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The Ancient Greeks and Modern Realism: Ethics, Persuasion, and Power

Richard Ned Lebow

2.1. INTRODUCTION

There is widespread recognition that the realist tradition reached its nadir in neo-realism. In his unsuccessful effort to transform realism into a scientific theory, Kenneth Waltz, father of neorealism, denuded the realist tradition of its complexity and subtlety, appreciation of agency, and understanding that power is most readily transformed into influence when it is both masked and embedded in a generally accepted system of norms. Neorealism is a parody of science.[1] Its key terms like power and polarity are loosely and haphazardly formulated and its scope conditions are left undefined. It relies on a process akin to natural selection to shape the behaviour of units in a world where successful strategies are not necessarily passed on to successive leaders and where the culling of less successful units rarely occurs. It more closely resembles an unfalsifiable ideology than it does a scientific theory, and its rise and fall has had little to do with conceptual and empirical advances. Its appeal lay in its apparent parsimony and superficial resemblance to science; something that says more about its adherents that it does about the theory. Its decline was hastened by the end of the Cold War, which appeared to many as a critical test case for a theory that sought primarily to explain the stability of the bipolar world. The end of the Cold War and subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union also turned scholarly and public attention to a new range of political problems to which neorealism was irrelevant.

The decline of neorealism has encouraged many realists to return to their roots. In doing so, they read with renewed interest the works of great nineteenth- and twentieth-century realists like Max Weber, E. H. Carr, and Hans Morgenthau in search of conceptions and insights relevant to contemporary international relations. Weber and Morgenthau in turn were deeply indebted to the Greeks, as is the broader tradition of classical realism. In *The Tragic Vision of Politics* (2003), I sought to recapture the wisdom of that tradition through a close reading of the texts of Thucydides, Carl von Clausewitz, and Morgenthau.[2] My project here is less ambitious, and is limited to describing the fifth-century Greek understanding of power and using it to critique modern conceptions, especially those associated with realism.

My argument draws on the writings of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Thucydides, and Plato. They differ in many ways, but give voice to a set of largely shared understandings about human nature and social relations. They have much to teach us about the nature of community, how it is held together by affection and friendship, the role of dialogue and persuasion in creating these bonds, and the ways in which the exercise of power can reinforce or undermine them. Their arguments, and mind, rely on the particularly rich Greek lexicon, which allows a more sophisticated analysis of such concepts as power, hegemony, and persuasion. This lexicon, and the manner in which they developed and deployed it, can enrich our understanding of power in several important ways. It highlights the links between power and the purposes for which it is employed, as well as the means used to achieve these ends. It also provides a conceptual framework for distinguishing enlightened from narrow self-interest, identifies strategies of influence associated with each, and their implications for the long-term survival of communities.

2.2. CONTEMPORARY CONCEPTIONS

In the field of International Relations, power has been used interchangeably as a property and a relational concept.[3] This elision reflects a wider failure to distinguish material capabilities from power, and power from influence. Classical realists—unlike many later theorists—understood that material capabilities are only one component of power, and that influence is a psychological relationship. Hans Morgenthau insisted that influence is always relative, situation specific, and highly dependent on the skill of actors.[4] Stefano Guzzini observes that this political truth creates an irresolvable dilemma for realist theory.[5] If power cannot be defined and measured independently from specific interactions, it cannot provide the foundation for deductive realist theories.

Liberal conceptions also stress material capabilities, but privilege economic over military power. Some liberal understandings go beyond material capabilities to include culture, ideology, and the nature of a state's political-economic order; what Joseph Nye, Jr. calls 'soft power'. Liberals also tend to conflate power and influence. Many assume that economic power—hard or soft—automatically confers influence.[6] Nye takes it for granted that the American way of life is so attractive, even mesmerizing, and the global public goods it supposedly provides so beneficial, that others are predisposed to follow Washington's lead.[7] Like many liberals, he treats interests and identities as objective, uncontroversial, and given.[8]

Recent constructivist writings differentiate power from influence, and highlight the importance of process. Habermasian accounts stress the ways in which argument can be determining, and describe a kind of influence that can be fully independent of material capabilities. They make surprisingly narrow claims. Thomas Risse considers argument likely to be decisive only among actors who share a common 'lifeworld', and in situations where they are uncertain about their

interests, or where existing norms do not apply or clash.[9] Risse and other advo-cates of communicative rationality fail to distinguish between good and persua-sive arguments—and they are by no means the same. Nor do they tell us what makes for either kind of argument, or how we determine when an argument is persuasive without reasoning backwards from an outcome. Thicker constructivist approaches build on the ancient Greek understanding of rhetoric as the language of politics, and consider the most persuasive arguments those that sustain or enable identities. According to Christian Reus-Smit, 'all political power is deeply embedded in webs of social exchange and mutual constitution—the sort that escapes from the short-term vagaries of coercion and bribery to assume a struc-tural, taken-for-granted form—ultimately rests on legitimacy.'[10]

Like thick constructivist accounts, the Greeks focus our attention on the under-lying causes of persuasion, not on individual instances.[11] They offer us conceptual categories for distinguishing between different kinds of argument, and a politically enlightened definition of what constitutes a good argument. The Greeks appreci-ated the power of emotional appeals, especially when they held out the prospect of sustaining identities. More importantly, they understood the transformative potential of emotion; how it could combine with reason to create shared identities; and with it, a general propensity to cooperate with or be persuaded by certain actors.

