

Thucydides' Principles of War

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Abstract: In the article, the author tries to clarify the principles of war which Thucydides lays out in his *History*. It is well-known that Thucydides' work is "a possession for all time" based on the greatest war in human history. From Thucydides' point of view, this war has fully demonstrated the potential of armed confrontation between men and other forms of human activity connected with it. Starting from the conception of war as a division of men into friends and foes, "us" and "them", the author follows Thucydides' own logic and gives four principles of the division. Three of them clearly replace each other as the war goes on; from a division by blood to a division by party, then from a division by party to a division based on might or power. The fourth principle of division is a division by humanity or human nature potentially rooted in the form of the text itself, i.e. in the division into two kinds of men in history.

Key words: Thucydides, political philosophy, war, Carl Schmitt, democracy

Introduction

For anyone, who studies the basis of political philosophy, Thucydides' work is seemed the first principal source. However, up until today there are some disputes about him: should we consider him a political philosopher or a historian?¹ Is he a successor of sophistry and its political thought or is he closer to Socratic classical political philosophy?² Can we call him a political realist, an ancestor of political realism, or not?³ One thing remains certain: Thucydides was the first political thinker who created a work focused on proper politics as well as a political aspect in human nature. And he did it not by mere abstract reflection, but by direct connection with the historical events. Furthermore, he is the first among political thinkers who had naked ambition of creating something immortal ("a possession of all time").⁴

The work of Thucydides actually explores several "immortal" topics of political philosophy. It describes the main features of imperialism⁵, gives multi-level description of the concept of progress, covers human nature and "nature" of political order, considers a question

¹ See Marcotte-Chenard S. What can we learn from political history? Leo Strauss and Raymond Aron, readers of Thucydides. The review of politics, 2018, no. 80, pp. 57-86. doi: 10.1017/S0034670517000778. Ober J. Thucydides and the invention of political science. Brill's companion to Thucydides, Boston, VSP, 2006. pp. 131-159.

² See Crane G. Thucydides and the ancient simplicity. California, University of California press, 1998. 330 p.

³ See McQueen A. Political realism and the realist «Tradition». Critical review of international, social and political philosophy, 2017, vol. 20, no 3, pp. 296-313. doi: 10.1080/13698230.2017.1293914.

⁴ Thucydides. History of the Peloponnesian war. I, 22, 4. Cf. Machiavelli N. The Prince. Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing, 2008. p. 95.

⁵ See Romilly J. Thucydides and Athenian Imperialism. Oxford, Oxford university press, 1963. 400 p.

of collision of two possible ways of life (democratic/marine, oligarchic/terrestrial)⁶, demonstrates and exposes the two principal motives of any political action (fear and hope).⁷ Such a specific and in the same time broad collection of subjects in Thucydides' work induces us to choose a specific one to explore within the article. And to make a right choice, we need to consider the specification of a current political situation, a factor actualizing the thought of Thucydides, that is modern political process, and, to be more precise, the process of opposition of the two approaches to the right political order.⁸ And that choice cannot be called unreasonable; all in all Thucydides himself says that the described war is the greatest war ever⁹ which can be repeated, but cannot be excelled, since it had exposed all the potential of human conflict. Speaking about a scale of the Peloponnesian war, Thucydides proves its unrivalled character by the following elements: a) a speed of technical development; b) an amount of people and nations affected by it; c) an escalation of violence; d) an evolution of principles of war; e) an amount of suffering bore by its participants; f) a raise of quality and quantity (of humanity) of persons entering the foreground of the war. All these elements exist in all the wars and are connected with their progress, their course. This article covers only one of them – the evolution of principles of war – although we will definitely highlight some of the others.

Principles of war

War presupposes a collective decision about division of participating parties into friends and foes¹⁰, “us” and “them”, those who should be saved and those who should be destroyed, defeated, enslaved.¹¹ Although this division, empowered by a decision, is not determined, its principles must be strict. And, if we follow Thucydides' logic, we should see all of them. Yet we cannot say that all of these principles cannot exist in different societies at the same time, but in a given society at any given moment there can be only one valid friend-and-foe-division principle. So, according to his thought, all these principles have clear evolution line in each society.

