

CHAPTER I

Introduction

INTRODUCTION

Every Athenian alliance, every declaration of war, and every peace treaty was instituted by a decision of the assembly. The assembled citizens voted after listening to speeches that presented varied and often opposing arguments about the best course of action for the state to take. For this reason, the fifteen preserved assembly speeches of the mid fourth century BC provide an unparalleled body of evidence for the way that Athenians thought and felt about interstate relations in general and about issues of war and peace in particular. To understand this body of oratory, its emotional appeals, its moral and legalistic arguments, and its invocation of state interests, is to understand how the Athenians of that period made decisions about war and peace. That is the goal of this book.

No one type of argument or single factor determined Athenian decisions. Rather, various considerations could play independent and important roles. As a result no single overarching thesis about Athenian thinking unites my chapters on, for example, “Legalism,” “Household metaphors,” and “Calculations of interest.” My investigations are united rather by an attitude towards Athenian thinking, a charitable and empathetic one, and my methodological preference for the evidence of assembly speeches. This attitude and methodology are best illustrated by contrasting them first with scholarship that portrays Athenian thinking as simple and deplorable and second with *unmasking* methodologies, according to which the stated grounds for war – as found in assembly speeches – only mask the truth and thus need to be stripped away rather than examined.

Scholars have often underrated the richness and variety of Athenian thinking. Arnaldo Momigliano exemplifies this tendency in modern scholarship when he argues that Greek thinking about foreign policy “can never assess achievement except by reference to success and therefore can

never teach more than prudence.”¹ I argue against such representations of the Athenians as political Realists, that is, as amoral and seeking only advantage.² While concerned about the interests and security of their city, the Athenians do not reveal in the assembly speeches a foreign policy entirely determined by calculations of interest. They rather invoke a variety of moral criteria for action. Cynics may argue that assembly speakers’ professions of morality reveal nothing more than their hypocrisy. Even were we to grant such an extreme view of Athenian politicians, hypocrisy is only advantageous, only makes sense, in a world in which moral judgments matter. Athens was such a world.

A contrary, but equally critical, tendency in recent scholarship focuses on the warlike, emotional side of Athenian decision-making. On this view, Athenian policies flowed from an irrational belligerence derived from Athenian culture and society. This enthusiasm for war is portrayed as resurfacing sporadically throughout the fourth century despite Athens’ fading powers.³ Scholars find two basic ways in which Athens’ culture and society gave rise to its putative belligerence.

First, Athens’ militarism, the high value placed on military service and prowess, cannot be denied. It probably did make Athens more prone to resort to war. Such militarism, however, was and is extremely common in a wide variety of cultures and societies. Athens was not a special case either in its militarism or in the reasons for which it went to war. Nor was Athenian culture overwhelmingly militarist: Athenians prized many things besides martial prowess. The claim that militarism ceaselessly propelled Athens into irrational and otherwise inexplicable wars is hyperbole.

Second, the moral and emotional component of Athenian thought was strongly structured by what is termed the “domestic analogy,” an explicit or implicit parallel between the relations among states and relationships within the state. Scholars such as J. E. Lendon argue that atavistic individual values were applied to the realm of states and encouraged the recourse to war: for example, Athenians saw their city as a Homeric warrior writ large, dedicated to violent revenge and possessed of a touchy sense of honor. Such a state might well be as prone to fighting as the characters in Homer are.⁴ But, again, the larger picture is more complex. Ritualized friendship, the relations between slaves and masters, the relations between men and women, and brotherhood – all these different relationships provided a

¹ Momigliano 1978: 22–3 on historiographical evidence for foreign policy thinking. See also, e.g., M. Finley 1985b: 70, and Sage 1996: 66.

² See pp. 155–7 for the meanings of Realism in foreign policy thinking.

³ E.g. Badian 1995. ⁴ Lendon 2000.

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complex set of values and a cognitive framework for Athenian thinking about the relationship of city-states. Since conflict and competition were not alone of value within Athenian society, there is no reason to expect that the deployment of domestic analogies to states should lead only to war. In particular, the legal analogy, according to which states, like individuals within the state, should resolve their disputes without recourse to war, tended to curb Athenian belligerence.

Notwithstanding the laudable goal of supplementing the older view of the Athenians as calculating and amoral in their foreign policy, these two theories risk making them uncalculating only in a belligerence deriving either from militarism or from primitive and violent mores. As we shall see, such views gloss over the difficulties of connecting a society's values and its tendency to go to war and oversimplify a rich and complex moral discourse based largely on a wide variety of domestic analogies.

