps a record of the source checked for each fact. No quotation, fact or story was invented. The readings themselves are copied unchanged from the translations named under Sources of the Texts.

Locators: a note marked 3.4 refers to Reading 3, paragraph or line 4, as numbered in the margin.

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