Thucydides begins from the very beginning. In order to prove the unrivalled scale of Peloponnesian war, he should prove the “weakness” of the famous wars of the past, namely, the Trojan War and the Persian war. In the case of the Trojan War, besides pointing out the poverty¹² and technological backwardness¹³ of ancestors, he also shows that Agamemnon campaign was made on held by, waged by, based on, the principle of consanguinity – Greek tribes fought against non-Greek. In addition, he explains that this division was not a universal

⁶ See Schmitt C. *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum*. New York, Telos Press Publishing, 2003. 372 p.

⁷ Cf. Weber M. *Politics as a Vocation*. Weber M. *The Vocation Lectures*. Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing, 2004. p. 34. Φόβος and ἐλπίς can be called the most developed concepts of Thucydides' work, especially if we consider how often he referred to them to clarify the actions of political regimes, personalities and the masses.

⁸ See Schake K. *What causes war?* *Orbis*, 2017, vol. 61, no. 4, pp. 449-462. doi: 10.1016/j.orbis.2017.08.002. in order to see why Executive office of the U.S. President is interested in Thucydides' work.

⁹ Thucydides. *History of the Peloponnesian war*. I, 1, 2. Cf. *ibid.* I, 21, 2-22, 1.

¹⁰ Although the foregoing does not deny that, as it will be shown below, such a division will most likely arise in the mind of a concrete person, a concrete political figure, rather than in the public consciousness.

¹¹ Schmitt C. *The Concept of the Political*. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2007. p. 19-79.

¹² Thucydides. *History of the Peloponnesian war*. I, 2, 2; 3, 1-4; 8, 3-4; 11, 1; 12, 1.

¹³ *ibid.* I, 13, 4; 18, 3; 19, 1

one among rival Greek tribes: «And it was, as I think, because Agamemnon surpassed his power the princes of his time ... [he] had become strong in naval power beyond the rest, that he was able to collect his armament, not so much by favour as by fear».¹⁴ In the case of Persian war this principle was still in force, but slightly changed. Now Greeks had a common name, Hellenes¹⁵, as well as non-Greeks, who were called barbarians¹⁶. This principle of consanguinity-based or tribal-based division arrives first and is defeated first. However, as it was said before, this does not make it invalid. During the Peloponnesian War this principle is no more than an excuse for the belligerents. This is especially clearly seen in the first part of the war (the Archidamus war), when the Corinthians use their consanguinity with the Epidamnians in order to take revenge on their other relatives, the Corcyraeans¹⁷. The Epidamnians, like the Corcyraeans, are related to Corinth by blood on two levels: as representatives of the same nationality (Dorians) and as “children” of their mother country.¹⁸ At the beginning of the second part of the war (the Deceleian war), the Athenians resort to the pretext of blood relationship with the Egestaeans and other Sicilian settlers to capture Sicily.¹⁹ Some of the war participants continue to regard this principle of dividing people into friends and foes as valid even in its middle. Thus, the Melians wonder why the Athenians do not divide their allies into blood relatives and others.²⁰ And they themselves still hope for help from the Lacedaemonians precisely because of kinship.²¹

Yet, the principle of division based on blood has been overcome by the main participants of the Peloponnesian war, Sparta and Athens, before the war had started. Firstly, it has been overcome not by the social consciousness of these city-states, but in the minds of the certain personalities, certain politicians. Specifically, this break occurs in the minds of two war leaders of Sparta and Athens during the Persian war, Spartan king Pausanias and Athenian general Themistocles. Pausanias, who was recalled from the command of Greek forces, because of his tyrannical behavior,²² according to Thucydides himself, wanted «to carry on an intrigue with the Great King... his aim being to become master of all Hellas»²³. So Pausanias did not regard Hellenes or even Lacedaemonians, who had condemned him earlier, as his allies, he regarded the Persians (i.e. barbarians) as ones. Pausanias betrayed his people in order to rule over them. He was ready even to betray his confidant by deceiving him.²⁴ So Pausanias became a man who cared not about his country but about his power (i.e. non-patriot), a liar and a traitor. His Athenian counterpart Themistocles is described by Thucydides in the same manner. He deceives Lacedaemonians (i.e. Hellenes) in order to let

¹⁴ *ibid.* I, 9, 1-3.

