THUCYDIDES: A POSSESSION FOR ALL TIME

P. J. RHODES

I have been asked to give you today a lecture based on the lecture which I gave last year as my Presidential Address to the Classical Association of England and Wales.[1] Students of rhetoric will tell you that particular kinds of discourse are appropriate to particular occasions; and on that occasion I needed to put on display a sample of my scholarship, while engaging with those in the audience whose classical interests were different from my own, and to send everybody out into the coming year encouraged to pursue the classics with enthusiasm and to 'wrestle against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places'.[2]

A good deal of my work has been devoted to Thucydides,[3] and I think Thucydides will provide me with a way make some of the points which I want to make here. How we read classical texts has undergone considerable changes over the decades, and how we read Thucydides has partaken of those changes. In the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, for more elementary readers the primary task was to understand the grammar and to translate him correctly (and to cope with such facts as that, through not having passed

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1 On 12 April 2015; published as *Ktema es Aiei (A Possession for All Time)* by the Classical Association, Watford, 2015. Since this was written for a British audience, most of my references are to publications in English.

2 *Ephesians*, vi. 12: 'lutter . . . contre les dominations, contre les autorités, contre les princes de ce monde de ténèbres, contre les esprits méchants dans les lieux célestes'.

3 E.g. my editions of books II (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1988), III (1994), IV. 1 – V. 24 (1998), I (Aris & Phillips Classical Texts. Oxford: Oxbow, 2014); my introduction and notes in M. Hammond (trans.), *Thucydides, The Peloponnesian War* (Oxford World's Classics. Oxford U. P., 2009); my *Thucydides* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015); and Thucydidean chapters in various multi-author books.

an exam in his own language, he perpetrated such solecisms as a genitive absolute referring to something mentioned in another case in the same sentence[4]). By historians he was regarded as a paragon of critical use of evidence, objectivity and reliability, and F. M. Cornford's *Thucydides Mythistoricus* of 1907, arguing that Thucydides was not just a chronicler of facts, but was conditioned by his own background and took a tragic view of his subject, was a voice crying in the wilderness.[5] The latest edition of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* still includes, though with an addendum by S. Hornblower on more recent work, the article on Thucydides written by H. T. Wade-Gery for the first edition of 1949, which praised 'his singular truthfulness'.[6]

For those who wanted to consider matters other than the linguistic technicalities and the factual content of Thucydides' history, just as there was a 'Homeric question' which tried to distinguish between an original core of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and later accretions, there was a Thucydidean question about composition. We know from his own text that he started work at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War and continued beyond the end[7] (though the text which survives breaks off abruptly in the autumn of 411). There are a few passages which must be 'early', in that they state things which were true at the time of the events with which they are mentioned but had ceased being true by the end of the war; and there are a few which must be 'late', in that they look ahead to events which occurred after those with which they are mentioned; but there are not many passages which can be labelled in this

4 E.g. Thuc. II. 5. v, 8. iv.

5 F. M. Cornford, *Thucydides Mythistoricus* (Arnold, 1907).

6 H. T. Wade-Gery, 'Thucydides (2)', *O.C.D.*[4] 1472–5, accompanied by a section on Style by J. D. Denniston, 1475; *addendum* by S. Hornblower, 1475–7.

7 Started work, Thuc. I. 1. i; continued beyond end, e.g. II. 65. xii, V. 26.

way.[8] The difference between what is said in the 'late' II. 65. xi about the failure of the Sicilian campaign of 415–413 (inadequate support at home) and the impression given by the narrative in books VI–VII (unrealistic ambition and mistakes on the spot) is such that they cannot have been thought and presumably were not written at the same time. And there are some instances of untidiness which we should expect to have been dealt with in a final revision.[9] This challenged scholars to work out what was written when, and how Thucydides' view of the war and of his own history of it developed.

In the second half of the twentieth century people began studying literature in ways which had not aroused much interest earlier, and this applied to Thucydides (and to Homer) as it applied elsewhere. The title of a 1973 book, *Thucydides, the Artful Reporter*,[10] sums up the main result: Thucydides came to be seen not as a dispassionate investigator and recorder of the truth but as an artful reporter, who used his art in selecting and presenting material to create particular effects; different people studied different kinds of effect, and these were not mutually exclusive but complemented one another. Beyond that, Marxists who made no secret of their political bias argued that all historians are biased, and those who pretend otherwise are worse than those who do not.[11] Postmodernists regarded authors' intentions as irrecoverable and uninteresting, and claimed that what we have is a self-standing text of which it is for us to make what we will.[12] And the inconvenient problem of composition was pushed to one side: W. R. Connor in his *Thucydides* of 1984 started at the beginning of the

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8 Early, e.g. Thuc. II. 23. iii; late, e.g. passages cited in previous note, and II. 100. ii, III. 93.

9 E.g. the repetition of material on the Aeginetans and Thyrea from Thuc. II. 29. ii to IV. 56. ii.

10 V. J. Hunter, *Thucydides, the Artful Reporter* (Toronto: Hakkert, 1983).

11 E.g. J. P. Sullivan, 'Editorial', *Arethusa* viii 1975, 6.

12 On newer approaches to literature see in general M. Heath, *Interpreting Classical Texts* (London: Duckworth, 2002); and on historical writing P. J. Rhodes, *Ancient Democracy amd Modern Ideology* (London: Duckworth, 2003), 9–17.

text and proceeded to the end, vowing 'to treat the Separatist hypothesis as the last refuge of the philologist'.[13]

These newer approaches inevitably had an impact on the understanding of Thucydides as a recorder of the truth, since a writer who was artfully producing various effects might have had other purposes as well as, or even rather than, recording the truth. Already in the 1960s K. J. Dover, who seems now to represent the older mode of interpretation rather than the newer, was moved to write in the Prefaces of his small editions of books VI and VII,

> Anyone who believes that Thucydides was omniscient, dispassionate, and infinitely wise, and that there is nothing to be said on the other side of any question on which Thucydides has made a pronouncement, may find some of my comments irreverent and cynical. I offer no apology.[14]

