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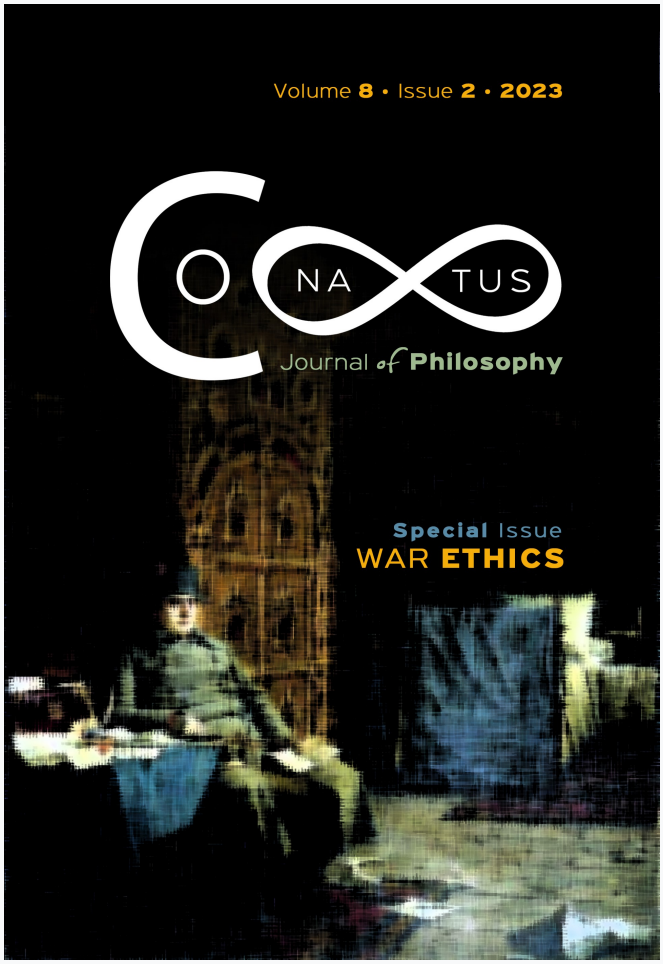

Polis, Loimos, Stasis: Thucydides about Disintegration of the Political System

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Polis, Loimos, Stasis: Thucydides about Disintegration of the Political System

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Abstract

This paper discusses Thucydides' analysis of the disintegration of the political community under the unbearable stress in cases of the plague epidemic in Athens and civil war in Kerkyra. Due attention is paid to Thucydides' methodology: the application of the art of medicine and antilogies. The destruction of the morality, fading away of virtue and neglect of both human and divine laws caused by the enormous fear of plague are presented through contrasting the state of lawlessness to the picture of the ideal order from the famous Pericles' speech in honor of the fallen Athenians. It is being analyzed marked similarity between the state of lawlessness in Athens and the destruction of the political order in stasis in Kerkyra concerning the destruction of the public morality, disappearing of lawfulness, and cancelling of the common good, despite the difference in predominant motivating passions – fear and lust for power, and different ways of corruption of the order in polis – apolitical stance and apathy vs. radical politicization. Finally, it is underlined Thucydides' understanding of repetition of the historical events after the same pattern because of the changelessness of human nature. It is milder in peace and regular ordered state of affairs, so that people are usually sensible and honest, acquire moral stance and embrace lawfulness, whereas when it is exposed to danger and faces the hardest challenges, it loses its considerations and restraints and shows its evil, violent and cruel side.

Keywords: *polis; plague; anomie; stasis; Thucydides*

I. Boccaccio's description of plague

Since Thucydides' description is the only account of that time of the disastrous effects of the plague epidemic which broke out in Athens in 430 BC, its plausibility and especially Thucydides' basic attitude about repetition of events in due course of history because of the sameness of human nature, can be corroborated with larger quotations from the most suggestive literary accounts of the plague epidemic left by Giovanni Boccaccio. Lethality from the plague was very high. An official of the Pope Clement VI estimated in 1351 that in Christian Europe 23.840.000 persons had died from plague for a couple of years, which is 31% from the total number of inhabitants of about 75 million.[1] For comparison with the ancient Athens, the moral and political effects of this epidemic are much more important. According to the testimony of a chronicler of these times, people were aghast, confused, and terrified.