¹⁵ *ibid.* I, 3, 2-4; cf. I, 95, 1.

¹⁶ *ibid.* I, 6, 1 and 6.

¹⁷ *ibid.* I, 24, 1; 25, 3.

¹⁸ The hate of the Corcyraeans by the Corinthians could be explained by the fact that first ones being their “children” had never shown any respect to their “mother”. See *ibid.* I, 25, 4.

¹⁹ *ibid.* VI, 6, 1-2. It should also be noted that by this time in the war, neither the Athenians nor the Egestaeans had any longer considered the blood relationship as a valid principle of dividing people into friends and foes.

²⁰ *Ibid.* V, 96.

²¹ *Ibid.* V, 104; 106; 108. The Athenians, responding to this replica of the Melians, boldly discard this motive of assistance from the Lacedaemonians. See *ibid.* V, 105, 3-4; 107; 109.

²² *ibid.* I, 94, 1-95, 5.

²³ *Ibid.* I, 128, 3.

²⁴ *Ibid.* I, 128, 5.

Athenians wall their city.²⁵ He also betrays the city for the sake of his own well-being and works against it and Hellas in general, deserting to the Persian king.²⁶

In general Thucydides demonstrates that the kinship-based principle of dividing people begins to fade in the Athenian public consciousness together with the birth of the Athenian Empire, i.e., as soon as the Athenians receive hegemony at the request of the Spartans who sought to be “rid of the Persian war”²⁷ and the allies, “because of their hatred of Pausanias.”²⁸ After the birth of two Hellenic empires, the “old” Spartan and the new Athenian²⁹, provided the threat from the barbarian Persia weakens, an unresolved conflict begins to grow between them.³⁰ At the same time a new principle of dividing people emerges – the party-based.

The Peloponnesian war started primarily as a civil strife between the parties of oligarchs and democrats in Epidamnus³¹. And yet it would be the all-Greek war (during the first its half) between oligarch (Peloponnesian league headed by Sparta) and democratic (Delian league controlled by Athens) parties³². By characterizing each party through describing their archetypes – Athens and Sparta – Thucydides virtually describes the difference between the two approaches to the concept of right political order, the two ways of life determined by financial shape, culture and international relations of each of these poleis. The warmongering Corinthians give the first clear but exaggerated characteristics of democratic order by describing the mentality of the Athenians³³. In order to bring the Spartans into the confrontation, they maximize the differences between the Spartans and the Athenians. So the latter are described as arrogant³⁴, aggressive³⁵, cunning³⁶, innovative³⁷, enterprising³⁸, risky³⁹, highly patriotic⁴⁰, but, above all, full of overly optimistic hopes⁴¹. Such a flattering characteristic of democracy, according to Thucydides himself, is both true and inadequate at the same time.

Democracy, as opposed to oligarchy, does seem to be “impudent” and aggressive, full of hopes. It stems from the fact that it does not have any serious internal enemies. Or, to put it another way, the majority of any polis is a supporter of democracy. Oligarchy, full of complex internal contradictions, is much more passive, and the main motive of its actions is not hope,

²⁵ Ibid. I, 90, 3-91, 4.

²⁶ Ibid. I, 135, 2-138, 3. Both Athens and Sparta would try to find allies among the Persians and barbarians in general after the beginning of the Peloponnesian war. See *ibid* II, 7, 1; 29, 5-7.

²⁷ Ibid. I, 95, 7.