2.3. PERSUASION AND POWER

We need to distinguish the goal of persuasion from persuasion as a means. As noted above, efforts at persuasion (the goal) rely on the persuasive skills of actors (the means) to offer suitable rewards, make appropriate and credible threats, or marshal telling arguments. Aeschylus, Sophocles, Thucydides, and Plato recog-nize the double meaning of persuasion, and like their modern counterparts, devote at least as much attention to persuasion as a means as they do to it as an end. Unlike many contemporary authorities, their primary concern is not with tactics (e.g. the best means of demonstrating credibility) but with ethics. They distinguish persuasion brought about by deceit (*dolos*), false logic, coercion, and other forms of chicanery from persuasion (*peithō*) achieved by holding out the prospect of building or strengthening friendships, common identities, and mutually valued norms and practices. They associate persuasion of the former kind (*dolos*) with those sophists who taught rhetoric and demagogues who sought to win the support of the assembly by false or misleading arguments for selfish ends. *Peithō*, by contrast, uses dialogue to help actors define who they are, and this includes the initiating party, not just the actor(s) it seeks to influence. *Peithō* constructs common identities and interests through joint understandings, com-mitments, and deeds. It begins with recognition of the ontological equality of all the parties to a dialogue, and advances beyond that to build friendships and mutual respect. *Peithō* blurs the distinction between means and ends because it has

positive value in its own right, independently of any specific end it is intended to serve.

Some of the Greek authors I examine—Sophocles in particular—treat *peithō* and *dolos* as diametrically opposed strategies. This reflects the tendency of Greek tragedy to pit characters with extreme and unyielding commitments to particular beliefs or practices against each other in order to illustrate their beneficial and baneful consequences. I do the same while recognizing, as did the Greeks, that pure representations of any strategy of influence are stereotypes. *Peithō* and *dolos*, like other binaries I describe, have something of the character of ideal types. Actual strategies or political relationships approach them only to certain degree and, in practice, can be mixed.

Sophocles, Thucydides, and Plato consider *peithō* a more effective strategy than *dolos* because it has the potential to foster cooperation that transcends discrete issues, builds and strengthens community, and reshapes interests in ways that facilitate future cooperation. For much the same reason, *peithō* has a restricted domain; it cannot persuade honest people to act contrary to their values or identities. *Dolos* can sometimes hoodwink actors into behaving this way. In contrast to *peithō*, it treats people as means not ends—a Kantian distinction implicit in Sophocles and explicit in Plato. In *Gorgias*, he has Socrates maintain that rhetoric, as practised by sophists, treats others as means to an end, but dialogue treats them as ends in themselves and appeals to what is best for them.

Dolos is almost always costlier in a material sense because it depends on threats and rewards. States whose power is primarily capability-based, and whose influence is largely exercised through *dolos*—the Greeks referred to such a political unit as an *archē*—often felt driven to pursue foreign policies intended to augment their capabilities. Like Athens, they may try to expand beyond the limits of their capabilities. *Peithō*, by contrast, encourages self-restraint.

Dolos is most often a strategy of the powerful, as they have the resources to employ it most effectively. For the playwrights and Thucydides, *dolos* is also associated with the domination of *archē*. Along with violence, it is the quintessential expression of this kind of rule. It can also be used by the weak to subvert the authority of the powerful. In Euripides's *Hecuba*, the Trojan queen Hecuba tricks her enemy Polymestor in order to tie him up. His Medea is at a double disadvantage because she is a barbarian as well as a woman, but triumphs over Jason by means of chicanery.

My analysis points to an interesting and complex relationship between power and ethics. While recognizing that might often makes for right, it reveals that right can also make might. Of equal importance, it provides a discourse that encourages the formulation of longer-term, enlightened self-interests predicated on recognition that membership and high standing in a community is usually the most efficient way to achieve and maintain influence. Such commitments also serve as a powerful source of self-restraint. For all of these reasons, ethical behaviour is conducive—perhaps even essential—to national security.

2.4. ARCHĒ

The Greeks generally used two words to signify power: *kratos* and *dunamis*. For Homer, *kratos* is the physical power to overcome or subdue an adversary from such action. Although fifth-century Greeks did not always make a clear distinction between these words, they tended to understand *kratos* as the basis for *dunamis*. It is something akin to our notion of material capability. *Dunamis*, by contrast, is power exerted in action, like the concept of force in physics.

