

HERTOG 2019 SUMMER COURSES FOUNDATIONS OF GRAND STRATEGY

STATESMANSHIP: PLUTARCH

Hugh Liebert, professor, U.S. Military Academy

What makes political leaders great? For more than two millennia men and women in the West have turned to Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* to answer this question. A "bible for heroes," as Emerson put it, Plutarch's *Lives* aimed to shape readers' souls by uncovering the virtues and vices of the greatest Greeks and Romans.

But the *Lives* were far from works of hagiography. They were a reflection on the fundamental problems of politics: the nature of republican government, the temptations of empire, the rise and fall of regimes, the challenge of formulating and executing grand strategy. It was not only for inspiration, but also for instruction in such matters that American statesmen like Hamilton, Lincoln, and Truman turned to Plutarch.

This course will approach the *Lives* in their spirit. We will read three pairs of *Lives* involving protagonists in the Peloponnesian War: *Nicias/Crassus*, *Alcibiades/Coriolanus*, and *Pericles/Fabius*. Our goal will be to understand both the merits and weaknesses of the grand strategies Plutarch's statesmen devise, and to learn from Plutarch about the passions and virtues of the statesman's soul.

Books:

- Plutarch, *Parallel Lives Vols. 1 and 2*, trans. John Dryden (Modern Library Classics, 2001)

Resources

To learn more about the ideas and figures discussed in this course, we encourage you to explore a project supported by the Hertog Foundation: **The Great Thinkers** (<http://thegreatthinkers.org/>) and **Contemporary Thinkers** (<http://contemporarythinkers.org/>) websites. These sites are aimed at introducing important thinkers in Western thought, with a particular emphasis on politics and philosophy.

Relevant pages include Plato, Aristotle, and Machiavelli (on The Great Thinkers), and Leo Strauss and Seth Benardete (on Contemporary Thinkers).

Monday, July 8, 2019

9:00 a.m. to Noon

Nicias & Crassus

Readings:

- *Life of Nicias*

- *Life of Crassus*
- *Comparison of Nicias and Crassus*

Questions:

1. In introducing the *Life of Nicias*, Plutarch speaks with apparent reverence towards Thucydides. Plutarch will merely augment Thucydides' and other writers' accounts with "such things as are not commonly known" insofar as these materials reveal Nicias's "character and temperament." How does Plutarch's biographical approach to Nicias relate to the approach Thucydides and other historians take? To what extent do new materials and the comparison with the Roman Crassus (unknown to Thucydides) enable Plutarch to do more than imitate or epitomize the historian?
2. In the *Comparison of Nicias and Crassus*, Plutarch says that Crassus does not deserve to be compared to Nicias. Why does Plutarch compare them?
3. What is the relationship between avarice and ambition in these *Lives*?
4. Plutarch says that Nicias was wholly given to divination, while Crassus wholly neglected it. Which is the more culpable attitude towards divination? Do these *Lives* allow us to discern how statesmen *should* relate to the gods?
5. Does Plutarch allow his reader to think that the Peace of Nicias could have been sustained? If not, why? If so, what additional steps might have saved it?
6. Why are the Athenian people so enthusiastic for the Sicilian expedition, but the Roman people (or at least their tribune) so opposed to the Parthian campaign?
7. Crassus goes East and encounters "barbarians" who speak Greek and have memorized Euripides. Nicias goes West and encounters Greek colonists, who also honor Euripides. Does the ambivalence of these cultural differences have anything to do with the failures of Nicias and Crassus?

Tuesday, July 9, 2019

9:00 a.m. to Noon

Alcibiades

Readings:

- *Life of Alcibiades*

Questions:

1. In the *Alcibiades* Plutarch discusses many of the same individuals and events described in the *Nicias*, among them the Peace of Nicias, the Sicilian Expedition, and Nicias and Alcibiades themselves. Are Plutarch's portrayals consistent across the two *Lives*? To the extent that they differ, why do they differ?
2. What is the relationship between Alcibiades's unconventional private life and his political and military virtuosity?
3. What do Socrates and Alcibiades see in one another? Does Plutarch understand Socrates' education of Alcibiades to have succeeded or failed? To what degree does the *Alcibiades* allow us to discern Plutarch's general understanding of the relationship between the philosopher and the ambitious statesman?
4. What does the *Alcibiades* teach us about the regimes of Athens, Sparta, and Persia? In which of these regimes is Alcibiades most at home?