> Father abandoned son, wife abandoned husband, brother abandoned brother because it looked like that plague struck and destroyed with its breath and look and so they died. And nobody could be found to bury the dead either for money or for the sake of friendship.[2]

People were in enormous fright from this apparently inexplicable pestilence for which there was no medicine. Or as the Florentine humanist Francesco Petrarch wrote: "This lucky posterity which will not experience such immense suffering – so that it will consider our testimony as a fairytale."[3]

In his remarkable work *Decameron*, Boccaccio as immediate eyewitness gave his moving account of the dramatic effects of the plague epidemic in Florence in 1348-1349. Then two thirds of the population (more than 100.000) died, among whom there were Boccaccio's father and stepmother and many dear friends. Against this terrible disease, which was, as he skeptically says, doomed by the stars or was provoked by the just wrath of God because of human sins, did not help either the human common sense or the undertaken measures. These measures were cleaning of the town or prohibition that any ill person enters the town or

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[1] Robert S. Gottfried, *The Black Death. Natural and Human Disaster in Medieval Europe* (New York, London, Toronto, and Sydney: The Free Press, 1983), 94.

[2] Ibid., 7.

[3] Francesco Petrarcha, *Selected Letters*, Volume 2, trans. Elaine Fantham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), VIII.

prayers or processions or medical advice or art of medicine. In such desperate circumstances without any hope for rescue, fright and prejudices made people act differently: some would shut in their houses, avoiding any contact with the outer world and not wanting to hear any news about the dead and ill; others indulged in pleasures and fun going from one inn to another day and night drinking immoderately and getting into other people's houses as soon as they would hear that there are things they like and in which they take pleasure. And because everybody, as if driven by death itself, neglected both oneself and one's things, majority of houses became public good, and strangers behaved in them as if they had been their own. However, many steered a middle course without indulging in debaucheries and depriving themselves of food and walks. There were also those who ran away from the town to the country, abandoning their houses and deserting their relatives.[4] Even more fatal effect of the plague in Florence was total lawlessness.

> In this extremity of our city's suffering and tribulation the venerable authority of laws, human and divine, was abased and all but totally dissolved, for lack of those who should have administered and enforced them, most of whom, like the rest of the citizens, were either dead or sick, or so hard bested for servants that they were unable to execute any office; whereby every man was free to do what was right in his own eyes.[5]

And that was the reason why in such state of anomie everything was permitted, including the most loathsome evil. This was conduced first of all by the terror which crept into the hearts of men and women so that brother abandoned brother, uncle abandoned their nephews and sister abandoned brother and wives also often abandoned their husbands. Finally, what was the most terrifying and almost incredible, fathers and mothers abandoned their children, as if they were not theirs, so that they did not even visit them or take care of them. Because of that terrible terror which negated all feelings and erased all considerations, death carried off many people who probably would have survived if somebody had helped them, so that all this produced such a number of those who

[4] Giovanni Boccaccio, "First Day – Introduction," in *The Decameron*, trans. J. M. Rigg (London: 1921), https://www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian_Studies/dweb/texts/DecShowText.php?myID=d01intro&lang=eng.

[5] Ibid.

were dying day after day and night after night.[6] In such inexorable emergency all traditional customs of paying homage to the dead and their burial were abandoned. There were small number of those who were mourned after with pity and there started new custom to laugh, make fun and enjoy. There was almost no deceased whose body was dutifully accompanied to the church, but paid gravediggers took the coffin away to bury it in the first empty grave. Many would die in the streets, and those who would die inside the houses would be carried to the streets in the morning in order to be taken away by the gravediggers. There were also the cases where two or three dead bodies would be put in one coffin together. No one paid homage to the dead either with tears or candles or escort; less care was taken about dying people than about animals nowadays, Boccaccio said. Since sanctified cemeteries were filled, big ditches were being dug and hundreds of the dead were stacked up in them and "piling them up as merchandise is stowed in the hold of a ship." The surrounding country knew no mitigation; for there, in sequestered village, or in the open champaign, by the wayside, on the farm, in the homestead, the poor hapless husbandmen and their families, forlorn of physicians' care or servants' tendance, perished day and night alike, not as men, but rather as beasts. Where, they too, like the citizens, abandoned all rule of life, all habit of industry, all counsel of prudence; nay, one and all, as if expecting each day to be their last, not merely ceased to aid nature to yield her fruit in due season of their beasts and their lands and their past labours, but left no means unused, which ingenuity could devise, to waste their accumulated store. And in the country outside the city, poor peasants would die on the roads, fields and houses, "not like men but like beasts" and