Such critics of Athenian thinking often adopt an *unmasking* approach to Athenian pronouncements: they seek to unmask, to debunk, the stated grounds for war – and hence evidence such as the assembly speeches – and locate the real causes of war elsewhere: for example, in amoral calculations of interest, in economic advantage, or in a militaristic culture.⁵ Such factors cannot be neglected, but they should supplement rather than replace the Athenians' own deliberations about questions of war and peace; for this book finds there a richer understanding of the relationship of states than the sideways glances of scholars rushing to true and hidden causes would suggest.

For example, two of the most influential, theoretically inclined ancient historians of recent decades, Yvon Garlan and Moses Finley, have approached Greek warfare with a focus on its material results.⁶ Garlan begins his analysis with a consideration of Plato and Aristotle, whom he characterizes as adherents of an economic view of Greek warfare.⁷ His own view is Marxian and thus materialist: it was the limits of internal production that drove the Greek states to violent appropriation and thus war.⁸ Finley, too, endorses Marx's view that in early societies such as Greece and Rome warfare rather than technological advance "was the basic factor in economic growth."⁹ He concedes that wars were fought for mixed motives but emphasizes the economic ones: "the hard fact remains that successful ancient wars produced profits, and that ancient political leaders were fully

⁵ In the first of these, they can justly claim to be following Thucydides; see pp. 156–7.

⁶ Garlan 1989; M. Finley 1978b and 1985b. ⁷ Garlan 1989: 31.

⁸ Garlan 1989: 38. ⁹ M. Finley 1985b: 74.

aware of that possibility.”¹⁰ This consideration leads him to take a skeptical approach to ancient justifications of warfare. He argues that modern historians who have neglected the material reasons for war tend to present “a continuous succession of diplomatic and political events ending, for no sufficient reason, in a resort to arms.”¹¹ Thus, the sequence of events, the claims, and the counterclaims of the antagonists are merely a smokescreen beneath which the historian must discern the fundamental and presumably “sufficient” cause of war, which derives from the nature of the classical Greek economy.

Finley’s approach is typical of a number of modern unmasking theories of warfare. While he dismisses the “claims and counterclaims” in favor of concrete profits of war, the theorists of militarism point out that grounds for war are superfluous if a state or a powerful class is predisposed, as it were, to fight wars. Unmasking theories need not focus on internal factors. For example, political Realists take the same approach to the application of ethics to foreign policy: moral arguments are merely screens to justify decisions already made on the basis of power politics. All these unmasking theories hold that the stated reasons for war are just screens for some other *real* reason for war; their goal is to rip away or see through the mask to discern this reason.

Finley buttresses his claim that our evidence for the decision-making process is insufficient with the further observation that, based on modern experience – for example the later publication of statesmen’s journals and internal memos – public pronouncements are often false to the actual motives of the actors concerned.¹² Nor, one might add, need orators always be fully aware of the real reasons for their policies. As J. A. Hobson put it: “politicians, in particular, acquire so strong a habit of setting their projects in the most favourable light that they soon convince themselves that the finest result which they think may conceivably accrue from any policy is the actual motive of that policy.”¹³ Finally, one can imagine cases where, by tacit agreement, the real reasons for a war cannot be mentioned publicly.¹⁴

Unmasking theories borrow some of their appeal from cynicism, often amply justified, about the official and stated grounds for war. In

¹⁰ M. Finley 1985b: 76. See also M. Finley 1978b: 2–3.

¹¹ M. Finley 1985b: 77, cf. 75, 80–1. Garlan 1989: 21–2 contains a similar statement, but he concludes with a more complex Marxian analysis of the contradiction between Plato’s and Aristotle’s theories of economic motivations and the political reasons contained in accounts of the beginnings of Greek wars (32–40); so too in Garlan 1995: 56–9.

¹² M. Finley 1978b: 3. ¹³ E.g. Hobson 1938: 198

¹⁴ E.g. Greenspan 2007: 463: “I am saddened that it is politically inconvenient to acknowledge what everyone knows: the Iraq war is largely about oil.”