Connor suggested that 'objectivity was for Thucydides not a principle or a goal but an authorial stance'.[15] As an extreme instance of doubt about Thucydides the recorder of truth we have the approach of A. J. Woodman, who treated Thucydides as a writer of 'historiography' (that word seems particularly popular with scholars who play down the historical content of the writing); and for instance he noted that the plague at Athens from 430 to 426 fits a literary pattern in which plagues are associated with war, and wondered whether 'Thucydides magnified the plague out of all proportion to its real significance'.[16] Doubt of another kind came from E. Badian, who saw Thucydides as concerned with what

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13 W. R. Connor, *Thucydides* (Princeton U. P., 1984), 19.
14 K. J. Dover, *Thucydides, Book VI / Thucydides, Book VII* (Oxford U. P., 1965), iv.
15 Connor (n. 13, above), 6.
16 A. J. Woodman, *Rhetoric in Classical Historiography* (London: Croom Helm, 1988), 1–69, esp. 32–40, quoting 39.

actually happened, but as a dishonest journalist twisting the facts to make a case rather than as a truthful historian.[17]

As Hornblower said in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 'now the lid was off': in true post-modern fashion people could make of Thucydides what they would. One field of classical study which has come into vogue is Reception, the study of what different people in different contexts have made of classical works. The cynic in me notes that this has a particular appeal to post-modernists, because it shifts the emphasis from what the works meant to their authors and their first audiences to what different people in different contexts have chosen to make of them; but it is a valid and worthwhile line of study. Bristol has been a leading centre for Reception; N. D. G. Morley has directed a major project on Thucydides: Reception, Reinterpretation and Influence,[18] and he hopes to follow that with one on Lessons of War: Reading Thucydides, 1914–45. And of course the switch in the past century from Thucydides the paragon of objectivity and truth to Thucydides the artful reporter is one important feature of the reception of Thucydides.

I am not such a dinosaur as to want to go back to the Thucydides of a century ago: given that he was an Athenian, from a family which had led the opposition to Pericles, but himself a supporter of Pericles; given that he served as a general in 424/3 and was exiled for his failure to keep the Spartans out of Amphipolis;[19] he cannot have been dispassionate but

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17 E. Badian, 'Thucydides and the Outbreak of the Peloponnesian War: A Historian's Brief', in J. W. Allison (ed.), *Conflict, Antithesis and the Ancient Historian* (Ohio State U. P., 1990), 49–91 with 165–81, revised in his *From Plataea to Potidaea* (Johns Hopkins U. P., 1993), 125–62 with 223–36.

18 Cf. K. C. Harloe & N. D. G. Morley (edd.), *Thucydides and the Modern World: Reception, Reinterpretation and Influence from the Renaissance to the Present* (Cambridge U. P., 2012); N. D. G. Morley, *Thucydides and the Idea of History* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014); C. Lee & N. D. G. Morley (edd.), *A Handbook to the Reception of Thucydides* (Chichester: Wiley–Blackwell, 2015).

19 Family, J. K. Davies, *Athenian Propertied Families, 600 – 300 B.C.* (Oxford U. P., 1971), 230–7; Amphipolis and exile, Thuc. IV. 104. iv – 106. iv, V. 26. v.

must have had strong opinions, and these must have affected his writing. And the few points at which we can check his details against other texts are in fact problematic.[20] However, there is no good reason to doubt that there was a Peloponnesian War, that his narrative of it is correct in general if not in every detail, and that when he claims to have tried hard to establish the truth[21] he did try hard and he thought he had succeeded, even if we may judge that he did not succeed as well as he supposed.

He relied mostly on his first-hand knowledge and on oral evidence, statements by witnesses, and this was inevitable.[22] Documents would provide some of the information which he wanted, and he did make some use of them (and in part but only part of his history he quotes documents directly), but much of the information would not be documented: for instance, documents would record the decision to undertake a particular campaign, how it was funded and who were the commanders, but they would not record why it was undertaken, whether it was controversial or what happened on the campaign. He shows his awareness of how hard it can be to discover the truth from different witnesses of the same event;[23] it was even harder to find out what happened in the battle at Syracuse fought at night in 413 than to find out what happened in battles fought during the day;[24] after he was exiled in 424/3 he was able to talk to people on the Peloponnesian side as well as the Athenian.[25] He was well placed to write about the plague which afflicted Athens, because he suffered from it

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20 Cf. K. J. Dover, *Thucydides* (*Greece & Rome* New Surveys vii 1973), 4–5.
21 Thuc. I. 20, 22.
22 I am contributing a chapter on 'Thucydides' Use of Evidence and Sources' to P. A. Low (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Thucydides* (Cambridge U. P., forthcoming).
23 Thuc. I. 22. ii–iii cf. VII. 44, 71.
24 Thuc. VII. 44. i–ii.
25 Thuc. V. 26. v.

himself and saw others suffering from it.[26]

Notoriously, he hardly ever 'shows his working', to indicate why he believes what he does believe, how certain he is of what he believes and where he has chosen from rival versions. There are a few exceptions: for instance, he states how Themistocles died but then mentions an alternative;[27] he reports a disagreement as to whether Scione in the north-east defected from Athens before or after the truce of 423 was ratified, and then firmly states the correct answer;[28] it was hard to discover how many men fought in the Spartan army at the battle of Mantinea in 418, because of 'the secrecy of the state', but from the structure of the Spartan army he makes a calculation (and many scholars think that an element is missing from the structure which he uses and his total is too low);[29] it is not certain whether the account which was finally accepted of Athens' religious scandals in 415, the mutilation of the herms and the profanation of the Eleusinian Mysteries, was correct or not, but the fact that the case was closed was of great benefit to Athens.[30]

He reveals rather more in his 'archaeology', the opening section of book I in which he outlines the development of power in Greece to justify his view that the Peloponnesian War was greater than any previous war:[31] present-day customs in more backward areas are used as an indication of earlier customs in more advanced areas;[32] ancient burials on Delos he thinks show that the inhabitants then were Carians, a people living in his time in the south-west