> all, as if they looked for death that very day, studied with all their wit, not to help to maturity the future produce of their cattle and their fields and the fruits of their own past toils.[7]

Inside the walls of Florence – Boccaccio testifies – more than one hundred thousand people had died and many palaces and houses were empty.

The great similarity can be noticed at first sight between Boccaccio's powerful literary account of the plague epidemic in Florence and Thucydides' description of the plague in Athens. In both cases the total breakdown of moral and laws in plague epidemic as well as in *stasis* can

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

be only explained by the fragility of human nature. It was left without any internal controls and restraints when faced with enormous challenges. This again convincingly denies seemingly acceptable interpretation of Donald Nielsen that Athenian citizens, faced with challenges of the plague, behaved so outrageously because public moral in Athens was already corrupted by the imperial policy, where measure and balance had been already denied and justice had been rejected.[8] Plague epidemic led also to profound lasting moral crisis in medieval Europe. All old corporative cooperation and associations were erased. Instead of them, in many cases emerged strong and selfish individualism. In the decades after the plague this individualism mainly tended to self-elevation, leisure, and pleasure. Collective institutions and old communities – rural as well as urban, so characteristic for 12th and 13th century – were shaken and ruined. And old social, religious, and even family relations were loosened.[9]

II. Plague in Athens

In his opening words about the terrible sufferings during the Peloponnesian war, which exceeded all previous wars, beside destruction and devastating of the cities, killing in military collisions and innumerable persecutions and killing in citizen's turmoil, Thucydides spoke about natural disasters, too, which accompanied the war itself, disastrous earthquakes, frequent eclipses of the sun, long droughts and as the climax of sufferings in the gradation of sufferings, he mentioned fatal effects of plague.

> Ancient events that were better established in legend than in experience now seemed less incredible, for there were now violent earthquakes spread through much of the world; eclipses of the sun, which now occurred much more frequently than ever before in memory; terrible regional droughts and the famines they caused; and last but not least, the plague, which caused great harm and great loss of life. All of these things were associated with this war.[10]

In the literature it is noticed that the shown gradation of the sufferings in the Peloponnesian war Thucydides concluded with the characteristic

[8] Donald A. Nielsen, "Pericles and the Plague: Civil Religion, Anomie, and Injustice in Thucydides," *Sociology of Religion* 57, no. 4 (1996): 402-404.

[9] Gottfried, 96-97.

[10] Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, trans. Walter Blanco (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), 1.23.

joint pair of *loimos* (plague) and *limos* (famine) and so he took over the familiar motive from the Greek literary tradition. Rachel Bruzzone interprets that Thucydides did not break with the established tradition, as his description of the war as the historical phenomenon is usually understood but, on the contrary, he deliberately pointed to the specific literary motive. Thus, he put war inside the tradition so that he, with reviving of the ancient pattern, could represent the historical pattern of destruction of the whole society.[11] Joint misfortunes (war, plague, famine), each of which can ruin the city, as a rule go together with the natural disasters (earthquakes, floods, eclipses of the sun) in the literary texts. In the *Iliad* Apollo sent the plague to punish the wantonness of the Greek army; in Hesiod gods sent famine and plague as punishment for committed injustice; in Aeschylus chorus was praying that Argos should not be affected with the plague; in Herodotus famine and plague worked havoc in Crete after the return of the army and the Trojan war. So, the pair *loimos-limos* was already widespread topos in the literary tradition.[12] Thucydides links the natural disasters – earthquakes, eclipses of the sun, long droughts, and plague – with human violence and he underlines this by mentioning the oral tradition about the ancient prophecy which had connected war with the outbreak of plague or famine. He especially points out the simultaneity of war violence and natural disasters, plague, devastating of the fields and dying in the city: "As soon as the Peloponnesians got in, the disease started immediately" – Thucydides says – "with people dying inside the walls and the land outside being laid waste."[13] By establishing this triad *polemos-loimos-limos,* Thucydides not only revives the ancient motive of suffering (*pathemata*), but he also completes it in specific, familiar pattern of war suffering.