5. At the beginning of his description of the Sicilian Expedition, Plutarch says that “Alcibiades dreamed of nothing less than the conquest of Carthage and Libya... [and] seemed to look upon Sicily as little more than a magazine for the war.” Is Alcibiades’ strategy admirably bold or ridiculously hubristic? If he had not been recalled to Athens, would Alcibiades have succeeded?

Wednesday, July 10, 2019

9:00 a.m. to Noon

Alcibiades & Coriolanus

Readings:

- *Life of Coriolanus*
- *Comparison of Alcibiades and Coriolanus*

Questions:

1. Plutarch does not tell us why he sets Alcibiades and Coriolanus in parallel. What are Plutarch’s reasons for pairing the two, and why does he not tell us?
2. Plutarch calls his reader’s attention to the original meaning of the Latin *virtus*, “manly courage,” and says the Romans spoke “as if valor and all virtue had been the same thing.” What is the difference between valor and all virtue?
3. Alcibiades is, at least for a time, the student of the greatest philosopher. Coriolanus does not seem to receive an education apart from military training. If Coriolanus had studied under Socrates would he have been more successful as a statesman? Does the *Coriolanus* provide evidence for or against Cato the Elder’s claim that Romans should allow philosophers “to return to their schools and lecture to the sons of Greece, while the youth of Rome give ear to their laws and magistrates”?
4. Why does Coriolanus see “the end [goal] of his glory” in his mother’s happiness? More broadly, what role does Plutarch understand Roman women to play in the life of the city?
5. How do these regimes of Rome and Antium compare? Does this *Life* allow us to understand why Rome eventually conquers Antium rather than the reverse? More broadly, what does the *Coriolanus* teach us about the relationship between domestic regimes and foreign policy?
6. Alcibiades saw Sicily as a stepping stone in a much larger strategy. Does Coriolanus have a grand strategy? Does he (or Rome) need one?
7. Plutarch’s *Coriolanus* inspired Shakespeare’s play of the same name. Plutarch’s *Alcibiades* informed Shakespeare’s *Timon of Athens*. Why did Shakespeare not write an *Alcibiades*?

Thursday, July 11, 2019

9:00 a.m. to Noon

Pericles

Readings:

- *Life of Pericles*

Questions:

1. In the introduction to the *Pericles* and *Fabius*, Plutarch says that observing virtuous deeds necessarily leads men to want to imitate them. What does Plutarch mean by this? Why is this an appropriate introduction for this pair of *Lives* in particular?
2. Thucydides says that under Pericles Athens was “a democracy in name, but a monarchy in fact.” Does Plutarch agree?
3. Plutarch stresses Pericles’ association with the philosopher Anaxagoras. How does this association influence Pericles’ political career? Why does Pericles pursue politics rather than philosophy?
4. What is Pericles’ strategy for Athenian victory in the Peloponnesian War? To what extent can Pericles be blamed for Athens’ loss of the war and subsequent decline?

Friday, July 12, 2019

9:00 a.m. to Noon

Pericles & Fabius

Readings:

- *Life of Fabius*
- *Comparison of Pericles and Fabius*

Questions:

1. How does Fabius’s strategy in the Punic War compare to Pericles’ in the Peloponnesian War?
2. In the *Pericles* and *Fabius* Plutarch shows two famous cities overcoming profound crises and reaching a kind of peak in their political development. What challenges do existential threats and unprecedented success pose to republican statesmen? How well do Pericles and Fabius respond to these challenges?
3. Fabius shares power with other Roman statesmen at key points in his career. Is he as excellent a colleague as a solitary general? How does the Roman regime take advantage of shared and unified commands?
4. At times in the *Life of Fabius* Hannibal seems to outshine Fabius himself. Who is the superior strategist? What do we learn, through Hannibal, about the Carthaginian regime?
5. What does the *Pericles/Fabius* reveal about the difference between Athens and Rome? About the differences in the kinds of statesman of each?
6. Who is the superior statesman, Pericles or Fabius? Why?