²⁸ Ibid. I, 96, 1.

²⁹ See Strauss L. *On Thucydides' war of the Peloponnesians and the Athenians*. Strauss L. *The city and man*. Chicago. The university of Chicago press, 1978. pp. 139-241.

³⁰ Thucydides. *History of the Peloponnesian war*. I, 18, 2-19. The Peloponnesian war is not the first conflict between these poleis, but it is the last.

³¹ Ibid. I, 24, 1-6.

³² Cf. *ibid*. II, 11, 9.

³³ Ibid. I, 119.

³⁴ Ibid. I, 68, 2.

³⁵ Ibid. I, 68, 3.

³⁶ Ibid. I, 69, 2.

³⁷ Ibid. I, 70, 1; 71, 3.

³⁸ Ibid. I, 70, 2.

³⁹ Ibid. I, 70, 3.

⁴⁰ Ibid. I, 70, 6.

⁴¹ Ibid. I, 70, 3 and 7.

but fear.⁴² However, it is precisely these excessive hopes and optimism that lead democracy to collapse through expansionist politics.⁴³ The same unrestrained hope could have ruined the Athenians at the beginning of the war. For Archidamus, marching with his army to ravage Attica, counted precisely on the fact that the Athenians, relying on their strength, would not tolerate the devastation of their fields and give the Lacedaemonians a ground battle.⁴⁴ And he was not mistaken: if it were not for the Pericles' efforts to control the people, the Athenians would have dared to go to a fatal battle with the Lacedaemonians.

The Athenians initiative and speed of decision-making, proved right after the Corinthians' speech,⁴⁵ turned out to be a weakness of democracy rather than its strength. The Assembly makes decisions too quickly being influenced by the moment or emotions. And it changes them too often as soon as the influence of the moment or emotions weakens.⁴⁶ This feature of democracy, easily associated with excessive hopes, makes it extremely vulnerable to the influence of demagogues, who fuel people's aspirations.⁴⁷ And it directly connects democracy with war: demagogues do not exist, they cannot stand out in any other way but through the promises of hegemony and domination⁴⁸, i.e. of embodiment of immoderate popular hopes. That is why, according to Thucydides, democracy was successful as long as it was democracy just in name⁴⁹, but took the road to collapse, as soon as the people really began to rule in Athens.⁵⁰ The patriotism of the Athenians in this case is the result of a mixture of their own interests with the interests of the city, i.e. hopes of enriching and gaining fame through destruction and subjugation of other cities.⁵¹

Speaking about the features of the Athenian democratic regime, the Corinthians do not mention some of them. Later they would be highlighted by Thucydides himself. First feature is the inexhaustibility of recourses.⁵² If democracy does not have any internal enemies, it does not have to fight with them so it has abundance in material recourses, people and allies⁵³ to provide a victory in any war. (At the same time, it is the allies who can be considered an

⁴² Oligarchy, as well as tyranny, is limited by inner conflicts and securing the safety of regime. See as Thucydides says about this on his own behalf (Ibid. I, 33, 5; cf. I, 17), cf. with Athenagoras' speech in Syracuse (Ibid. VI, 38, 3).

⁴³ Cf. the results of the Peloponnesian war with the description of the Athenian expedition to Egypt (Ibid. I, 104 and 110).

⁴⁴ Cf. the purpose of Archidamus (Ibid. II, 11, 4 and 6) with the comments of Thucydides himself (Ibid. II, 20, 2-5) and the reaction of the Athenians (Ibid. II, 21, 2).

⁴⁵ See Ibid. I, 72, 49.

⁴⁶ Cf. the behavior of Athenian youth in during the siege (Ibid., II, 20, 2-22, 1) and the behavior of the Athenian Assembly after the surrender of the Mytilenaeans (Ibid. III, 36, 2-5). See the speech of Cleon (Ibid., III, 37, 2-3).

⁴⁷ See Ibid. II, 65, 9-10.

