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Martha C. Taylor, *Thucydides, Pericles, and the Idea of Athens in the Peloponnesian War*. Cambridge University Press, 2010. Pp. xii & 311. £50.00. ISBN 978-0-521-76593-0 (Hbk).

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This interesting but frustrating study offers a radical re-evaluation of Thucydides' *History*. Taylor argues that Thucydides offers a critique of Pericles' strategy and vision of the city; in her view, the Athenians as presented by Thucydides embraced and implemented both, and the narrative of the *History* shows that this policy led to the city's downfall. The obvious objection to this is that it flies in the face of a number of overt statements to the contrary by Thucydides, not least of which is his claim that 'others did the opposite of Pericles with respect to all points of his advice, and following personal ambition and personal profit they managed things badly both for themselves and for their allies' (2.65.7). Taylor's response is to show how the narrative contradicts this statement, which she characterises as 'Thucydides offering his reader what appears to be a quick and easy answer while later demonstrating that the situation is far more complex' (p. 89).

In the first chapter, Taylor assesses Pericles' presentation of the city in the speeches which Thucydides gives him. In these, Taylor argues, he urges the Athenians to view Athens as a city of the sea rather than of Attica. This is a theme which Taylor believes underpins the rest of the *History*. In the second chapter she turns to the adoption of Pericles' vision and strategy by the Athenians after his death, with a particular focus on the attack on Melos. The third chapter concerns the Sicilian expedition and the Spartan occupation of Decelea, through which Taylor believes 'Thucydides reveals the reality and the weakness of Pericles' vision' (p. 164). In the fourth chapter Taylor turns to the oligarchic regime of 411, and the weakness of the Athenian democracy which, she argues, Thucydides implies in his description of it. Finally, the fifth chapter concerns the response of the democratic fleet at Samos, which first proposes abandoning Athens and then attacking it.

The book is aimed at political theorists as well as classicists (p. 6), and both will be grateful for the clarity and economy with which Taylor describes the chronology of

the war and her own arguments. The details of scholarly controversy are deliberately confined to the footnotes, but thorough nevertheless, inasmuch as they concern scholarship specifically about Thucydides.

In the first two chapters in particular, Taylor draws out the contradictions between Thucydides' statements and the narrative effectively. She points out, for example, Pericles' need to persuade the Athenians of his strategy over time, which does not sit well with his supposed position as the guiding light of the Athenians (pp. 49-52). Taylor also notes the differences between what Thucydides tells us about the statesman's policy in his 'Epitaph' (2.65) and what Thucydides actually has him say in his speeches (pp. 84-87).

Things are more problematic in the fourth chapter, where Taylor attempts to show that Thucydides' argument was that the Athenian democracy was easily taken over by the oligarchic Four Hundred. Thucydides' overt statement that the task was difficult is put down to 'piquant irony' (p. 221), but Taylor fails to convince when it comes to the details. She claims, for example, that Thucydides' failure to mention an atmosphere of fear at the Assembly which gave power to the oligarchs proves that he believed there was no such atmosphere (p. 217). As she earlier accepts, however, this followed 'a calculated campaign of political intimidation' and indeed murder (pp. 210-211). Furthermore, Thucydides' statement that not a single voice was raised in opposition to the oligarchic proposal is surely intended to imply that elements of fear and coercion were present, unless we are supposed to imagine that every single Athenian voluntarily abandoned democracy. Again, when Taylor discusses the dismissal of the Council by a body of hundreds of armed men, she rather tenuously claims that this proves how easy it was to get the councillors to acquiesce, on the grounds that no actual force had to be used (pp. 218-220). The point is surely that resistance would have been useless. There is no reason to prefer her account of the whole episode to the mainstream view that the coup was 'a classic mixture of terror and propaganda' (Moses Finley, quoted p. 193).

There are also a number of more general problems with the book. The first is that while Taylor can often make a strong case that there are differences between what Thucydides expressly says and what his narrative reveals, it is much more difficult for the reader to accept that the explanation for this is an overarching ironic design.

Such an idea is perhaps feasible, but to convince her readers Taylor would have to show us why and how Thucydides would do this. What kind of writer could produce such a work, and at what audience would it be aimed? The problem is that Thucydides is not put in a clear literary, intellectual or social context. Taylor writes that her book 'is not a work of history. I do not claim to prove here anything about the policy of the historical Pericles or the real Athenians' reaction to it... I hope to elucidate Thucydides' presentation of the Athenians' "theoretical thinking" about the polis' (p. 6). But there is insufficient discussion of what this 'theoretical thinking' was; there is no mention, for example, of the concept of the 'imagined community' outlined by Benedict Anderson and applied to early democratic Athens by Greg Anderson.

Taylor also neglects to discuss the practical problems which Thucydides faced. In producing his history Thucydides must have been constrained by the facts as they were presented to him, and his selective depiction and interpretation of events is no doubt due to deliberate design. But when reading Taylor's book one gets the impression that every line of Thucydides is imagined to be part of a perfect whole, in which no allowance is made for the writer's capacity to contradict himself, misinterpret the evidence he presents, or reach conclusions that are not supported by the evidence. There is no sense of Thucydides as a writer struggling to achieve his goals, or as an innovator in a genre that is not yet fully formed. Every apparent contradiction in the text is put down to Thucydides' supposed masterplan. But why is this to be preferred to an explanation based on the kind of authorial inconsistency which we see in other works of history? Taylor does not provide a convincing reason.

Taylor has produced an interesting work and for the most part defends her position well on her own terms. The book is frustratingly limited, however, by the author's failure to step beyond the text itself and examine the work in context. Taylor says that the book is 'first and foremost, a study of what Thucydides has to say' (p. 6), but without any idea of who she thinks Thucydides is this must remain an unsatisfying approach. The book will nevertheless give other scholars reason to question some orthodox views of Thucydides' methods and intentions. It is to be hoped that either they or Taylor herself can elaborate on her theories and tie them into an idea of Thucydides and the intellectual and social world in which he lived that is rather more satisfying than what is offered in this book.