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26 Thuc. II. 48. iii.
27 Thuc. I. 138. iv.
28 Thuc. IV. 122.
29 Thuc. V. 68. ii–iii: see A. W. Gomme, A. Andrewes & K. J. Dover, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides* (Oxford U. P., 1945–81), and S. Hornblower, *A Commentary on Thucydides* (Oxford U. P., 1991–2008), *ad loc.*
30 Thuc. VI. 60. ii–v.
31 Thuc. I. 1–21.
32 Thuc. I. 5. ii – vi.

corner of Asia Minor;[33] the physical appearance of Athens and Sparta shows that powerful states do not necessarily have grand buildings, as Athens does but Sparta does not;[34] at a number of points he argues from Homer, even calculating from the Catalogue of Ships in *Iliad* II the number of Greeks who fought against Troy.[35] Here I think the fairest comment is that he was looking for the right kinds of support, even if he was sometimes led astray: even if the Trojan War were a reliable historical event, to calculate as Thucydides did from the Catalogue of Ships was naïve; and burial practices which were characteristic of the Carians may not have been unique to the Carians.

As for the composition of Thucydides' history, I can see why people lost interest in a problem on which it had become unlikely that anything valuable could be said which had not been said already by somebody somewhere; but the problem has not gone away, and, if we base our interpretations on the assumption that the text which we have is a finished work and is exactly the text which Thucydides intended his readers to have, we are basing them on a mistaken assumption. And this needs to be emphasised for the sake of a more general point. New lines of investigation are worth pursuing, as long as they make sense and there is some likelihood of achieving worthwhile results (or indeed occasionally it is worth raising questions to which we cannot obtain an answer, to make the point that it would be good if we could obtain an answer), and indeed it is important for the vitality of our subject that the new interests of new generations should generate new questions; but these new lines do not make older lines of investigation obsolete.

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33 Thuc. I. 8. i.

34 Thuc. I. 10. i–iii.

35 Thuc. I. 10. iii–v (with the calculation), 3. ii, 5. ii, 9. iv; cf. III. 104. iv–vi (a *Homeric Hymn* which he attributes to Homer). He was criticised for this already by G. Grote, *History of Greece* (London: Murray, 'new edition' in 12 volumes, 1869/84, i. 377–8, 388–94, with a response to critics of the first edition 393[–4] n. 1 = 'new edition' in 10 volumes, 1888, i. 350–1, 361–6, with 365[–6] n. 1).

There is also, with Thucydides and more generally, the problem of what I have called over-interpretation. I do not for a moment doubt that Thucydides was a careful writer, who thought hard about what he wanted to say and how he wanted to say it; but he was working with rolls of papyrus, not even with a codex, he did not have numbered pages or chapters (even the division of his history into books seems not to have been his own, since different divisions became current), and he did not have indexes or computerised searching facilities. I am sure that he often checked or remembered when writing one passage what he had written in another; but it will have been much harder for him to check than it is for writers in our time. I think it is dangerous to assume that every interesting contrast or other effect which we can find in his text was deliberately placed there by him.[36]

Book I chapter 24, where after his introductory remarks Thucydides turns to the events leading to the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War, begins Ἐπίδαμνός ἐστι πόλις . . . ('Epidamnus is a city . . . '), without any of the particles (words such as δέ) which Greeks commonly used to link a sentence to the preceding sentence. It has been noticed that a paragraph in the *Iliad* begins, ἔστι πόλις Ἐφύρη . . . ('There is a city Ephyre . . . '), likewise without a particle; and it has been suggested that Thucydides is deliberately echoing Homer.[37] But is he? Another possibility is that he is not echoing Homer deliberately, but he is doing so unconsciously, in that without his being aware of it his background knowledge of Homer led him to start the section in this way; and yet another possibility is that here he was not influenced even unconsciously by Homer, but that when he made a new start this simply

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[36] For what follows see P. J. Rhodes, ' "Epidamnus is a City": On not Overinterpreting Thucydides', *Histos* ii 1998, 64–71 = http://research.ncl.ac.uk/histos/documents/1998.03RhodesEpidamnusisaCity6471.pdf.

[37] Hom. *Il.* VI. 152. See H. Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus* (Sather Lectures xli. U. of California P., [2]1983), 141 with 223 n. 53; S. Hornblower, *Thucydides* (Duckworth, 1977), 116 with n. 31.

seemed a natural and effective way in which to do it.

An example of another kind. The Peloponnesian invasions of Attica in the early years of the war are mentioned year by year as they occurred, and indeed when they did not occur that is mentioned too.[38] The Athenians invaded the Megarid twice each year, beginning in autumn 431; but in this case Thucydides mentions the first invasion, and tells us that they occurred each year until the capture of Nisaea in 424, but after that he says nothing about these invasions until the summer of 424, and it is only then that he tells us that they occurred twice each year.[39] I am sure it was a deliberate decision not to mention each of these invasions in its place, because Thucydides believed that the war was a war about Athenian power, not a war about the particular grievances and especially not a war about the Megarians' grievance; but I find it much harder to believe that keeping back the additional detail of two invasions a year to 424 is an instance of a 'technique of increasing precision', used to minimise the effect of Athens' repeated invasions, rather than that Thucydides simply happened not to mention that detail when he reported the first invasion.

He was a man proud of his ability to detect the reality underneath a misleading surface, and again and again he contrasts the *logos*, the 'word' or what might be thought to be the case, with the *ergon*, the 'deed' or what really was the case. When the Spartan regent Pausanias returned to the Aegean after being recalled from his campaign of 478, he went 'in word for the Greeks' war (against Persia) but in deed to engage in negotiation with the

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38 Peloponnesian invasions, Thuc. II. 10–12, etc.; no invasion 429, II. 71. i; invasion abandoned 426, III. 89. i.

39 Thuc. II. 31, IV. 66. i. See T. E. Wick, 'Megara, Athens, and the West in the Archidamian War: A Study in Thucydides', *Historia* xxviii 1979, 1–14 at 2–3; S. Hornblower, in Hornblower (ed.), *Greek Historiography* (Oxford U. P., 1994), 145–6; *Commentary on Thucydides* (n. 29, above), ii. 230–1. According to Plut. *Per.* 30. iii the decree of Charinus added to the generals' oath of office an undertaking to invade Megarian territory twice a year.