⁴⁸ The three main Athenian demagogues considered by Thucydides – Pericles, Cleon and Alcibiades – are pushing Athens to war. Pericles stands for the war with the Spartans (See Ibid. I, 127, 3. Cf., with the first mention of Pericles in connection with the imperialistic policy of Athens., Ibid., I, 111, 2; 114, 3), Cleon becomes the head of the Athenian military party (See his characteristic given by Thucydides Ibid., V, 16, 1), Alcibiades promises the Athenians the conquest of Sicily, implying the conquest of Carthage and the rest of the world (See Ibid., VI, 15, 2. Cf. VI, 90, 2-3).

⁴⁹ On the sympathies of Thucydides to a more moderate regime see *ibid.* VIII, 97.

⁵⁰ Thucydides speaks directly on his own behalf about this topic. *Ibid.* II, 65, 10.

⁵¹ See *Ibid.* VI, 24, 3.

⁵² Thucydides speaks directly on his own behalf about this topic. *Ibid.* II, 65, 12-13.

⁵³ Cf. Speech of Archidamus about the state of Sparta at the outbreak of the war (Ibid. I, 80, 3) with Pericles' speech about the state of Athens at the outbreak of the war (Ibid. I, 140-144).

important factor in the high amount of wealth and men controlled by Athens, the separation of which will become a successful strategy of the war.)⁵⁴ The Corinthians do not mention this quality of democracy, since they know that the Spartans are poor and small in number, which means they will rather avoid the war than begin it, having heard such a comparison of Sparta and Athens.

The second quality of democracy, not mentioned by the Corinthians, is religiosity. Thucydides shows the rise of religiousness in Athens from the case of Pericles' restrain of the people⁵⁵ to the radical democracy of the times of the Sicilian expedition. At the beginning of the war, the people consider acceptable and approvable even the most impious proposals of their leader.⁵⁶ At the end of the war, the disastrous decision to withdraw Alcibiades from Sicily to Athens for the trial is the result of religious hysteria⁵⁷. Alcibiades is accused of mutilating the hermai, the statues of the god Hermes, the god of democrats.⁵⁸ This undisclosed⁵⁹ and, possibly, unrelated⁶⁰ to Alcibiades, crime becomes the basis for his persecution. Hardly could the Corinthians convince the Spartans that they are less pious than the Athenians.⁶¹

The third, unnamed by the Corinthians, but explored by Thucydides, quality of democracy that distinguishes it from oligarchy, is its ability to produce historical figures. During the entire war, Sparta gave only two persons worth considering: Archidamus and Brasidas.⁶² The Athenian regime during this war has produced Pericles, Cleon, Alcibiades, Nicias and Demosthenes.

The party-based principle of dividing people into "us" and "them" almost instantly makes the belligerents to search for allies among the barbarians⁶³ and to support the respective parties in the other city-states. The same principle of the division of people begins to manifest itself more and more within the Greek cities, turning into increasingly bitter civil war. But it is precisely this material that allows Thucydides to reveal the essence of human

⁵⁴ In fact, all the successes of Brasidas are connected not with military victories over the Athenians, but with the separation of their allies from them. See *ibid.* IV, 108, 1-3.

⁵⁵ Cf. *Ibid.* II, 12, 2; 22, 1; 59, 1-2 with II, 65, 3-9.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* II, 13, 4-5.

⁵⁷ More on the mutilation of the hermai see Osborne, R. The erection and mutilation of the hermai. *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*, 1985, vol. 31. pp. 47-73. doi:10.1017/S0068673500004752.

⁵⁸ Thucydides explicitly speaks about the connection between the hermai and democracy (Thucydides. *History of the Peloponnesian war*. VI, 28, 2). For more details, see Quinn J. Herms, kouroi and the political anatomy of Athens. *Greece and Rome*, 2007, vol. 54, no. 1, pp. 82-105. doi: 10.1017/S0017383507000058.

⁵⁹ Thucydides. *History of the Peloponnesian war*. VI, 53, 1-2; 60.