The decisive factor which instigated the flaring up of the plague epidemic in Athens at the beginning of 430 BC was besiege of the city by the Spartans and their allies. Since the Athenians as the naval power were much more skillful at the sea battles, but much weaker in the collisions of the infantries, where Spartans were peerless, Pericles convinced the Athenians to leave their fields and houses outside the city walls and with wives and children find refuge inside the city walls, what caused the overpopulation in the narrow space of the city.[14] When the refugees gathered in the city, only a few of them had homes of their own or with family of

[11] Rachel Bruzzone, "Polemos, Pathemata, and Plague*:* Thucydides' Narrative and the Tradition of Upheaval," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 57, no. 4 (2017): 884-885.

[12] Ibid., 889-893.

[13] Thucydides, 2.54.

[14] Ibid., 2.14.

friends while most of them found shelter in the unpopulated parts of the city and in all temples of the gods and chapels of the heroes, everywhere except on the acropolis, in the Eleusinium or in some other sanctuary which was securely locked. Because of the unexpected emergency even the Pelasgic was populated, what was prohibited by some Delphic oracle which under the threat of curse ran like this: "[...] better for the Pelasgic wall to be unused."[15]

The Athenians did not know the cause of plague. The majority of Greeks believed that plague came from Apollo who, according to Homer's words in *Iliad*, sent it to punish the Greeks. So, the Athenians, too, started from the general idea that plague came from the gods, especially (although not necessarily) from Apollo. Sophocles, too, claimed that the origin of plague was divine in his *The King Oedipus*.[16] As if Homer's explanation had been appropriate even for the emergence of plague at the beginning of the Peloponnesian war. Thucydides mentions that Spartans sent their envoys to Delphi to get the advice and permission to enter the war and they were answered that they would win if they fought with all their might and that Apollo would help them.[17] Thus, contemporaries believed that a god had sent them the plague from the Delphi in the form of the divine help to the Spartans. This widespread opinion was confirmed by the fact that the Spartans without fear from the lethal disease continued to ravage Attica although the epidemic had been flaring up both in Athens and in the Athenian army. According to Thucydides, it seems that the disease first began in Ethiopia, and then descended into Egypt and Libya and all of a sudden it attacked Athens infecting at first the people of Piraeus.[18]

The plague epidemic in Athens had been occurring through waves. At first the plague emerged in Athenian harbor in Piraeus in summer in 430 BC. In the first moment there was a suspicion that the Peloponnesians had poisoned Athenian cisterns which was what caused the terrible pestilence. Afterwards, the plague epidemic flared up again in 429 BC when Pericles himself died from it, an information that Thucydides did not mention but it was mentioned later by Plutarch in his description of Pericles' life.[19] The third wave happened in the winter in 427/426 BC.[20]

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[15] Ibid., 2.17.

[16] Lisa Kallet, "Thucydides, Apollo, the Plague, and the War," *The American Journal of Philology* 134, no. 3 (2013): 355; 361.

[17] Thucydides, 1.118.

[18] Ibid., 2.48.

[19] Plutarch, *Lives*, Volume 3: *Comparison of Pericles and Fabius Maximus*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann 1916), 1.1.