King'.[40] Periclean Athens was 'in word democracy but in deed rule by the first man'.[41] In 413, when things were going badly for the Athenians in Sicily but Nicias still had hopes that Syracuse would be betrayed to them, 'in deed he was still undecided and continued thinking about it, but in his open word at the time he said he would not withdraw the force'.[42] In Athens in late summer 411, when opposition to the oligarchy of the Four Hundred was growing, and Theramenes and Aristocrates placed themselves at the head of that opposition, they said they were afraid of Athens' force at Samos (which had declared in favour of democracy), and of Alcibiades (who after his years in exile had joined that force), and that the envoys sent by the Four Hundred to Sparta (to try to negotiate an end to the war) might harm Athens; and they called for the larger body of Five Thousand citizens, which had been officially instituted earlier but had not in fact been brought into existence, to be revealed 'in deed and not in name'. 'That was the political smokescreen of their *logos*, but most of them were motivated by individual ambition.'[43]

Now life is not always black and white, and contrasts between appearance and reality are not always entirely fair. How could Thucydides know that Nicias (who was killed at the end of the campaign) was in fact wavering when he publicly refused to withdraw the Athenian force from Syracuse? Is it not possible that, while Theramenes and Aristocrates were indeed ambitious, they were also genuinely afraid of what they said they were afraid of?

But, however reliably Thucydides may have reported what happened, however carefully Thucydides may have presented his report, his history is more than the sum of its details. In his chapter on how he has written it, I. 22, he says that, although it is not

40 Thuc. I. 128. iii.
41 Thuc. II. 65. ix.
42 Thuc.VII. 48. ii.
43 Thuc. VIII. 89. ii–iii (the rendering 'smokescreen' for *schema* is Hornblower's).

superficially attractive, he will be satisfied 'if it is found useful by those who want a clear account of what happened, the like of which in accordance with human nature will some time happen again; what he has put together is a possession for all time (*ktema . . . es aiei*) rather than a competition piece for immediate hearing'.[44]

In his history Thucydides does not merely report the events of a particular war, but reflects more broadly on the human condition.[45] Mostly, like early Greek writers in general, he makes his points through the presentation of the narrative, for instance by treating in detail episodes from which a lesson can be drawn, rather than by turning aside from the narrative for a general discussion;[46] but there are two particular passages of comment, on the plague in Athens and on the civil war in Corcyra.[47]

Some scholars have found Thucydides' message thoroughly pessimistic. For Connor 'history does not teach us how to control human events, nor enable us to cure plagues or prevent potential tyrannies, but it reminds us how easily men move from the illusion of control over events to being controlled by them'.[48] For H.-P. Stahl, people tend to indulge in irrational hopes even in defiance of known facts, but 'the present and future will be as unsteerable and unpredictable as was the historical past'.[49] G. E. M. de Ste. Croix saw and admired in Thucydides a realistic 'moral bleakness' with regard to dealings between states;

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44 Thuc. I. 22. iv.

45 Cf. P. J. Rhodes, '*Biaios Didaskalos*? Thucydides and his Lessons for his Readers', in G. Rechenauer & V. Pothou (edd.), *Thucydides — A Violent Teacher?* (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2011), 17–28.

46 H. D. F. Kitto, *Poiesis* (Sather Classical Lectures, xxxvi. U. of California P., 1966), ch. vi; cf. Connor, *Thucydides* (n. 13, above), 5–18; and much earlier T. Hobbes, *Eight Books of the Peloponnesian Warre written by Thucydides the Sonne of Olorus* (London: Seile, 1629) (in W. Molesworth, *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury*, viii [London: Bohn, 1843], p. xxii): 'The narration itself doth secretly instruct the reader, and more effectually than can possibly be done by precept'.

47 Cf. below.

48 Connor, *Thucydides*, 247.

49 H.-P. Stahl, *Thucydides: Man's Place in History* (Swansea: Classical P. of Wales, 2003), 218; first published as *Thukydides: Die Stellung des Menschen im geschichtlichen Prozess* (*Zetemata* xl. Munich: Beck, 1966).

— a belief not that 'might is right' but that it is simply a fact of life that those who have power exercise it as far as they can[50] — and that moral bleakness has appealed to those students of international relations who consider themselves Realists as opposed to Idealists.[51]

Those kinds of view, I think, are too pessimistic. There are some matters of which his view is gloomy: the *demos*, the mass of the people, in Athens and elsewhere is too volatile[52] (that is not a view found only in Thucydides[53]); Greeks pride themselves on their good order as opposed to the indiscipline of the barbarians,[54] but that good order is fragile.[55] The two notable discussions, of the plague and of civil war, both focus on a collapse of standards, which Thucydides clearly deplored. The plague 'marked the beginning of a decline to greater lawlessness in the city . . . no fear of the gods or law of men had any restraining power . . . no one expected to live long enough to pay the penalty for his misdeeds'.[56] In civil war 'many grave sufferings attacked the cities . . . the words normally used to evaluate deeds were changed to fit what was thought justified . . . neither side paid attention to considerations of piety, but if men could cover an objectionable act with fine words it enhanced their reputation . . . civil war brought every form of wickedness to the Greek world, and simple goodness . . . was driven by mockery into non-existence'.[57] This helps us to understand the comment, at first surprising, on the death of Nicias, whose misjudgments are shown by the narrative to have made a substantial contribution to the failure of Athens' great Sicilian campaign of 415–

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50 G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War* (London: Duckworth, 1972), 15–28.
51 Cf. P. A. Low, *Interstate Relations in Classical Greece: Morality and Power* (Cambridge U. P., 2007), 7–32.
52 Thuc. II. 65. iv, IV. 28. iii, VI. 63. ii, VIII. 1. iv, cf. Pericles in I. 140. i, II. 61. iii, Cleon in III. 38. i.
53 Cf. Ar. *Acharnians* 630, 632, *Knights* 1111–20, *Ecclesiazusae* 199–200, 797–8; Isoc. XV. *Antidosis* 19.
54 Thuc. II. 81. ii–viii, IV. 125–8, VII. 29–30.
55 Thuc. III. 32. ii, 109–11, IV. 128. iv; and contrast III. 75 with 81. iv–v, IV. 46–8.
56 Thuc. II. 53.
57 Thuc. II 82–3 (84 is probably an interpolation).