⁶⁰ Thucydides intentionally interrupts the narrative of the investigation into the mutilation of the hermai by the "true" history of the struggle against tyranny in Athens, the history of Harmodius and Aristogeiton (*Ibid.* VI, 53, 3-59, 4. Cf. I, 20, 1-2).

⁶¹ On the role of religion in the military affairs of Sparta see Xenophon. *Constitution of the Lacedaemonians*. Xenophon. *Scripta Minora*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1968. pp. 135-189.

⁶² Thucydides makes it clear that he doubts the competence of Archidamus (Thucydides. *History of the Peloponnesian war*. I, 79, 2). And the description of Brasidas' actions and fate can be considered simply comical. Cf. The episode where Brasidas teaches the Peloponnesians that the side with the most men wins (*Ibid.* II, 87, 6), with the episode where Brasidas "was knocked back" and lost his shield (*Ibid.* IV, 12, 1), with the episode where Brasidas achieves his most prominent military victory without a fight (*Ibid.*, IV, 72, 4-73, 3), and with the episode where Brasidas dies by accident, in the "wrong battle", during which the Lacedaemonians lose only seven men (*Ibid.* V, 10, 8-11, 2).

⁶³ See note 26.

nature. Speaking of humanity, i.e. of human nature itself, as a sum of natural qualities and aspirations, he notes that human nature is much more clearly manifested during war than during peace, in action rather than at rest.⁶⁴ This stems from the fact that in a civilized and peaceful society, manifestations of human nature are restrained by artificially created restrictions, primarily by laws and religion⁶⁵, without which a civilized society is not possible at all. However, their existence is a result of natural desire for more, because they should serve as the guarantee of gaining more in the future. Human nature, consisting of “desire to rule, greed and ambition”,⁶⁶ can be suppressed if it is embodied within a civilized life.⁶⁷ This subordination is the result of faith in the promise, or the possibility of safe accumulation of money, power and glory, or their acquisition as a result of the divine grace, i.e. it directly depends on the belief in the efficacy of human and divine laws. As soon as this faith weakens, people stop putting the future above the present⁶⁸ and begin to try to get all that is possible, without postponing.⁶⁹ If the awareness of the invalidity and ineffectiveness of human and divine laws becomes universal, the society perishes.⁷⁰ However, in any society there should exist a stratum of people who live not by laws, but by nature. The same can be observed at the level of states and unions.

The knowledge of the eternal and unchanging human nature⁷¹ makes possible the arrival of the last principle of dividing people into those who are consistent with nature and therefore are closer to the natural goal (more humane) and those who are less consistent with it and are further from the natural goal (less humane). The party-based division – the result of a convention, and not of nature – is overcome by the most powerful belligerent states: Sparta and Athens (Syracuse also comes close to it). This overcoming is not fixed clearly in the case of the “old empire” of Sparta, but it is fairly clearly shown by Thucydides in the case of the two cities, Mytilene and Melos, which surrender to Athens. These two surrenders are separated by the speech of the first post-Periclean demagogue Cleon.⁷² The surrender of Mytilene to the Athenians corresponds to the surrender of Plataea to the Spartans. When Plataea is surrendered to the Spartans, they, using a simulation of a court, kill the surrendered men, enslave women and raze the city to the ground.⁷³ When, in besieged by the Athenians Mytilene, a democratic party takes over the city,⁷⁴ according to the party-based principle of division, it expects help from Athens. However, Cleon, who has already overcome the party-based principle of dividing people, demands the execution of all citizens of Mytilene who

⁶⁴ Ibid. III, 82, 2-3.

⁶⁵ Cf. the description of human nature with a description of the effect of the plague on the Athenian society. Ibid. II, 51, 4-53 and III, 82, 6-7; 83, 1; 84, 2.

⁶⁶ Ibid. III, 82, 8.

⁶⁷ For example, the civilized Greeks of the present are much richer than the barbarian Greeks of the past. Ibid. I, 2-3, 1 and 4.