Archē—rule over others—is founded on *kratos* (material capabilities) and, of necessity, sustains itself through *dunamis* (displays of power). Superior material capability provides the basis for conquest or coercion. Influence is subsequently maintained through rewards and threats. Such a policy makes serious demands on resources, and encourages an *archē* to increase its resource base. Athens did this through territorial and commercial expansion, but even more through the extraction of tribute, which permitted a major augmentation of its fleet.

Archē is always hierarchical. Control will not admit equality, and an authoritarian political structure is best suited to the downward flow of central authority and horizontal flow of resources from periphery to center. Once established, the maintenance of hierarchy becomes an important second-order goal, for which those in authority are often prepared to use all resources at their disposal. Athenians explicitly acknowledged that Melian independence, by challenging that hierarchy, would encourage more powerful allies to assert themselves, which could lead to the unraveling of their empire. The Soviet Union, another classic *archē*, periodically intervened in Eastern Europe for the same reason. Successful *archē* requires impressive material capabilities and also self-restraint. There are diminishing returns to territorial expansion and resource extraction. At some point, further predation encourages active resistance and makes maintenance of *archē* even more dependent on displays of resolve, suppression of adversaries, and the maintenance of hierarchy. All these responses require greater resources, which in turn encourages more expansion and resource extraction. For political, organizational, and psychological reasons, self-restraint is extraordinarily difficult for an *archē*. Hierarchy without constitutional limits or other restraints—the political basis for *archē*—makes it easier to ignore the interests and desires of domestic opinion and client states, isolates those in authority from those whom they oppress, and narrows the focus of the former on efforts to maintain or enhance their authority. Over time, it can produce a ruling class—like Athenian citizens, slave owners in the American antebellum South, the former Soviet *nomenklatura*, or the present day Chinese Communist Party—whose socialization, life experiences, and expectations make the inequality on which all *archē* is based seem natural, and for whom rapacity and suppression of dissent has become the norm.

Thucydides offers the political equivalent of what would become Newton's third law of motion: an *archē* is likely to expand until checked by an opposite and equal force. Imperial overextension—*dunamis* beyond that reasonably sustained by *kratos*—constitutes a serious drain on capabilities, especially when it involves an *archē* in a war the regime can neither win nor settle for a compromise peace

for fear of being perceived as weak at home and abroad. In this circumstance, leaders become increasingly desperate and may assume even greater risks because they can more easily envisage the disastrous consequences to themselves of not doing so. Athens threw all caution to the winds and invaded Sicily, not only in the expectation of material rewards but also in the hope that a major triumph in *Magna Grecia* would compel Sparta to sue for peace. In our age, Austria–Hungary invaded Serbia to cope with nationalist discontent at home, Japan attacked the United States hopeful that a limited victory in the Pacific would undermine resistance in China, and Germany invaded Russia when it could not bring Britain to its knees. All of these adventures ended in disaster.

2.5. PERSUASION

As I noted in the introduction, the ancient Greeks distinguished between persuasion based on deceit (*dolos*), false logic, and other forms of verbal chicanery, from persuasion (*peithō*) based on honest dialogue. *Peithō* is characterized by frankness and openness and it accomplishes its goal by promising to create or sustain individual and collective identities through common acts of performance. As a form of influence, it is limited to behaviour others understand as supportive of their identities and interests. It is nevertheless more efficient than *archē* because it does not consume material capabilities in displays of resolve, threats, or bribes.

The contrast between the two strategies is explored in Aeschylus's *Oresteia*. In *Agamemnon*, the first play of the trilogy, Clytemnestra employs *dolos* to trick her husband, just back from the Trojan War, into walking on a red robe that she has laid out before him. She wraps him up in the robe to disable him so she can kill him with a dagger. In the next play, *Libation Bearers*, Orestes resorts to *dolos* to gain entrance to the palace and murder Clytemnestra and her consort, Aegisthus. In the final play, the *Eumendides*, Athena praises *peithō* and the beneficial ends it serves and employs it to end the Furies's pursuit of Orestes, terminate the blood feuds that have all but destroyed the house of Atreus, and replace tribal with public law (lines 958–74). *Dolos* is clearly linked to violence and injustice. Even when used to achieve justice in the form of revenge it entails new acts of injustice that perpetuate the spiral of deceit and violence. The only escape from the vicious cycles is through *peithō* and the institutional regulation of conflict, which have the potential of transforming the actors and their relationships. This transformation is symbolized by the new identity accepted by the Furies—the *Eumenides*, or wellwishers—who, at the end of the play, are escorted to their new home in a chamber beneath the city of Athens.