413, that he was 'least deserving of the Greeks in my time to reach this level of misfortune, because he conducted his whole life with a view to goodness'.[58]

But Thucydides does not paint a picture of unrelieved gloom. People ought to learn from history, and they can learn from history, even though they sometimes fail to do so. The Athenian Demosthenes, after his hoplites had suffered badly from Aetolian light-armed troops in 426, himself made effective use of light-armed troops in Amphilochia in the following winter and at Pylos in 425.[59] Although there is an element in history of *tyche*, 'chance', which reasoning cannot predict,[60] able leaders such as Themistocles and Pericles have the capacity to judge what is likely to happen and to plan appropriately for it.[61] If the Athenians had followed Pericles' policies to the end, Thucydides thinks (though his judgment both of what Pericles' policies were and of how good they were can be questioned[62]), they would have won the Peloponnesian War.[63]

Even in dealings between states there is not a total moral bleakness. Although there was no formally enacted international law, there was a general acceptance of common principles, the *nomoi* or *nomima* of the Greeks or of all men, which ought to be upheld although sometimes they were not.[64] States engaged in a dispute could go to arbitration, some treaties made provision for arbitration, and sometimes arbitration did take place; though Thucydides records no occasion when it took place, and in his narrative offers of arbitration sometimes look like attempts to score points by making an offer which is unlikely to be

58 Thuc. VII. 86. v.
59 Thuc. III. 97–8, 107. iii – 108. iii, IV. 28. iii –37.
60 Thuc. I. 140. i, II. 61. iii.
61 Thuc. I. 138. iii; II. 65. v–vi, xiii, cf. what Pericles says of himself in 60. v.
62 See, e.g., P. J. Rhodes, *A History of the Classical Greek World, 478–323 B.C.* (Chichester: Wiley–Blackwell, [2]2010), 102–3.
63 Thuc. II. 65. vii–xiii.
64 Thuc. I. 41. i, III. 9. i, 56. ii, 58. iii, 59. i, 67. vi, IV. 97. ii–iii, 98. ii.

accepted.[65]

Notoriously, in the speeches in his history Thucydides returns again and again, more often and more emphatically than is likely to have been the case with speeches actually delivered at the time, to the nature of the power which Athens exercised through its alliance, the Delian League — and from his own point of view this makes good sense, since he believed that the 'truest reason' for the Peloponnesian War was, rather than any of the particular grievances, the growth of Athens' power and the fear which that produced in Sparta.[66] Athenians are indeed represented as displaying with regard to their empire the moral bleakness of de Ste. Croix, claiming that it was natural for them to exercise their power as far as they could and natural for their subjects to resent being subjected to it; Athenian rule is described as tyranny not only by the Corinthians, but also by the Athenians Pericles, Cleon and Euphemus; if anything, the Athenians claim, they deserve credit for not enforcing their will as blatantly as they could.[67] Ironically, de Ste. Croix was one of those who argued that the reality was less bleak, and that Athenian rule was unpopular not with all the members of the subject states but only with the rich upper class.[68]

This is not the occasion for yet another detailed discussion of how much authentic

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65 Thirty Years' Peace 446/5 and Athenian offer, Thuc. I. 140. ii, VII. 18. ii; Peace of Nicias 421/0 and Spartan offer, V. 18. iv, VII. 18. iii; in 435 Crocyra offered Corinth arbitration or resort to the Delphic oracle over Epidamnus, I. 28. ii – 29. i; in 424 the Spartan Brasidas wanted to arbitrate between the Macedonians Arrhabaeus and Perdiccas but Perdiccas would not let him, IV. 83; arbitration between Sparta and Argos over Cynuria offered by Argos in 420, V. 41, eventually took place and favoured Argos, Paus. II. 38. v.

66 Thuc. I. 23. iv–vi.

67 Natural for Athens to rule and for subjects to hate, Thuc. I. 75. i – 76. ii; tyranny, I. 122. iii, 124. iii (Corinthians), II. 63. ii (Pericles), III. 37. ii (Cleon), VI. 85. i (Euphemus), cf. Ar. *Knights* 1111–20; Athenians deserve credit, I. 76. iii – 77. iv. The Melian Dialogue in V. 85–111, of which it will not have been easy for Thucydides to obtain a reliable report, goes further than the other speeches, but not so much so as to justify accepting the speeches but rejecting the dialogue.

68 G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, 'The Character of the Athenian Empire', *Historia* iii 1954–5, 1–41, following a line first taken by Grote, *History of Greece* (n. 35, above: 1869/84, vi. 9–10, 182–4 = 1888, v. 149–51, 319–21): this prompted vigorous argument.

reporting there is in Thucydides' speeches;[69] but I believe that, while emphasis on what he thought important may have had a distorting effect, and speeches on particular occasions are made to respond to speeches on other occasions to a greater extent than is likely to have happened in fact, the arguments in his speeches are arguments which he knows were used or genuinely believes might have been used.[70] Unless Thucydides was being seriously dishonest (and I do not believe he was), some Athenians on some occasions did speak of Athenian power as he represents them as doing.

As I remarked earlier, since Thucydides regarded the Peloponnesian War as a war about Athenian power, it is not surprising that he makes this theme prominent. But, beyond that, I think he returned to the subject so often because he was worrying about a dilemma which he was unable to resolve. He was an Athenian, an admirer of Pericles, and proud of Athens' achievements under Pericles.[71] Yet, as we have seen, he believed in the upholding of standards and in law-abiding behaviour. Ought he to praise the wonderful achievements of his own city under the leader whom he admired, or to condemn them as brought about by defiance of standards and law-breaking behaviour on the largest scale?