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particular pro-war oratory in every age tends to exaggerate injuries suffered, to rouse ethnic, national, or city-state jingoism, to make compromise seem weak, to associate killing with manhood, and to valorize death in war as a noble and willing self-sacrifice. When successful, war rhetoric results in war with its hates, grief, maiming, destruction, and death. Since World War I such appeals and arguments, often treated as the manipulation of a gullible populace by unscrupulous politicians, have been particularly suspect.¹⁵ A significant strain of twentieth-century thinking about war oratory is typified by Wilfred Owen's attack on "The Old Lie | Dulce et decorum est | Pro patria mori." Not only the nobility of dying for one's country, but even the whole just-war tradition has been attacked as a cover for other more sinister motives.¹⁶ The same hostile, skeptical approach that many intellectuals have taken to the justification of wars since World War I seems to inform many treatments of Athenian assembly speeches. In some cases, the parallel is explicit: W. R. Connor discusses the arguments of Demosthenes: "his characterization of Macedon passes from exaggeration and simple misunderstanding into a melodramatic phantasia . . ." and seems "strangely familiar . . . reveal[ing] some of the most unfortunate and recurring illusion of commentators on foreign policy."¹⁷

In addition such attributions of hidden motivation make slippery targets. To return to M. I. Finley and fourth-century Athens, if an orator justified a war in terms of both justice and profit, the appeal to profit revealed its true motivation and the invocation of justice merely provided a specious pretext. If a war ended profitably for Athens, we are asked to judge its motivation on its results rather than on its justification or the events that led up to it.¹⁸ If a war ended in disaster or wasted expense, it may still have been the result of a mistaken expectation of profit. We are, in this case, required to ignore the results of the war in judging its motivation.

The subject of this book would be less important and have to be approached from a different perspective if we were to accept such a complete separation between the stated causes of war – what we read in assembly speeches – and its real reasons. But we are not in an either-or situation. On the one hand, it is naïve to think that actors always state or are even fully conscious of the reasons for their actions. Nor do the actors' motivations

¹⁵ Gaubatz 1999: 2. E.g. Russell 1951: 43. Cf. Russell 1916: 23. ¹⁶ E.g. Wells 1969 and Santoni 1991.

¹⁷ Connor 1966: 57. The date of publication suggests that Connor is thinking of Cold War rhetoric in the United States. Given the importance of the Vietnam War to his intellectual development (Connor 1984: 6–7), the justifications of this war and contradictory pictures of Soviet power and fragility are perhaps the specific parallels that he had in mind.

¹⁸ M. Finley 1985b: 75–6.

always provide an exhaustive explanation for the recourse to war. Some unmasking theories – most famously those of Marx, Darwin, and Freud – can provide persuasive explanations for the actions of states or individuals, explanations often unsuspected by the actors themselves.¹⁹ Similarly, Finley's emphasis on the hope for economic gain as a motivation for war in ancient Greece is not entirely misplaced. This did sometimes play a role in the complex of motivations that led the Athenians to go to war. On the other hand, only an absolute certainty that the stated reasons are negligible and that the hypothetical real reasons are compelling and exhaustive could justify dismissing the former for the latter. In the case of classical Athens we manifestly lack this certainty.

A contrast between classical Athens and the modern world is telling against an excessively unmasking approach. Skepticism about the stated grounds of war makes the most sense when applied to modern representative democracies in which considerable power is delegated to the government – not to mention undemocratic states. In these cases, historians may and often do find a chasm between the considerations accorded weight by, for example, a president and his advisors in private and the public pronouncements about the reasons for war. As one eminent scholar of international relations puts it:

[Public] foreign policy discourse in the United States often sounds as if it has been lifted right out of a Liberalism 101 lecture. . . Behind closed doors, however, the elite who make national security policy speak mostly the language of power, not that of principle.²⁰

In a direct, participatory democracy such as Athens no such clear distinction can be made between the people and their representatives or executors. It is far more difficult to explain how important motivations for war could leave no trace in the arguments and appeals of war oratory. At Athens decision-making and the appeal to public opinion were one and the same process. Decisions were based on public opinion, the assembly's vote. They were not justified to a public after having been made on some other basis. And, in contrast to modern pictures of elite incitement of a peaceful but perhaps gullible people, it turns out that the rich at Athens tended to favor a less aggressive foreign policy; indeed, it was from their ranks that the few critics of Athenian militarism emerged.²¹

Finally, the arguments and appeals of deliberative oratory can provide insight and allow us to evaluate the importance even to the “real causes” of unmasking theories. Orators made reference, albeit rarely, to the potential

¹⁹ McCullagh 1991.

²⁰ Mearsheimer 2001: 23–5.

²¹ See pp. 39–48 and 256–7.

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profits of war. They appealed directly to state interest as the basis for policy; some even took an unmasking position towards the moral professions of their opponents. They invoked the internal values of Athenian society in their appeals to act like real men, to avoid slavish behavior, and, in general, to avoid the shame of yielding. In Athens the stated grounds for war were not radically divorced from its real motivation. This is hardly surprising. A skilled orator who hoped to sway the assembly on a close vote could hardly afford to ignore the true motivations, feelings, and thinking of his audience.²² One cannot assume a perfect proportionality between the importance of a motive and its appearance in assembly speeches, but there does not seem to be much scope left for important hidden motives.