Although the trilogy is ostensibly about the house of Atreus and the regulation of family and civic conflict, it is also about international relations. Many of the major characters are central figures in the Trojan War. Helen is married to Menelaus, and her seduction and abduction by Paris triggers the war. Menelaus's honour can only be redeemed by the recapture of Helen and destruction of the

city that has taken her in. Agamemnon, his brother and king of Argos, leads the Greek expedition against Troy. The *Oresteia* opens with his return to Argos after a ten-year absence. In the interim, his wife Clytemnestra has taken Aegisthus, son of Thyestes, for a consort. Among her motives for murdering her husband is his earlier sacrifice at Aulis of their daughter Iphigenia in response to the prophecy that it was necessary to secure favourable winds for the departure of the Greek fleet to Troy.

The curse of the Atridae and the Trojan War are also closely connected in their origins: both are triggered by serious violations of guest friendship (*xenia*), one of the most important norms in heroic age Greece. In Aeschylus's version, the troubles of the Atridae clan begin with Thyestes's seduction of his brother Atreus's wife. This violation of the household is followed by another more terrifying one. Atreus pretends to forgive Thyestes and allows him to return home where he is invited to attend a feast. In the interim, Atreus has murdered two of Thyestes three children and put them in a stew which he then serves to Thyestes. This gives Aegisthus, the surviving son, a motive for seducing Clytemnestra and assisting her in the murder of Agememnon, the son of Atreus. The curse of the Atridae and the Trojan War unfold as a series of escalating acts of revenge. If the curse of the Atridae can be resolved through *peithō* and institutional regulation, this might be possible for the internecine conflicts among the community of Greeks, as they arise from the same causes and are governed by the same dynamics.

Peithō is also central to Sophocles's *Philoctetes*, produced in 409 BCE, five years before Athens's defeat in the Peloponnesian War. Greek tragedy was deeply affected by two decades of war, the plague, the breakdown of Athenian civic culture, and the re-emergence of intense factional conflict. Sophocles and Euripides are less convinced than Aeschylus, writing more than a generation earlier, that reason and dialogue can successfully overcome, or at least, mute conflict. Their plays suggest that civic conflicts are multiple, cross-cutting, and endemic, and correspondingly more difficult to resolve. They nevertheless search for some way of restoring a civilizing discourse in the intensely partisan and conflictual environment of late-fifth-century Athens.

Like many tragedies, the *Philoctetes* is set during the Trojan War. Philoctetes's father had been given Heracles's bow because he had lit that hero's funeral pyre. Philoctetes inherited the bow, and trained himself to become a master archer. En route to Troy, he was bitten in the leg by a snake and left with a foul-smelling, suppurating wound. The resulting stench, and Philoctetes's repeated cries of pain, led the Greeks to abandon him on the island of Lemnos while he slept. After years of inconclusive warfare, the Greeks receive a prophecy that Troy will only be conquered when Philoctetes and his bow appear on the battlefield. They dispatch Odysseus and Achilles's son Neoptolemus to retrieve archer and bow, and the play opens with their arrival on the island.

Odysseus lives up to his reputation as a trickster; he resorts to soft words (*logoi malthakoi*) to persuade Neoptolemus to go along with his scheme to pretend friendship with Philoctetes in order to steal the bow. He does this by creating a seemingly irreconcilable conflict between two important components of his

identity: the honourable man who would rather fail than resort to dishonesty and deceit, and the Greek committed to the defeat of Troy. Odysseus presents his argument at the very last moment, giving Neoptolemus no time for reflection.

Philoctetes is an honourable, friendly, and generous person, with whom Neoptolemus quickly establishes a genuine friendship. When Philoctetes grows weak from his wound, he gives his bow to Neoptolemus for safekeeping, and when he awakes from his feverish sleep is delighted to discover that Neoptolemus has kept his word and not abandoned him. In the interim, the chorus had pleaded unsuccessfully with Neoptolemus to sneak off with the bow. Neoptolemus then half-heartedly tries to persuade Philoctetes to accompany him to Troy on the spurious grounds that he will find a cure there for his wound. Philoctetes sees through this deceit, and demands his bow back. Neoptolemus initially refuses, telling himself that justice, self-interest, and, above all, necessity demand that he obey his orders to bring the bow back to Troy. Philoctetes is disgusted, and Neoptolemus's resolve weakens. Odysseus returns and threatens to force Philoctetes to board their ship, or to leave him on the island without his bow. Odysseus appears to have won, as he and Neoptolemus depart with the bow. However, Neoptolemus, who has finally resolved his ethical dilemma, returns to give back the bow because he recognizes that what is just (*dikaios*) is preferable to that which is merely clever (*sōphos*). Odysseus threatens to draw his sword, first against Neoptolemus, and then against Philoctetes. Neoptolemus refuses to be intimidated, as does Philoctetes, who draws his bow and aims an arrow at Odysseus. Neoptolemus seizes his arm and tells him that violence would not reflect honour on either of them. Philotetes then agrees to proceed voluntarily with Neoptolemus and Odysseus to Troy.