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WAR: THUCYDIDES

Jakub Grygiel, professor, Catholic University of America

Are allies costly or beneficial to a great power? Do they enhance its security or drag it into peripheral and unnecessary wars? What are the advantages and risks of a maritime power? Does a sea power need allies more than a land power? How should it compete with a continental rival? What is the impact of a prolonged conflict on an already fragile social order of a polity?

These questions characterize our current debates on U.S. strategy, but they are not new. More than two thousand years ago, Thucydides described with great lucidity the strategic challenges facing a maritime great power, Athens—and they are remarkably relevant to today's security dilemmas and strategic choices.

The course will focus on Thucydides' masterpiece, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, and examine a series of strategic challenges and responses to them. During the weeklong seminar, students will read extended excerpts from Thucydides, focusing on key speeches and moments in the conflict. The course requires careful reading of the text but is not a history class. Rather, by placing themselves in the position of the Thucydidean characters, students will discuss recurrent principles of strategy and the dilemmas facing leaders.

Books:

- *The Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Richard Strassler (Free Press, 2008)
- *The Persians*, trans. Seth Benardete

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Relevant pages include Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli, and Thucydides (on The Great Thinkers).

Monday, July 15, 2019

9:00 a.m. to Noon

How to Assess the Enemy

Readings:

- Aeschylus, *The Persians*

- Thucydides, Book 1.1–1.29 (pp. 3–20)

Questions:

1. Geopolitical rivalries begin and continue with an assessment of the enemy: how to know the rival? What are the consequences of a poor assessment?

Tuesday, July 16, 2019

9:00 a.m. to Noon

The Role of Alliances

Readings:

- Thucydides, Book 1.30–1.146 (pp. 20–85)

Questions:

1. Great powers fear “entrapment” (being dragged into small and peripheral wars by their allies) while their allies fear “abandonment” (being left alone by their distant security patron). How can these fears be mitigated? Do they reflect the reality of international politics?
2. What is the importance of allies for the U.S.?

Wednesday, July 17, 2019

9:00 a.m. to Noon

Land Power vs. Sea Power

Readings:

- Thucydides, Book 2.1–2.103 (pp. 89–156)

Questions:

1. The Peloponnesian War was a conflict between a sea power (Athens) and a land power (Sparta). What are the features of such a conflict? What are the differences in how they conduct war?
2. How did the strategy of Archidamus differ from that of Pericles?
3. What strategy should the U.S. pursue against its continental rivals (China, Iran, Russia)?

Thursday, July 18, 2019

9:00 a.m. to Noon

The Role of Domestic Cohesion and The Rise of Demagogues

Readings:

- Thucydides, Book 3.1–3.86 (pp. 159–202)
- Thucydides, Book 5.84–5.116 (pp. 350–57)

Questions:

1. States are fragile. Factions are powerful while social cohesion can collapse unexpectedly. What are the sources of weakness and strength?
2. How does internal cohesion (or lack thereof) affect foreign policy?
3. What is the appeal of demagogues?

Friday, July 19, 2019

9:00 a.m. to Noon

Are Distant Expeditions Always Doomed?

Readings:

- Thucydides, Book 6:
 - o 6.1; 6.6–6.26 (pp. 361; 365–76)
 - o 6.46–6.53 (pp. 387–90)
 - o 6.75–6.88 (pp. 403–12)
 - o 6.89–6.93 (pp. 412–16)
- Thucydides, Book 7:
 - o 7.3–7.30 (pp. 429–45)
 - o 7.42–7.87 (pp. 451–78)

Questions:

1. Pericles warned against ambitious power projections. The Athenians went to Sicily and failed miserably. Are distant expeditions doomed?
2. Was it a strategic blunder—or a strategically bold move but executed poorly?