So, if something was a factor in causing a war, it was usually present in the arguments upon which Athenian decisions were based. Just as important to our argument is the converse principle: arguments for war that successfully persuaded the audience should be regarded as genuine causal factors in the origins of a war. If an orator appealed to the justice of a course of action, it was because this was likely to affect the assembly. Orators did not make moral claims – which they did often – to waste time, but to win people over to their sides. If an argument based on justice, for example, convinced a majority of the citizens present at the assembly to vote for war, it can quite precisely be called a cause of war.

To sum up, the assembly speeches include a large variety of types of arguments, expected to be persuasive, about the relations of states. They need to be taken seriously rather than dismissed as some sort of façade; thus Athenian thinking is complex. That it is sophisticated is something that the reader will have to judge from my detailed investigations, but one final but crucial point requires emphasis here: behind some of the dismissals that we have been examining lies the smug and sterile assumption that correct views about war and peace are simple and straightforward, something that “we moderns” understand. Such a view strikes me as false as far as the present is concerned. It also contributes to a dismissive and superficial attitude towards Athenian thinking about the relationship of states, one not conducive to understanding it.

METHODOLOGY

In recent decades studies of forensic oratory and the funeral oration have proven fruitful for understanding Athenian social and political attitudes.²³

²² Raaflaub 1994: 135.

²³ E.g. Dover 1974; Loraux 1986; Ober 1989; D. Cohen 1995; Herman 1996; *pace* Worthington 1994: III.

The need for orators to take into account their audiences, whether the large juries of the Athenian justice system or the people assembled to mourn the war dead, makes such studies of Athenian popular thought persuasive. So too, preserved deliberative speeches can be the best source of evidence for popular attitudes about war and interstate relations.²⁴

One must grant, however, the occasional inaccuracy and even the self-serving mendacity of assembly speakers. References to the past in the Attic orators have been carefully studied and generally show a low level of historical accuracy.²⁵ When the orators discussed their own time, their partiality seems to have outweighed their more detailed and accurate knowledge. The discrepancies between the accounts of recent events by Demosthenes and Aeschines are notorious.²⁶ But even the lies of a dishonest orator can reveal shared standards by which actions are judged. For example, Demosthenes' claim that Athens had always come to the aid of weaker cities whose liberty or safety was in danger represents a distortion at best.²⁷ Nevertheless, we learn that Athenians considered aid to the weak a sufficient reason for going to war – and had an exaggerated opinion of their own altruism. The parallel to the use of forensic speeches is again apt. Courtroom speeches, often written for lying, guilty defendants or to convict the innocent, have provided the evidence for persuasive investigations of Athenian social and political attitudes. So too, can assembly speeches reveal much about foreign policy thinking, despite their ubiquitous partiality and occasional dishonesty.

Sometimes a speaker explicitly concedes the basic principles of his opponents. For example, in his attack on Aeschines and the Peace of Philocrates, Demosthenes repeatedly admits that peace is a good thing in itself, but he argues that the merits of peace in general are not at stake in Aeschines' trial.²⁸ Both sides assumed the desirability of peace in principle. Such passages, which occur with some frequency, provide perhaps the best opportunity to ascertain common beliefs.

The risk still exists of placing too much weight on arguments that, in the event, fell flat and failed to persuade; it is also crucial never to mistake an orator's straw-man for the opinion it misrepresents.²⁹ It is always dangerous

²⁴ Harding 1987: esp. 38–9. R. Thomas 1989: esp. 203–8. Cf. Todd 1990 and Herman 1996: 13–14 on forensic speeches.

²⁵ Pearson 1941; Worthington 1994; and Milns 1995. Cf. Missiou 1992: 59 on Andocides' inaccuracy.

²⁶ E.g. Cawkwell 1969: 163. Cf. Cawkwell 1978a: 117–19 and Cawkwell 1963b: 200 on Demosthenes' mendacity.

²⁷ Dem. 18.99. ²⁸ Dem. 19.88–9, 92, 96–7, 336.

²⁹ For an oratorical misstep see Dem. 19.16, 305–7; cf. Aeschin. 2.63–4, 74–8. That Demosthenes misrepresents the position of his opponents, especially Eubulus, is the thesis of a seminal article by Cawkwell (1963c).

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to base too much on a single passage, but when we find a number of passages in different speeches depending on the same suppositions, these are likely to have been widely accepted. Furthermore, other types of evidence also admit of miscommunication and contain idiosyncratic passages; they often involve other complicating factors, such as the atypical, elite readership of philosophy or the mythical setting of tragedy.