⁶⁸ I.e. become “vicious”. Cf. Xenophon. Memorabilia. II, 1, 21-34.

⁶⁹ On how quickly liberated nature overcomes written and unwritten laws, see Thucydides. History of the Peloponnesian war. III, 82, 6.

⁷⁰ Ibid. II, 53, 4.

⁷¹ Ibid. III, 82, 1-2.

⁷² Cf. the characterization of Cleon given by Thucydides at his first mention (Ibid. III, 36, 6) and later (Ibid. IV, 21, 3).

⁷³ Ibid. III, 68, 2-3.

⁷⁴ Ibid. III, 27, 2-28, 1.

have attained to maturity, and the enslavement of their children and women.⁷⁵ When this demand is not fulfilled for the first time⁷⁶, Cleon clearly expresses the new principle of dividing people into “us” and “them”: the principle of power.

Cleon directly divides might and right (justice)⁷⁷, talking openly that if the Athenians still want to be the strongest, they should not observe right (i.e., in this case, the custom of helping and defending other democrats), but think of their own, i.e. of the interests of the city, and not of the party.⁷⁸ Now being an empire, Athens can no longer afford to have allies equal to them, now all their allies must be seen as weak, as their slaves regardless of their tribal or party affiliation.⁷⁹ The existence of Athens now depends on their power, and that power largely depends on the allies and their behavior.⁸⁰ Thus, the “tyrannical” attitude of Athens to the allies and other cities is primarily a result of an absolutely natural desire for self-preservation⁸¹, which leaves the empire no other choice on how to treat them. In the case of Mitylene, Cleon is defeated, but the new principle of dividing people is fixed in the public consciousness of Athens and triumphs in the course of the so-called “Melian dialogue”⁸²: the rule of the strongest is natural, so natural that even the gods are subject to this principle.⁸³ In this context, right, justice is artificial, is the result of the agreement of two equally strong sides.⁸⁴ As a consequence, this new principle of division dictates the most aggressive policy of Athens. On the one hand, it is dangerous to delay in suppressing or capturing the weakest, if this serves to strengthen the power and secures survival of the strongest. On the other hand, it is impossible to establish the fact of equality of powers outside of the struggle, i.e. it is impossible to know whether the forces of Sparta and Athens, Syracuse and Athens, Carthage and Athens, Persia and Athens are equal without testing them – without the armed confrontation.

As already noted, this new principle of division concerns the three sides of the Peloponnesian war, the last of which, albeit not fully, is Syracuse. The Syracusan politician Hermocrates is the first of the citizens of this city to realize that it is possible to give the Athenians a rebuff in the Athenian expedition to Sicily only if the whole island ceases to adhere to the divisions by blood and party, i.e. will unite under the leadership of the strongest city, his city. In other words, he understands that it is possible to escape the onset of the

⁷⁵ Ibid. III, 36, 2. Cf. III, 36, 6.

⁷⁶ Ibid. III, 36, 4.

⁷⁷ Cf. Ibid. III, 39, 3 p III, 40, 4.

⁷⁸ Cf. this with how Thucydides characterizes the actions of the Spartans in the destruction of Plataea (Ibid. III, 68, 4).

⁷⁹ On the Athens’ way to the Athenian Empire and why empires are not different from each other, see the speech of the Athenians in Sparta (Ibid. I, 72 and 78).

⁸⁰ See note 53.

⁸¹ See Ibid. I, 75-76. On the connection between thought of Thucydides and T. Hobbes see Schlatter R. Thomas Hobbes and Thucydides. *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 1945, vol. 6, no. 3, pp. 350-362. doi: 10.2307/2707297.

⁸² On the “Melian dialogue” see Macleod C. Form and meaning in the Melian dialogue. *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, 1974, vol. 23, no. 4, pp. 385-400.

⁸³ Thucydides. *History of the Peloponnesian war*. V, 105, 1-2. Cf. Ibid. I, 76, 2-4; 77, 3-5.