TIMELINE OF THE PELOPONNESIAN WAR

From Victor Davis Hanson's *A War Like No Other*

PHASE ONE: THE ARCHIDAMIAN WAR (431–421)

- 431** Thebans attack Plataea (March)
Spring evacuation of Attica and first Peloponnesian invasion (May)
Athenian ships raid the Peloponnese (July)
First Athenian invasion of Megara (September)

- 430** Second invasion of Attica (May–June)
Great plague breaks out at Athens (June)
Besieged Potidaeans surrender city to Athens (winter)

- 429** Peloponnesians arrive to besiege Plataea (May)
Phormio's Athenian fleet defeats the Peloponnesians in the Corinthian Gulf (summer)
Athenian maritime raids against northwestern Greece (summer)
Death of Pericles (September)

- 428** Third invasion of Attica (May–June)
250 Athenian ships deployed in the Aegean and in the west (summer)
Athenians besiege Mytilene on Lesbos (June)

- 427** Fourth invasion of Attica (May–June)
Capitulation of Mytileneans and debate over their fate at Athens (July)
Surrender of diehards at Plataea and destruction of the city (August)

- 426** Return of plague at Athens (May–June)
Demosthenes conducts campaigns in Aetolia and Amphilochia (June)
First Athenian expedition to Sicily (winter)

- 425** Athenian occupation of Pylos (May)
Fifth and last annual Peloponnesian invasion of Attica (May–June)
Spartan surrender on Sphacteria (August)
Athenian raid on the Corinthia and battle of Solygia (September)

- 424** Boeotians defeat Athenians at Delium (November)
Brasidas captures Amphipolis (December)
Athenians sail home from first expedition against Sicily (winter)

- 423** Athens moves against Mende, Scione, and Torone (April)
Walls of Thespieae razed by the Boeotians (summer)
Brasidas active in northwestern Greece (summer)

- 422** Cleon and Brasidas killed at Amphipolis (October)
Peace negotiations between Athens and Sparta (winter)

PHASE TWO: THE PEACE OF NICIAS (421–415)

- 421** Athens evacuates Messenians from Pylos (winter)
Boeotia, Corinth, and Argos discuss various alliances (summer)
- 420** Alcibiades urges anti-Spartan alliance of Athens, Argos, and Mantinea (July)
Elis bars Spartans from participation in the Olympic Games (summer)
- 419** Alcibiades marches small force into the northern Peloponnese (summer)
Argos and Epidaurus renew border war (summer)
- 418** Victory of Sparta at Mantinea (August)
Argos and Mantinea return to Spartan alliance (November)
- 417** Civil strife at Argos and defeat of the democrats (winter)
Athenian fleet active in northern Greece (summer)
- 416** Athenian attack on Melos (May)
Debate over sending an armada to Sicily (winter)

PHASE THREE: THE SICILIAN WAR (415–413)

- 415** Alcibiades, Nicias, and Lamachus set sail for Syracuse (June)
Recall of Alcibiades, death of Lamachus, and stalemate on Sicily (September)
- 414** Arrival of Gylippus with various Peloponnesian relief forces (August)
Second Athenian armada under Demosthenes prepares to leave (winter)
Spartans arrive at Decelea, on the Athenian plain (winter)
- 413** Thracian mercenaries attack Mycalessus (spring)
Defeat of Athenians on Epipolae and in the Great Harbor (July–September)
Execution of Demosthenes and Nicias (September)

PHASE FOUR: THE DECELEAN AND IONIAN WARS (413–404)

- 412** Athenians construct a new fleet (spring)
Persian and Spartan military alliance (summer)
Revolts of Athenian allies in the Aegean (June–July)
- 411** Oligarchic revolution at Athens (June)
Spartan admiral Mindarus sends fleet into Aegean (September)
Dramatic Athenian naval victory at Cynossema (September)
- 410** Athenian naval victory at Cyzicus (March)
Failure of oligarchic revolution and rehabilitation of Alcibiades (summer)
Spartans garrison bases in Asia Minor (winter)
- 408** Athenians seek to regain Byzantium (winter)

- 407** Cyrus arrives as satrap of Asia Minor and gives greater aid to Sparta (spring)
Alcibiades dismissed (spring)
- 406** Spartan admiral Callicratidas defeats Athenians in the Aegean (June)
Athenian victory at Arginusae followed by trial of victorious generals (August)
Athens rejects Spartan offers of peace (August–September)
- 405** Athenian defeat at Aegospotami and loss of fleet (September)
Lysander prepares to sail to Athens (November)
- 404** Ongoing naval blockade of Athens (winter)
Lysander sails into the Piraeus and Athens surrenders (April)
Ascension of the Thirty Tyrants (summer)