Odysseus fails to grasp the essential truth that our principal wealth is not material, but social and cultural. It consists of the relationships of trust we build with neighbours and friends through honest dialogue, and the communities which this sustains. Odysseus is willing to use any means to accomplish his ends because he lacks any definition of self beyond the ends he can accomplish. He is incapable of interrogating those ends or the means by which they might be obtained. His attempts to exercise power through deceit and threats fail, leaving him something of an outcast.[12] Odysseus comes close to imposing his will on both his protagonists, and fails only because Neoptolemus and Philoctetes have established a friendship based on mutual trust and respect. His emotional attachment puts Neoptolemus back in touch with his true self and the values that make him who he is, and give him the resolve and the courage to return to Philoctetes with his bow, apologize for having obtained it dishonourably, and face down an enraged Odysseus. The emotional bond Neoptolemus and Philoctetes establish also leads Philoctetes to imagine an encounter between himself and Heracles, who tells him that it is his fate to go to Troy with Neoptolemus and there win glory. He agrees to proceed because he too has been restored as a full person through his relationship with Neoptolemus.

Gorgias (circa 430 BCE), described language (*logos*) as a 'great potentate, who with the tiniest and least visible body achieves the most divine works'. When employed in tandem with persuasion (*peithō*), it 'shapes the soul as it wishes'.[13]

Thucydides exalts the power of language and its ability to create and sustain community, but recognizes how easily it can destroy that community when employed by clever people seeking selfish ends. I have argued elsewhere that one of the key themes of his text is the relationship between words (*logoi*) and deeds (*erga*).[14] Speech shapes action, but action transforms speech. It prompts new words and meanings, and can subvert existing words by giving them meanings diametrically opposed to their original ones. The positive feedback loop between *logoi* and *erga*—the theme of Thucydides's 'Archeology'—created the *nomoi* (conventions, customs, rules, norms, and laws) that made Greek civilization possible. His subsequent account of the Peloponnesian War shows how the meaning of words were twisted and transformed to encourage and justify deeds that defied *nomos*, and how this process was responsible for the most destructive forms of civil strife (*stasis*) that consumed Hellas.[15] For Thucydides, *dolos* was an important cause of war. It is pronounced in the opening speeches of the text (1.32–44): the appeals of Corcyraeans and Corinthians to the Athenian assembly to persuade and dissuade it from entering into a defensive alliance with Corcyra.

Words are the ultimate convention, and they too succumb to *stasis* in the sense that civilized conversation is replaced by a fragmented discourse in which people disagree about the meaning of words and the concepts they support, and struggle to impose their meanings on others—as Odysseus did with Philoctetes. Altered meanings changed the way people thought about each other, their society, and obligations to it, and encouraged barbarism and violence by undermining long-standing conventions and the constraints they enforced. Thucydides (3.82) attributes this process to 'the lust for power arising from greed and ambition; and from these passions proceeded the violence of parties once engaged in contention'. Leaders of democratic and aristocratic factions

sought prizes for themselves in those public interests which they pretended to cherish, and, recoiling from no means in their struggles for ascendancy, engaged in the direct excesses; not stopping at what justice or the good of the state demanded, but making the part caprice of the moment their only standard, and invoking with equal readiness the condemnation of an unjust verdict or the authority of the strong arm to glut the animosities of the hour.

Thucydides gives us few examples of *peithō*. Arguably, the most significant is Pericles's funeral oration, which turns a solemn recognition of the sacrifices of the fallen into an uplifting commemoration of Athens and its values, and how they are maintained by the love, sacrifice, and self-restraint of its citizens. Pericles speaks in a forthright manner, acknowledging that the Athenian empire has come in some ways to resemble a tyranny. It nevertheless retains its *hēgemonia* and achieves excellence (*aretē*) by demonstrating generosity (*charis*) to its allies (2.34.5). 'In generosity', he tells the assembly, 'we are equally singular, acquiring our friends by conferring not by receiving favours' (2.40.4). *Charis* encouraged loyalty, self-restraint, and generosity based on the principle of reciprocity. With *philia* (friendship), it was the foundation of interpersonal, civic, and inter-polis relations.

To this point in the argument, I have stressed the beneficial consequences of *peithō* and the negative consequences of *dolos*. Are there circumstances in which *dolos* may be necessary or beneficial, and *peithō* damaging? The ending of *Philoctetes* leaves us with the thought that *peithō* and *dolos* may be usefully combined. Heracles tells Achilles that he cannot capture Troy without the assistance of Philoctetes, but working together like twin lions hunting, they shall overcome Ilium. Philoctetes will use Heracles's bow to kill Paris, Troy's leading warrior, and Odysseus, as readers of Homer knew, would devise the scheme of the 'Trojan horse' to gain the Greeks entry into the City.