Sparta was no better than Athens. Anonymous Athenians before the war say that if Sparta were to take over the Athenian empire it would quickly become as unpopular as

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69 For my views see, e.g., Hammond (trans.), *Thucydides, The Peloponnesian War* (n. 3, above), xxxiv–xxxvi.

70 That Thucydides gives individual speakers individual voices to a greater extent than has usually been allowed is argued by D. P. Tompkins, 'Stylistic Characterization in Thucydides' (Yale Ph.D. thesis, 1968), developed in 'Stylistic Characterization in Thucydides: Nicias and Alcibiades', *YCS* xxii 1972, 181–214; 'Archidamus and the Question of Characterization in Thucydides', in *Nomodeiktes: Greek Studies in Honor of Martin Ostwald* (U. of Michigan P., 1993), 99–111; 'Thucydides Constructs His Speakers: The Case of Diodotus', *Electron. Ant.* i 1993/4; 'The Language of Pericles', in A. Tsakmakis & M. Tamiolaki (edd.), *Thucydides Between History and Literature* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 447–64.

71 E.g. Thuc. I. 10. i–iii (on the physical impressiveness of Athens and unimpressiveness of Sparta), II. 65 (on Pericles) with Pericles' speeches in 35–46, 60–4.

Athens or more so — and we know that it did, so that in 378/7, exactly a century after the foundation of the Delian League, Athens founded its Second League to defend the freedom of the Greeks against Sparta.[72] The Spartan Brasidas, whom Thucydides in general presents positively, in 424 hoped that the people of Acanthus would welcome his offer of liberation, and he assured them that it would be liberation, not the replacement of one kind of domination by another; but he intended to force it on them if they did not accept it, and Thucydides described his speech as 'attractive but untrue'.[73] Before Athens captured and killed the citizens of the island state of Melos, in 416/5, which Thucydides reports vividly and at length, Sparta captured and killed the citizens of Hysiae in the Argolid — no less cruel an act, though Thucydides disposes of that in just part of one sentence.[74]

Was it a *nomos* of nature that those who can exercise power do, and have nothing to be ashamed of, or were there *nomoi* of other kinds which even the most powerful cities ought to obey? Thucydides does not disclose it himself, but this was clearly part of a wider argument in the late fifth century about *physis* and *nomos*, 'nature' and 'law' in the sense of human convention, matters which human beings in a particular context have decided one way but other human beings in another context might decide differently. If laws and rules about human conduct are not derived from the gods (there is hardly any sign that Thucydides was a believer, and this is a topic I shall return to later), what purpose do they serve, and what is the justification for them?

Protagoras, if he is fairly represented by Plato, believed that, although laws are a human convention, they are a good convention, instituted by the city to help people to live

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72 Thuc. I. 76. i, 77. vi. Second League, Diod. Sic. XV. 28, 29. v–viii, *IG* ii^2 43 = Rhodes & Osborne 22, trans. Harding 35.

73 Thuc. IV. 85–7, 108. v.

74 Melos, Thuc. V. 84–116; Hysiae, 83. ii.

well.[75] But other sophists argued that laws are a bad convention, which prevent people from living as nature would allow: for Antiphon the Sophist one should obey the laws if one's disobedience is likely to be detected, but not otherwise;[76] for Thrasymachus in Plato's *Republic* laws are enacted by the strong for their own advantage and therefore reinforce the position of the naturally strong;[77] for Callicles in Plato's *Gorgias* laws result from a conspiracy by the weak to prevent the naturally strong from living as they otherwise could.[78] It was perhaps partly in reaction against the anarchy threatened by views of that kind that fourth-century Athens and fourth-century philosophers distinguished between *nomoi*, 'laws', which are permanent and of universal validity, and *psephismata*, 'decrees', which happen to have been decided by the assembly for a particular occasion and / or for particular individuals, in order to return *nomos* to the good side of the equation.[79]

Hornblower has revived interest in the religious dimension of Thucydides' subject matter and Thucydides' treatment of that,[80] after a period in which this aspect of a historian who shows little interest in or belief in religion was welcomed but not discussed by commentators who themselves had little interest or belief in religion. Whatever position those who accept or reject one of the major religions of our time may adopt, religion of a different kind was not an optional extra for the Greeks, as religion has become an optional extra in today's post-Christian societies, but was 'embedded' in their society,[81] and if we dismiss it as

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75 Pl. *Prt.* 326 C–E.

76 Antiphon, *Vorsokr.*[6] 87 B 44, beginning of fr. A.

77 Pl. *Resp.* I. 336 B – 354 C; cf. Alcibiades in dialogue with Pericles in Xen. *Mem.* I. ii. 39–46.

78 Pl. *Grg.* 481 B – 505 C.

79 E.g. Arist. *Eth. Nic.* V. 1137 B 11–29, *Pol.* IV. 1292 A 4–37.

80 S. Hornblower, 'The Religious Dimension to the Peloponnesian War, Or, What Thucydides does not Tell Us', *HSCP* xciv 1992, 179–97, revised in his *Thucydidean Themes* (Oxford U. P., 2011), 25–53.

81 It was first claimed by K. Polanyi in *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1944) / revised U.K. edition *Origins of Our Time: The Great Transformation* (London: Gollancz, 1945), using the word at p,. 57 / 63, that in antiquity the economy

unimportant and uninteresting superstition we shall be closing our eyes to an important aspect of Greek life.