The subject of this study is Athenian thinking about interstate relations; to some extent this focus requires us to ignore or put aside questions about how a speech works as a whole or how it related to its specific historical context. An orator may bring up a particular argument about proper interstate conduct because of the artistic or rhetorical imperatives of a well-fashioned speech.³⁰ An orator may stress one consideration rather than another, because of the particular details of the interstate situation or internal politics at that point in time.³¹ But he could only make use of that consideration because it was already part of a shared system of thinking and of values concerning interstate relations. Some scholars argue that personal ambitions, ties, or enmities largely determined the political positions of Athenian politicians.³² I do not find such arguments persuasive.³³ But even if the motivations of politicians were, in some sense or another, personal, the arguments that were expected to convince the assembly were invariably political and focused on the issue at hand. My relative neglect of an argument's connection to its rhetorical and historical context or to the personal motivations of the speaker allows us to focus on the connections between arguments and permits us to understand the overall structure of Athenian thinking about war and peace.

This aim has not only required me to neglect certain traditional approaches and questions but has also led to forays beyond the traditional confines of history. In particular, the knowledge that the Athenians thought about foreign affairs according to a particular model often prompts the question, "Why this model and not some other?" An explanation in terms of historical development – the Athenians believed *B* because they

³⁰ The third volume of F. Blass, *Die Attische Beredsamkeit*, 1877, mainly takes this approach to the speeches in our period. Modern scholarship in this vein includes Pearson 1964; Rowe 1966, 1968; Wooten 1977; Slater 1988; Tuplin 1998; Usher 1999: 209–43, 270–6.

³¹ This is the dominant approach in Schäfer's monumental and still influential *Demosthenes und seine Zeit*, 1885–7. Important recent works with this primary concern include the following: Cawkwell 1962a, 1962b, 1969; Burke 1977; Strauss 1985; Cargill 1985; Sealey 1993; E. Harris 1995; Sawada 1996; Fox 1997; Badian 2000; Ryder 2000; Worthington 2000; Lambert 2001. Most commentaries on individual speeches treat the speeches both in their historical context and as works of rhetoric, e.g. Wankel 1976; Edwards 1995: 105–13; MacDowell 2000: 1–30; Yunis 2001: 1–26.

³² E.g. Sealey 1956: 179; Perlman 1963: 351; Sealey 1993: 5 and *passim*; Sawada 1996; Badian 2000.

³³ See the critique of Konstan 1997a: esp. 62–7.

had previously believed *A* – is only occasionally satisfying. But to go further sometimes requires going beyond the bounds of traditional history. At the very least such investigations require a comparative-historical approach. Only the knowledge of other cultures' thinking about war and peace allows us accurately to judge what is unique about Athenian thinking and requires an explanation specific to Athens, and to judge what it has in common with other cultures, in which case a general explanation is often more appropriate. I have sought such general explanations by drawing upon theories and ideas from a variety of fields, namely cognitive psychology, Game Theory, international relations theory, and the sociology, anthropology, and comparative history of war and peace. Despite the perils of wading into the unfamiliar waters of these various disciplines – some of which are regarded with suspicion and hostility by scholars of ancient Greek history – I believe that, by casting our nets widely, we will gain immeasurably in our understanding not only of the *what* of Athenian thinking but also of the *why*.

EXPERIENCE AND INTEREST

Several factors at Athens favored well-informed thinking about foreign affairs. Athenians were proud of their high level of political participation and knowledge, which was certainly much higher in Athens than it is today among the citizens of a modern nation.³⁴ A term on the *boule*, the Council of Five Hundred, lasted for a full year and included the vetting of treaties, the official reception of foreign embassies, the preparation of proposals, and attendance at all assembly meetings. Such service was widespread: Mogens Hansen concludes that “over a third of all citizens over eighteen, and about two thirds of all citizens over forty, became councilors, some of them twice.”³⁵ Sundry evidence suggests that foreign policy decisions were widely discussed away from the official meetings of the assembly and the *boule*.³⁶ In short, the intended audience of war oratory was well informed and often possessed active political experience.

The high level of popular involvement in issues of war and peace derived both from democratic practices and from the huge impact such decisions had on the Athenian population. In the late fifth century, during the course

³⁴ E.g. Thuc. 2.40.2; I follow here the arguments of Harding 1987: 37.

³⁵ Hansen 1991: 249. Whether we quarrel with Hansen's exact figures does not influence their basic force. See also Dem. 19.17.

³⁶ E.g. Ar. *Lys.* 506–28; Thuc. 3.36.4–6; Dem. 4.10–11, 48–9 (contra Dem. 10.1); 19.288; Theophr. *Char.* 26.6.