Thucydides's Mytilenian debate is sometimes cited as a less ambiguous example of the benefits of *dolos*. In this episode, Diodotus convinces the Athenian assembly not to execute all Mytilenian adult males, but only a limited number of aristocrats who can be held responsible for the rebellion. He openly acknowledges that it is no longer possible to defend a policy in the name of justice; Athenians will only act on the basis of self-interest. He carries the day by using his considerable rhetorical skill to mask an appeal based on justice in the language of self-interest (3.36–49). Modern examples abound. Franklin Roosevelt has been almost uniformly praised by historians for the rhetorically dishonest, but strategically effective, way he committed American naval forces to engage German submarines in the Atlantic before America entered the war. Modelling himself on Roosevelt, Lyndon Johnson campaigned as the peace candidate and promptly exploited an alleged attack on American naval vessels in the Gulf of Tonkin to intervene militarily in Vietnam. As that war ended in disaster, historians condemn Johnson's deception. George W. Bush and his advisors made multiple false claims to gain public and congressional approval for an invasion of Iraq. It is too early to offer a definitive judgement, but it seems highly likely that history will judge Bush's *dolos* at least as critically as it has Johnson's.

Leaders routinely believe that they know better than public opinion what is good for their countries, and feel justified to use *dolos* to achieve their policy goals. Even when their policies are in the national interest, they risk exacerbating the political problem by making the public less responsive to honest, and inevitably more complicated, arguments in the future. Thucydides uses the sequence of Pericles's funeral oration, the Mytilenian and Sicilian debates to track this decline. More often than not, *dolos* is simply a political convenience; leaders use it because it is the only way, or at least the easiest way, of gaining popular support.

Plato's opposition to *dolos* was unyielding for these reasons. He understood that rhetoric was at the heart of politics, and sought to develop dialogue as an alternative to speeches that so easily slipped into reliance on *dolos*. Quite apart from dialogue's ability to produce consensual outcomes through reason, the free exchange of ideas among friends and the give-and-take of discussion had the potential to strengthen the bonds of friendship and respect that were the foundation of community. Plato portrays Socrates's life as a dialogue with his polis, and his acceptance of its death sentence as his final commitment to maintain the coherence and principle of that dialogue. Plato structures his dialogues to suggest that Socrates's positions do not represent any kind of final truth. His interlocutors

often make arguments that Socrates cannot fully refute, or chooses not to, which encourages readers to develop a holistic contemplation of dialogue that recognizes that unresolved tensions can lead to deeper understandings and form the basis for collaborative behaviour.

The Socratic emphasis on dialogue has been revived in the twentieth century, and is central to the thought and writings of figures as diverse as Mikhail Bakhtin, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Jürgen Habermas. Bakhtin suggests that even solitary reflection derives from dialogues with others against whom or with whom we struggle to establish ourselves and our ideas.[16] Habermas's 'critique of ideology' led him to propose a coercion-free discourse in which participants justify their claims before an extended audience and assume the existence of an 'ideal speech situation', in which participants are willing to be convinced by the best arguments.[17] Greek understandings of *peithō* have much in common with, but are not entirely the same as, Habermas's conception of communicative rationality. Habermas puts great emphasis on reasoned argument among equals, and its ability to persuade—an outcome so essential to democracy. *Peithō* values reason, but less for its ability to convince than its ability to communicate openness and honesty. These values help to build the trust and friendship on which the underlying propensity to cooperate and be persuaded ultimately depend.

Gadamer's conception of dialogue is closer to the Greeks. For Gadamer, dialogue 'is the art of having a conversation, and that includes the art of having a conversation with oneself and fervently seeking an understanding of oneself'.[18] It is not so much a method, as a philosophical enterprise that puts people in touch with themselves and others and reveals to them the prior determinations, anticipations, and imprints that reside in their concepts. Experiencing the other through dialogue can lead to *exstasis*, or the experience of being outside of oneself. By this means, dialogue helps people who start with different understandings to reach a binding philosophical or political consensus. Critical hermeneutics in its broadest sense is an attempt to transgress culture and power structures through a radical break with subjective self-understanding.[19]

This framing of persuasion has important implications for the theory and practice of power and influence. In contrast to *archē*, which is created and sustained by violence, threats, and *dolos*, *hēgemonia* is created and sustained by *peithō* and rewards. It is only possible within a community whose members share core values, and is limited to activities that are understood to support common interests and identities. *Peithō* can also help to bring such a community into being. While it is the strategy of influence associated with *hēgemonia*, it is largely independent of material capabilities. However, it can help to sustain those capabilities because it does not require the constant exercise of *dunamis*.