[20] Javier Martinez, "Political Consequences of the Plague of Athens," *Graeco-Latina Brunensia*

Thucydides' words about the symptoms of plague and the course of the disease make such strong impression, so that this paragraph became famous both because of the precision and the detailed description of its clinical picture. Such disease, Thucydides says, was worse than it can be verbally expressed, and it pervaded and tormented the ill totally, that it almost exceeded human powers; even birds and quadruped animals, which bit the dead bodies, would die. Getting over the malign disease and watching the others suffering, he describes the unbearable heat and insatiable thirst which made the ill tear apart their clothing, and many, who were not taken care of, jumped into wells. He precisely writes down other symptoms as well, from the redness and swelling of the eyes, throat and tongue and chest pain to visceral abscessation and visible furuncles over the body. He was equally overwhelmed by the desperation and hopelessness of the diseased who have been deserted by their fellow men out of their fear. Many died because of the lack of care, but others died even though they had been carefully taken care of.[21] Thucydides, admittedly, did not state the total number of dead from the plague, but it certainly was huge. For only forty days during the besiege of Potidaea, four thousand hoplites out of one thousand fifty-one died in just forty days.[22] The Athenians had fallen into this misery and in it they suffered with "people dying inside the walls and the land outside being laid waste."[23] It is estimated that the population of Athens was diminished for about one third, but the exact number is unknown.[24] In such trouble the Athenians recalled a prophecy, too, for which the old people used to say that it was of ancient origin: "A Dorian war will come and with it, plague."[25]

In Thucydides' description of the events inside the city during the epidemic, his account of the moral corruption and depravity is strong. This was especially evident and devastating in respect to the treatment of the dead bodies who should have been buried with dignity according to ancient customs and valid laws. As the pestilence had worked havoc without any order, dead bodies were lying one upon the others and half dead people were wandering on the roads and near all springs thirsty for water.

22, no. 1 (2017): 136; Thucydides, 2.47-66.

[21] Thucydides, 2.49-50.

[22] Ibid., 2.58.

[23] Ibid., 2.54.

[24] Jennifer T. Roberts, *The Plague of War. Athens, Sparta, and the Struggle for Ancient Greece* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 84.

[25] Thucydides, 2.54.

> The temples, in which they had pitched tents, were full of corpses because they died even there. Not knowing what was to become of them and completely overwhelmed by the illness, people lost respect for the sacred and the secular alike. Besides, all burial customs, that they used to observe, were thrown into confusion, they buried their dead as best they could. Many resorted to sacrilegious burial methods, for want of appropriate ones, because of the many deaths within their families. For example, they got a head start on people who had built funeral pyres by lighting them and piling on their own dead first, or they would throw the corpse they were carrying onto one that was already burning and go away.[26]

It is not impossible that some parts of his *History* Thucydides wrote after these events had happened so that his eloquence and writing skill caused certain suspicion with later writers that he had perhaps exaggerated in presenting the horrors which had happened in Athens during the plague. Recent archeological excavations in Athens have, however, confirmed the plausibility of Thucydides' account. The massive tomb was found on the ancient cemetery Kerameikos in 1994, dated in the time of the plague during the first years of the Peloponnesian war. This tomb is characterized precisely with neglecting the traditional funeral customs by burning, about which the osteological findings testify in the strata which reveal that the dead bodies were simply thrown one upon another at random.[27]

In order to understand the scale and drama of the moral offence which was caused by such neglect of the traditional funeral rites, it has to be mentioned that these rites had been observed with ancient people since time immemorial. They were amongst the most ancient ones and might be the most ancient rites which had to be observed unavoidably and unconditionally by others; and so, it was in Athens, too. When an Athenian died, women, who were more than sixty years old and in very close kinship with the deceased, would wash the body and anoint it. His body would be dressed in robes especially chosen for this occasion, decorated with flowers and ribbons, and put on an elevated bed covered with black fabric and cushions under the head. The family would keep vigil during which laments were sung. The funeral itself was held two days later so that visitors could have expressed their sympathy and that

[26] Ibid., 2.52.