⁸⁴ Ibid. V, 89.

Athenian Empire only by creating an empire of Syracuse.⁸⁵ However, his proposal (like Cleon's proposal in due time) fails.⁸⁶

Finally, we should briefly mention the possible fourth principle of dividing people into friends and foes, “our own” and “aliens”, proposed by Thucydides not in the context of his account of history, but in the form of its presentation. From the point of view of the author of the *History*, all the participants of the events described in it are divided into two types: those who are worthy of serious consideration – such are awarded with the opportunity to excel not only in deeds, but also in speech– and those who are not worthy of it. The first category of people consists of outstanding generals, demagogues, politicians – actors of history, the second – of all the rest⁸⁷. At the same time, if the principle of the strongest is the last principle of division, mastered by states, the principle directly connected with the sovereignty of the interests of a particular city and their embodiment, the new principle of division is no longer implies sovereignty of collectives (states), but of individuals. Pausanias, Alcibiades and Themistocles turn out to be equally sovereign participants in international (interstate) relations, like Sparta or Athens themselves. This is especially evident in the case of Alcibiades. He, like his city, is capable and ready to change allies (which are other states) if necessary. He, like his city, is a patriot of himself. He does not unite his interests with the interests of his city, but he does the opposite, turning his interests in the interests of Athens, Sparta, Persia. Humanity, i.e. the level of manifestation in one or another personality of human nature, according to Thucydides is directly related to war and its scale. This does not mean at all that nature does not manifest itself in peaceful life. However, its manifestation during peace remains repressed, trivial and secondary in comparison with those peaks of humanity that can be observed during war. In this sense, war reveals, unmask human nature. This is why Thucydides considers the scale of the Peloponnesian war to be the limit, for the manifestation of humanity, that is, human nature, reaches its peak.⁸⁸

Conclusion

In his work, Thucydides does not simply recite historical events in some, if not always clear, sequence. In fact, he is deeply interested in explaining these events, in highlighting the eternal grounds that move humanity towards war, and towards the evolution of the principles of war. According to Thucydides, human nature is radically individualistic; the very principles of war move from the oldest concepts of collectivism (consanguinity) to the newest concept of individualism (personal sovereignty), passing through two stages, party and imperialistic. Thucydides seems to show that, first and foremost, this evolution affects the

⁸⁵ Ibid. VI, 34. This completely coincides with the story of the Athenians about how the Athenian Empire was born (See Ibid. I, 74, 4; 75, 3-76, 1).

⁸⁶ Hermocrates' proposal fails due to opposition from people who have not yet overcome the previous principle of division, to which Thucydides points directly (Ibid. VI, 35, 2).

⁸⁷ For a clearer understanding of the concept of humanity, one must compare Thucydides' characteristics given by him on his own behalf to historical figures of the Peloponnesian war with his characteristics of historical figures who lived prior to it i.e. in time of the Persian war (Pausanias and Themistocles) and the Trojan War (Agamemnon).

⁸⁸ From the Thucydides' of point view, the Peloponnesian war has surpassed previous wars by the level of humanity in both quantitative and qualitative aspects. The Trojan War gave only one person worth considering (Agamemnon), the Persian war – two (Pausanias and Themistocles), while the Peloponnesian war largely surpassed this result.

individuals' consciousness and therefore outstanding personalities, whose worth is directly connected with the refusal to follow the principles of division of people by virtue of blood, ideology, and reasons of state in favor of one's own nature, i.e. moving from faith in the value of the collective and its forms, to belief in the self-worth of individual representatives of the collective, the value of the individual Self.⁸⁹ Thus, Thucydides points out that the acme of war is not limited to races, nations, classes, ideologies, creeds, or state interests, it is limited to the struggle between collective and individual, to the struggle between inhumane and humane.

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⁸⁹ In this sense the value of one or another personality (as opposed to collective) cannot be measured by the results of one's life, successes or achievements, i.e. cannot be outside itself.

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