Classical realists like Hans Morgenthau were also aware that power is most effective when least apparent. 'Man is born to seek power', he wrote in his first postwar book, 'yet his actual condition makes him slave to the power of others'.[20] Human beings repress this unpleasant truth, and those who want to exercise power, he wrote, must help them do so. Clever leaders come up with justifications or invoke ideologies that make 'interests and power relations . . . appear as

something different than what they actually are'. Whenever possible, they must convince others who must submit to their will that they are acting in their own interest or that of the community.[21] For all of these reasons, Morgenthau insisted that '[w]hat is required for mastery of international politics is not the rationality of the engineer but the wisdom and moral strength of the statesman'.[22]

2.6. POWER AND ETHICS

In modern discourses, ethics and behaviour are generally considered distinct subjects of enquiry because they are understood to derive from different principles. Many modern realists consider these principles antagonistic; not all the time to be sure, but frequently enough to warrant the establishment of a clear hierarchy with interest-based considerations at the apex. For the Greek tragedians, there was no dramatic separation between ethics and interest. Their writings show how individuals or states that sever identity-defining relationships enter a liminal world where reason, freed from affection, leads them to behave in self-destructive ways. The chorus in *Antigone*, proclaims in the first stasimon (lines 267–9): 'When he obeys the laws and honours justice, the city stands proud...But when man swerves from side to side, and when the laws are broken, and set at naught, he is like a person without a city, beyond human boundary, a horror, a pollution to be avoided.'

Like the chorus in Antigone, Thucydides—arguably, the last of the great tragedians—recognized the extraordinary ability of human beings to harness nature for their own ends, and their propensity to destroy through war and civil violence what took them generations to build. His writings explore the requirements of stable orders, but reveal pessimism about the ability of the powerful to exercise self-restraint. Like Aeschylus, he saw a close connection between progress and conflict. He understood that violent challenges to the domestic and international orders are most likely in periods of political, economic, social, and intellectual ferment.

Thucydides was a friend of Sophocles and Euripides, and wrote what might be called a tragedy.[23] Tragedy in many ways provides the vision of the world that underlies what has come to be known as classical realism. Hans Morgenthau, its preeminent modern exemplar, is very much in this tradition. In the late eighteenth century, German intellectuals turned to tragedy as a model for reconstituting ethics and philosophy. Morgenthau was intimately familiar with the corpus of ancient and modern literature and philosophy. His intellectual circle included his colleague and fellow émigré Hannah Arendt, who had studied with Heidegger, wrote about tragedy and applied its lessons to contemporary politics.[24] Morgenthau came to understand tragedy, he wrote to his British colleague, Michael Oakeshott, as 'a quality of existence, not a creation of art'.[25] His postwar writings, beginning with *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*, repeatedly invoke tragedy and its understanding of human beings as the framework

for understanding contemporary international relations. The principal theme at which he hammers away is the misplaced faith in the powers of reason that have been encouraged by the Enlightenment. But he is equally wary of emotion freed from the restraints of reason and community. 'The *hybris* of Greek and Shakespearean tragedy, the want of moderation in Alexander, Napoleon, and Hitler are instances of such an extreme and exceptional situation.'[26] Although he never used the Greek word, *sôphrosunê* (prudence and self-restraint), his German and English writings and correspondence make frequent use of its equivalents: *Urteilskraft* [sound judgement] and prudence. He offers them, as did the Greeks, as the antidotes to hubris. Tragedy, and its emphasis on the limits of human understanding, also shaped his approach to theory. Like politics, it had to set realistic goals, and recognize the extent to which its vision was shaped and constrained by its political and social setting.

Thucydides and Morgenthau understood that foreign policy at odds with the accepted morality of the age—or at least the community to which actors belong—undermines the standing, influence, and even the hegemony of great powers. The Anglo-American invasion of Iraq might be cited as the latest example of this age-old phenomenon. The national security elite of the United States still considers its country 'the indispensable nation' to whom others look for leadership. Public opinion polls of its closest allies—countries like Canada, Japan, and the countries of Western Europe—indicate that the United States has lost any *hēgemonia* it may once have had, and is overwhelmingly perceived as an *archē*, and one that many people believe is the greatest threat to the peace of the world.[27] In the run up to the invasion of Iraq, it surely behaved as an *archē*; the Bush administration's duplicitous claims about weapons of mass destruction and false claims that the purpose of an invasion was to remove these weapons and introduce democracy to Iraq were a quintessential exercise in deceit (*dolos*). Its subsequent occupation began with efforts to protect only those assets of strategic or economic value to the Bush regime (e.g. the oil ministry and refineries), and was followed by the installation of an American proconsul, unwillingness to share authority with any international organization, and the denial of contracts for the rebuilding of Iraqi infrastructure to companies from countries that had not supported the war. Such behaviour is typical of an *archē* who can no longer persuade but must coerce and bribe; and, Blair's Britain aside, this is the basis of the so-called coalition of the willing.

At least as far back as Homer, the Greeks believed that people only assumed identities—that is, became people—through membership and participation in a community. The practices and rituals of community gave individuals their values, created bonds with other people and, at the deepest level, gave meaning and purpose to peoples' lives. Community also performed an essential cognitive function. To take on an identity, people not only had to distinguish themselves from others but also 'identify' with them. Without membership in a community, they could do neither, for they lacked an appropriate reference point to help determine what made them different from and similar to others. This was Oedipus's problem; because of his unknown provenance, he did not know who he was or where he

Au: Please check the change in the spelling of this word.

was heading. His attempt to create and sustain a separate identity through reason and aggression was doomed to failure.