[27] Robin Mitchell-Royask, *Plague and the Athenian Imagination. Drama, History, and the Cult of Asclepius* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), xii; Martinez, 142.

it would be certain that the deceased had really died. Only then the remains would be carried to their final rest.[28]

The contrast between the traditional funeral rites and Thucydides' narration about handling the dead bodies during plague epidemic shows the terrible sacrilege of simply piling the dead bodies upon others without any rites and without paying homage to the deceased. Thucydides himself underlined this sacrilege when he described the official funeral rite in the first year of the Peloponnesian war:

> That same winter, the Athenians observed an ancestral custom and arranged for the funeral, at the public expense, of the first men to die in the war. They always did it in the following way. Two days beforehand, they would build a tent and lay out the bones and ashes of the dead, and everyone would make whatever offerings he wished to his kin. On the day of the funeral procession, wagons brought in cypress coffins, one for each tribe. There was one empty bier spread with a coverlet for the missing, the men who could not be found and carried away. Any man, citizen or stranger, could attend the funeral; women who were related to the dead were also present, mourning the dead right up to the grave. The soldiers were buried in the national cemetery, which is in the most beautiful suburb of the city [....]. When the coffins are covered with earth, a man who has been chosen by the city for his outstanding reputation and exceptional wisdom delivers a fitting eulogy over the dead.[29]

In this case, according to Thucydides, the man chosen was Pericles of Xanthippus. The unconditional necessity of attendance and following the proper and holy funeral rite can be observed in Sophocles' *Antigone*; the heroine violated the unholy decree of the new ruler of Thebes, Creon, in order to bury properly her brother Polynices, and thus saving his deceased body from becoming food for the vultures. Antigone risked her life and eventually she was incarcerated where she committed suicide. And in doing this she referred to unwritten divine laws which were valid from the times immemorial:

> For their life is not of today or yesterday,
> but for all time,
> and no man knows when they were first put forth.[30]

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[28] Roberts, 84-85.

[29] Thucydides, 2.34.

[30] Sophocles, *Antigone,* trans. Richard Jebb (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1891), 456-457.

How strong and long the impression was, which the plague epidemic left on the citizens of Athens, shows its huge influence on the treatment of these characteristic motives in tragedies. Thus, Euripides' *Hippolytus* is interpreted as a drama about the plague, too, and as such it is full of metaphors about disease, rites to prevent the plague and famine and allusions of Asclepius, the god of healers. Sophocles' *The King Oedipus* and *Trachinian Women* were written during or immediately after the epidemic, so that its influence is visible in both dramas. The metaphoric talk about the disease and *stasis* in Athens, which is strongly expressed in Euripides' dramas, was continued in the following decades. Euripides has taken over the picture of the sick city from Sophocles, but whereas Sophocles' Thebes is the sick city because the plague is a realistic threat, Euripides uses this metaphor to depict *stasis*, which is a state of strife and civil war. The influence of Thucydides' work on poetry is doubtless. Although in the paragraph about *stasis* in Kerkyra he still does not designate *stasis* as *nosos* (disease), he characteristically does use the expressions which are connected with the state of disease. Thus, the metaphor of the sick city has been more and more present and stronger in the Athenian literature as the political unity grew weaker. However, the tragedy itself has become a form of healing the sick city, too. Immediately, several years after the plague had decreased approximately one quarter to one third of the city's population, the Athenians erected Aesculapion, the temple of the god the healer, beside the Dionysian theatre.[31]

III. Thucydides' method

The crucial idea in Thucydides' account of the plague in Athens is the concept of anomie which at the same time denotes the destruction of the legal and political order as well as moral disarray and depravation. They led to outburst of unbridled and selfish individualism, the sickness of the city which is almost identified with the state of *stasis*. But, before we start to clarify extremely important and far-reaching concept, we should say something about Thucydides' method.

To understand Thucydides' method, his introductory remarks are especially important. At first, he said that he had quoted the speeches as it looked like to him that the individuals on such occasions would have said them and that in doing so, he had respected the whole meaning of the real speeches. But, immediately after that, he stressed that he always researched as accurately as possible every single deed in which he had

[31] Mitchell-Royask, 105; 122-128.