While Herodotus was happy to combine a religious explanation of events with an explanation in human terms (for instance on Xerxes' decision to invade Greece in 480[82]), Thucydides almost always gives a human explanation only, and beyond the plans and actions of human beings he seems to recognise only *tyche*, 'chance' in the sense of happenings which cannot be predicted and prepared for.[83] Sometimes he gives a religious explanation 'from the outside', when a religious consideration has affected people's actions, but he does not always do that where he could or should. It has become notorious that he says of the men escaping from the besieged Plataea in 428/7 that they 'had shoes on the left foot only, to give them a safe grip on the mud', when if a safe grip was all that mattered two bare feet should have been better than one; what he does not say is that baring one foot was part of a rite for the gods of the underworld, who were presumably being invoked to help the escape.[84] When natural phenomena such as earthquakes led men to change their plans, he does not say whether they were afraid of physical danger or of the wrath of the gods; though he does say that the Spartans believed that the great earthquake which afflicted them *c.* 465/4 was punishment for sacrilege against Poseidon.[85] He makes Pericles in his funeral speech refer to Athens' many festivals simply as 'relaxations from toil'; and when writing of Athens'

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was 'embedded' in society. This was first applied to religion by R. C. T. Parker in J. Boardman *et al.* (edd.), *The Oxford History of the Classical World* (Oxford U. P., 1986), 254–74 at 265–6; E. Kearns, writing on 'religion (Greek)' in *O.C.D.*[4] 1262–3 at 1262, makes the point without using the word.

82 Hdt. VII. 1–19.

83 E.g. Thuc. I. 78. i–ii (Athenian speech at Sparta), II. 61. iii (in Pericles' last speech)

84 Thuc. III. 22. i, discussed by P. Lévêque & P. Vidal-Naquet in Vidal-Naquet, *Le Chasseur noir* (Paris: La Découverte / Maspero, [2]1983), 101–2 / trans. A. Szegedy-Maszak, *The Black Hunter* (Johns Hopkins U. P., 1986), 64.

85 Earthquakes, e.g. Thuc. III. 89. ii, V. 45. iv; *c.* 465/4, I. 128. i.

religious scandals in 415 he mentions impiety, but he regards the fears of an oligarchic plot as more serious, and writes with apparent unconcern that there had been previous instances of damage to statues 'in drunken revelry'.[86]He suggests his own view when he remarks of Nicias' letting an eclipse delay the Athenians' departure from Syracuse in 413 that 'he was too much inclined to divination and the like'.[87]

And yet there are passages which make us doubt whether Thucydides was totally irreligious.[88] We should not make much of such remarks as 'They sent to Delphi and enquired of the God. . . . He responded':[89] that is simply the standard language used of consulting an oracle, and I do not think Thucydides' use of the language need imply that he himself believed that the enquiry was put to the God and the God gave the response. But he provides a detailed account of Athens' 'purification' of Delos in 426/5, which was of no relevance to the course of the Peloponnesian War (although we can think of political dimensions, and a possible reaction to the plague, which he does not mention); and Hornblower has wondered if Thucydides was himself involved in that episode.[90] And at the end of his introduction on the greatness of the Peloponnesian War he not only says:

> There had not been so many cities captured and depopulated, in some cases by barbarians and in others by the two sides fighting against one another (and some cities

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86 Pericles, Thuc. II. 38. i. 415, Impiety (*asebeia* and cognates), VI. 27. ii, 53. i; oligarchic plot, 27. iii, 28. ii, 53. iii, 60. i, iv, 61. i–iv; drunken revelry, 28. i.

87 Thuc. VII. 50. iv.

88 See S. I. Oost, "Thucydides and the Irrational: Sundry Passages", *"CP* lxx 1975, 186–96; N. Marinatos, "Thucydides and Oracles", *JHS* ci 1981, 138–40; K. J. Dover, *The Greeks and Their Legacy* (*Collected Papers*, ii. Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), 65–73.

89 Thuc. I. 25. i, 118. iii.

90 Thuc. III. 104, cf. I. 8. i, V. 1, 32. i, with Hornblower, *A Commentary on Thucydides*, on III. 104. But it has been suggested also that Thucydides took part in the north-western campaign of that winter (Gomme, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides*, on III. 113. vi; W. K. Pritchett, *Studies in Ancient Greek Topography*, viii [Amsterdam: Gieben, 1992], 77–8); and I doubt if he could have taken part in both.

> after they had been taken suffered a change of inhabitants); nor so many people exiled and slaughtered, either in the actual course of the war or through dissension.

but he continues:

> What was previously reported by hearsay but more rarely confirmed in fact became not unbelievable: with regard to earthquakes, which attacked over the greatest extent of territory and with the greatest violence; and eclipses of the sun, which occurred with greater frequency than was remembered from earlier time; great droughts in some places and famines resulting from them; and, what caused not the least harm and to some extent death, the disease of the plague. All these things attacked together in conjunction with this war.[91]

There is, incidentally, a recent parallel: in Britain at the end of the First World War, 'for proof of the Second Coming [of Jesus Christ] Adventists pointed to natural phenomena, including the increase in storms, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions'.[92] Now strictly Thucydides is saying only that other people were prepared to see a connection between the war and these natural phenomena; but a thoroughgoing rationalist ought not to have written of the phenomena in this particular way: did the rationalist waver, or did he on this occasion, for the sake of a fitting climax, simply let his pen run away with itself?

What makes Thucydides' history a *ktema es aiei* is that he uses the history of the Peloponnesian War not simply to narrate what happened in the war, though it was indeed a great war and an important one, but also in order to reflect on abiding issues. He is, as they

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91 Thuc. I. 23. ii–iii.

92 M. Pugh, *'We Danced All Night': A Social History of Britain between the Wars* (London: Bodley Head, 2008), 9.

say, 'good to think with'[93] — and he has been quoted on London buses in the First World War, in the Preamble to the 2003 Draft Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe and by Sir Ivor Roberts, British Ambassador to Italy, in his valedictory telegram in 2006 (which was so outspoken that it was made the last of the *genre*).[94] Also, last year, he was given a programme in B.B.C. Radio 4's 'In Our Time' series.[95]

So we have a *ktema es aiei* in Thucydides, and indeed in the Greeks and Romans generally; but we are engaged in a subject which focuses on Dead White European Males[96] (though when slavery became fashionable, in the heyday of Marxism, not all the people studied were European or male, and more recently, of course, women have overtaken slaves as the favourite oppressed group). With that in mind, and in a world obsessed with 'transparency' and 'accountability', we need to be conscious ourselves, and to be ready to tell other people, why our studies are valuable. This does not mean quantifying the 'impact' of classics and the subject's contribution to Gross National Product: that would be silly, and if the rulers of the darkness of this world command us to do such things we must have the

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93 This expression is usually credited to the sociologist C. Lévi-Strauss, *Le Totémisme aujourd'hui* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962), 128: 'bon[nes] à penser'), translated by R. Needham as *Totemism* (Boston: Beacon P., 1963 / London: Merlin P., 1964), 89; but (a fact to which I was alerted by Prof. P. A. Cartledge) two centuries earlier the visionary Christopher Smart, who had been a boy at Durham School, wrote that his cat Jeoffry was 'good to think on' (*Jubilate Agno*, B. 755) — but that is not included in the selection from *Rejoice in the Lamb* which was set to music by Britten.