For the Greeks, this pathology extended beyond individuals to cities. There is reason to believe that Sophocles intended Oedipus as a parable for Periclean Athens. Like Oedipus, Athens's intellectual prowess became impulsiveness, its decisiveness thoughtlessness, and its sense of mastery, intolerance to opposition. Oedipus's fall presages that of Athens, and for much the same reasons.[28] The United States would do well to consider the extent to which the unilateral foreign policies that it has pursued since the end of the Cold War are taking it down the same path as Oedipus and Athens. Its unilateral foreign policies, often accompanied by aggressive rhetoric, have opened a gulf between itself and the community of democratic nations that has previously allowed it to translate its power into influence in efficient ways. Once outside this community, and shorn of the identity it sustained, Washington must increasingly use threats and bribes to get its way, and like Athens and Oedipus, the goals it seeks are likely to become increasingly short-sighted and irrational. If this comes to pass, it will be another tragic proof of arguably the most fundamental truth of politics: that friendship and persuasion create and sustain community, and community in turn enables and sustains the identities that allow rational formulation of interests. In the last resort, justice and power are mutually constitutive.

NOTES

1. An earlier version of this chapter appeared under the title 'Power and Ethics' in a special issue of *Millennium*, 33/3 (2005), on power and international relations.
2. Lebow, *The Tragic Vision of Politics: Ethics, Interests and Orders* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
3. Robert Dahl, 'Power', in David L. Sills (ed.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, Vol 12* (New York: Free Press, 1968), pp. 405–15; Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View*, 2nd edn. (New York: Macmillan, 2004); and Stefano Guzzini, 'Structural Power: The Limits of Neorealist Power Analysis', *International Organization*, 47/3 (1993), pp. 443–78.
4. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: Knopf, 1948), pp. 14ff, 270–4.
5. Guzzini, 'The Enduring Dilemmas of Realism in International Relations', *European Journal of International Relations*, 10 (2004), pp. 533–68.
6. For example, Dahl, 'Power'.
7. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (Washington: Public Affairs Press, 2004); and Nye, 'The Decline of America's Soft Power', *Foreign Affairs*, 83 (May/June 2004), pp. 16–21.
8. Reus-Smit, *American Power and World Order* (London: Polity, 2004), pp. 64–5.
9. Risse, '"Let's Argue!": Communicative Action in World Politics', *International Organization,* 54 (2004), pp. 1–40. On Habermas, see also Ze'ev Emmerich's Chapter 11 in this volume.
10. Reus-Smit, *American Power and World Order* (London: Polity, 2004).

11. For a thick constructivist account, see Martha Finnemore and Stephen J. Toope, 'Alternatives to "Legalization": Richer Views of Law and Politics', *International Organization*, 55 (2001), pp. 743–58.

12. Bernard Knox, *The Heroic Temper: Studies in Sophoclean Tragedy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), ch. 5; and James Boyd White, *Heracles' Bow: Essays on the Rhetoric and Poetics of the Law* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), pp. 3–27.

13. Frg. 82, BII, in Hermann Diels and Walther Kranz (eds.), *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker,* 7th edn. (Berlin: Weidmannsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1956), pp. 8, 13–14.

14. Lebow, *The Tragic Vision of Politics*, ch. 4.

15. James Boyd White, *When Words Lose Their Meaning: Constitutions and Reconstitutions of Language, Character, and Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); and Lebow, *The Tragic Vision of Politics*, ch. 4.

16. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

17. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, 2 vols., trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984–7); and Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1990).

18. Gadamer, 'Reflections on My Philosophical Journey', in Lewis Edwin Hahn (ed.), *The Philosophy of Hans-George Gadamer* (Chicago: Open Court, 1997), p. 33.

19. See also Gadamer, 'Plato and the Poets', in *Dialogue and Dialectic*, trans. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), pp. 39–72; Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd edn., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Crossroad, 1989); and Gadamer, 'Reflections on My Philosophical Journey', pp. 17, 27.

20. Morgenthau, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics* (London: Latimer House, 1946), p. 145.

21. Morgenthau, *Politics in the Twentieth Century*, Vol I of *The Decline of Democratic Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 59.

22. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 3rd edn. (New York: Knopf, 1960), p. 172.

23. Lebow, *The Tragic Vision of Politics*, pp. 126–41.

24. On Heidegger and Arendt, see Chapters 7 and 6 by Spegele and Owens in this volume.

25. Letter to Michael Oakeshott, 22 May 1948, Morgenthau Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., B-44.

26. Morgenthau, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics*, p. 135.

27. Lebow, *The Tragic Vision of Politics*, pp. 314–5.

28. Bernard Knox, *Oedipus at Thebes* (New York: Norton, 1970); and J. Peter Euben, *The Tragedy of Political Theory: The Road Not Taken* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 40–1.