taken part in and those he had heard from others. At the same time, he expressed his hope that those people, who wish to explore accurately both the past events and those events which would happen again in the same way or similarly, according to human nature, would be satisfied. Finally, he expressed his judgment about history he had written, too: "My work was composed not as a prizewinning exercise in elocution, to be heard and then forgotten, but as a work of permanent value."[32] And in the so-called second introduction, Thucydides explained that he, after his commandment at Amphipolis, spent twenty years in exile outside his country, and that he was present at events on both sides and so he, now in peace, was all the better able to understand them.[33] The very manner in which Thucydides judged the events which he had described mostly reminds us of the procedure which was applied in medicine, the top science in that time. Exploration of the physical or biological world in the era of the 'Greek enlightenment' in fifth century BC was concentrated on close, minutest observation of nature from which ensued the rational analysis and drawing the conclusions from the observed phenomena. Thucydides used that method when he studied the brute facts from the human history. He especially used that method when he analyzed the destruction of the political order in the plague epidemic and in *stasis*. It was very consistent with the approach in medicine. This also holds true for his discussion of the pathology of the political life together with singling out of the characteristic phenomena as symptoms, ascertaining the essence or important properties of the observed phenomena as this is performed when diagnosing and following up of the course of disease like showing that the clinical course of disease is identical with the manner of writing medical treatises. From an experienced physician from that time, with the complete knowledge of the previously recorded cases, it was expected to tell apart the symptoms of one disease from the other, to recognize the variants of the symptoms of the same disease with various patients as well as the different stages of the progressing disease. A disease which is manifesting on different places and in different times will not be identical in every particular case, so that capable physician can recognize the similarities without paying attention to superficial variants.[34]

While discussing the disastrous effects of the plague epidemic or of a *stasis*, Thucydides, having as a model medical *tehne,* describes the beginning, conditions, and circumstances of the destruction of the political or-

[32] Thucydides, 1.22.

[33] Ibid., 5.26.

[34] Jonathan J. Price, *Thucydides and Internal War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 14-15.

der in a similar way and, as the destruction spread and got deeper, he also uses the expressions which the physicians used to describe the progressing of the disease. The misfortunes and suffering caused by the sickness of the city or of *stasis* will be – according to Thucydides – fiercer or milder and they will be different in its form depending on the given circumstances. But the variations in external manifestations of this political and moral disease should not deceive an experienced observer.[35] Thucydides not only successfully applied the adequate to medicine methods on the discussing of the political phenomena in the manner of the medical *techne*, but he also showed that he had appropriate medical knowledge, too. The details of his description of the plague, the pathognomonic symptoms, and also the progressing and especially the whole course of the disease confirm this. He did that, as he stresses, to enable us to recognize it easier even in the future:

> [...] I will say what it was like and how, should the disease ever strike again, someone who gives an examination may have some prior knowledge of it and not fail to recognize it. I give this description having been sick myself and having myself seen others who suffered from the disease.[36]

Thucydides shows the drastic psychological and social effects of the epidemic after the description of the disease. They are very similar to the pathology of the *stasis*, but of course, with some essential differences. But before that, we should show how his method, alongside with the application of the medical *techne,* comprises the discussion of the political phenomena with the antilogies, too, which was the characteristic manner taken over from the treatises of the sophists.

IV. The contrast between the characters of the Athenians and Spartans – passions and extravagance vs. discipline and moderation

Thucydides identifies as the essentially true cause of the Peloponnesian war the one mentioned last. This is the fact that the Athenians became great power which has intimidated the Spartans and so forced them to wage war.[37] But before giving the description of the starting of the war itself, Thucydides thought that he should show the characteristic traits both of the Athenians and the Spartans.

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[35] Ibid., 15.

[36] Thucydides, 2.48.

[37] Ibid., 1.23.

The Corinthians discussed the true cause for the former on the meeting of the allies in Sparta. According to them, the Athenians are innovators and perspicacious authors of the new ideas which they also put into practice. They are also bold beyond their strength, daring beyond their better judgment and optimistic in the direst straits and they act without any hesitation. They put their bodies into the service of their city and they use their mind to do something for their country. If they fail to achieve their goals, they consider that they have lost what already belonged to them, whereas if they go after it and get it, they treat it like a trifle in comparison with what is to come. They enjoy little of what they have because they are always getting something new and thinking that simply doing their duty is a holiday, and that a quiet idleness is no less a chore than boring work. The advantage of the Athenians was also that their feats made them invent new things, whereas the established legal order is the best only when the state is in peace.[38]