94 See (e.g.) http://www.ltmcollection.org/posters/poster/poster.html?;
IXSR=c8BaicmLlGd&_IXMAXHITS_=1&IXinv=1983/4/8159&IXsummary=results/results&IXsearch=war&_IXFIRST_=18; CONV 850/03 (pdf), accessible from (e.g.)
http://www.statewatch.org/news/2003/aug/constitution.htm;
http://www.theinsider.org/news/article.asp?id=2485 (which cites
http://news.independent.co.uk/world/middle_east/article2488807.ece, but that seems no longer to be accessible). Sir Ivor Roberts is now President of Trinity College, Oxford.

95 29 January 2015, when he was discussed by P. A. Cartledge, K. C. Harloe and N. D. G. Morley.

96 The *Oxford English Dictionary* cites 'dead white male' from the *Winchester* [Virginia] *Star* in 1985 and 'DWEM' from *Forbes* in 1990; B. M. W. Knox published a volume of essays with the title *The Oldest Dead White European Males and Other Reflections on the Classics* (New York: Norton, 1993).

courage and the patience to explain why it would be silly.[97]

We can no longer claim, as T. Gaisford is alleged in what is probably an elaboration on the truth to have claimed — in a sermon in Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford, on Christmas Day, forsooth — that 'the study of Greek literature . . . not only elevates above the vulgar herd, but leads not infrequently to positions of considerable emolument'.[98] A defence of classics often advanced is that with the range of skills called for, including the mastery of two languages, and the need to understand a world which was sufficiently like our own to be intelligible but sufficiently unlike our own to be stimulating, our subject is very good at teaching people to think. That claim is justified, but it is not a sufficient defence of our subject, because of course it is possible for people to learn to think without studying our subject.

I believe it was in 1959, when the British newspaper known until then as the *Manchester Guardian* dropped *Manchester* from its title, that it started printing in London and filled London with advertisements saying, 'Now you too can have a lively mind before breakfast' — and my not entirely flippant reaction to that was 'a lively mind on an empty stomach'. I am all in favour of thinking — don't misunderstand me — but if thinking is to be useful it must be informed thinking; and if the study of classics is valuable this is not only because it teaches us to think but also because (as those who have studied classics do not

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97 In the last Research Excellence Framework to which British universities were subjected, in 2014, one of the criteria by which departments were judged was the 'impact' of their work on people outside their own field. Contrast with my reaction, e.g., the cautious acceptance in British Academy's response to the proposal to assess the 'impact' of research, in its press release 'The Impact of Impact', dated 3 Dec 2009 (see http://www.britac.ac.uk/news/news.cfm/newsid/9).

98 This version is given by W. Tuckwell, *Reminiscences of Oxford* (London: Smith, Elder, ^{2}1907), 124. More credible is a version given by J. B. Wainewright, in a letter in *The Tablet*, 14 May 1904, 21: ' . . . the study of Greek, which not only, by the light it throws on revealed truth, prepares us for eternal happiness in the next world, but also not unfrequently leads to positions of considerable emolument in this'.

need to be told) in its content it gives us matter which is worth thinking about.

Partly, of course, because in the European tradition the Greeks and Romans are an important part of our own past: our languages are full of their words, our literatures are full of Greek and Roman episodes, and the Greeks and Romans have had a formative influence on many branches of study. So we have to know about the Greeks and Romans to know about ourselves. Beyond that, the main reason why we study the Greeks and Romans is surely that they are intrinsically worth studying: that they wrote works of literature, in various *genres*, which are still worth reading, that they produced works of art which are still worth looking at, that their thinkers intelligently faced important and interesting questions which in our different context we still have to face, that in various fields of public and private life they did interesting things.

And I have found, and I trust that all of you who have studied classics have found, that the study of the Greeks and Romans is enjoyable. I quote the end of a short piece by the late P. S. Derow, entitled 'Why Ancient History?'

> History does not repeat itself, but people are people and ancient history involves the study, within a chronological microcosm, of people's responses to circumstances, both political (at local and global levels) and other. It is a deeply humane kind of study, and, given the nature and the range both of the evidence it uses and of the intellectual engagement and activity it requires, it is also fun.[99]

[99] P. S. Derow, 'Why Ancient History?', in A. Erskine (ed.), *A Companion to Ancient History* (Chichester: Wiley–Blackwell, 2009), 3–5 at 5 = his *Rome, Polybius and the East* (edd. A. Erskine & J. Crawley Quinn. Oxford U. P., 2015), 15–17 at 17.

Nobody alive now is likely to know the languages and the main body of material as well as some people knew them in the first half of the twentieth century. But that is for a perfectly respectable reason: schools nowadays have many other things to teach as well as classics, and even in my generation they did not devote as much time to classics as some schools had done earlier; and university classics departments have to provide for the products of today's schooling. But, as the many publications and conferences on our subject demonstrate, very able people are still attracted to classics, and there is a great range of important and interesting questions about many aspects of classics which can be investigated and are being investigated. in Britain, there are enterprises which are successfully encouraging the return of classics to state schools, many of which had abandoned the subject in the second half of the twentieth century. In spite of spiritual wickedness in high places (and I have been called on to write letters in defence of university classics departments in other countries as well as in the United Kingdom), our subject, in Europe, in France and in Strasbourg, is thriving; and I thank you for inviting me to speak to you today.