The Athenian envoys, who had already been in Sparta, thought that it would be useful that they address the Spartans, too. According to them, they were constrained to develop their empire into what it is today, i.e., the most powerful, under the influence of fear, desire for respect and finally of gain because it was appropriate to human nature to attain the supreme power by complying with the most important instincts: ambition, fear, and gain. And even more important is that they were not the first who did it, but it is from time immemorial that the strong shall rule the weak. And it is the reason why they think that they deserve to rule, what the Spartans, too, had thought until they started considering their own interests. And now Spartans refer to justice, which no one, who has taken something by force, has ever respected or what kept one, if he was handed the chance to get something by force, from getting more. Finally, the Athenians added that they should be praised, those who succumbed to the drive, which is appropriate for states to strive, to rule over others and who are growing more and more just than their sheer power asks from them.[39]

The Spartan character was described by Archidamus, their king. First of all, he rejected the objection that Spartans were slow and cautious because these properties were proofs of their wise moderation thanks to which they were the only ones who did not become arrogant when they were successful, and they also gave way less in times of misfortune. Besides, they are brave warriors and sensible men precisely because of their moral strictness; their common sense is mostly established by the sense

[38] Ibid., 1.70-71.

[39] Ibid., 1.75-76.

of shame, whereas the spiritual balance ensues from the sense of disgrace. They are sensible because they are brought up to respect the laws always and to be always too much disciplined in order not to submit to them. He concluded his speech with an observation that men are not so much different and that the best man is he who has been trained in the hardest school. And the Spartans are precisely such persons.[40]

Thucydides has stressed the basic opposition of the sides in war in these three speeches, where he has contrasted the character of the Athenians to the character of the Spartans: extravagance vs. moderation and unbridled passions vs. strict discipline. Alongside the speech of Corinthians about the character of the Athenians, Thucydides puts forward his key method, too – that human passions are the strongest motivating drives of historical events. It should be mentioned here that in his account of the *stasis* in Kerkyra, the imbalance would be precisely the characteristic expression.

V. The contrast between the ideal order and a state of anomie

It is extremely important that Thucydides' detailed account of the state of the complete moral disarray and anomie during the later plague epidemic in Athens ensues immediately after the quotation of the renowned Pericles' speech in praise of the fallen Athenians. In that way he has used the splendid antilogies to contrast the ideal political order with the state of moral depravation and complete lawlessness. In Donald Nilsen's interpretation, the strong contrast between the idealized picture of the Athenian culture, values and virtues from Pericles' speech and the breakdown of moral order in the city during the plague epidemic should show that the plague had only made evident that Pericles' description of the spirit of the constitution and way of life, which had made Athens great, was only an ideal picture from the ancient past of the city; that picture had disappeared long ago along with the vanishing of the characteristics of balance, measure, and harmony due to the imperialism, which was the real cause of the moral depravation, as the famous Melian dialogue has shown. According to him, Thucydides' understanding of the disastrous effect of the plague in Athens remained within the conceptual framework of the understanding of the *miasma*, the moral contamination, which was the true cause of the disastrous pestilence.[41]

In the available historical sources and writings there are no reliable evidence that Pericles really had held that funeral speech. It is plausible, having in mind Pericles' character and political role, that Thucydides him-

[40] Ibid., 1.84.

[41] Nielsen, 397-404.

self wrote it in order to present his political ideal and show at the same time in what Athens was superior and what was the basis of its supremacy in comparison with numerous other city states in Greece.[42] Or, according to the words of Jacqueline de Romilly:

> Therefore, we could accept that after the defeat Thucydides interpolated in his work this long and thought-provoking paragraph which was, without any apparent need, wholly dedicated to the glory of Athens and Pericles and which disclosed completely the supporting of the reliable and vivid ideals, embodied in that great statesman.[43]

With his splendid literary style Thucydides delineated with broad strokes this great political ideal and immediately after that he contrasted it with the absolute moral breakdown and negation of laws in the state of anomie. First of all, he singled out power because Athens was the only one among all those states which "proves stronger than its reputation," so that even its enemies are aware of the justness of their defeat and its subjects of worthiness of its rule. That is why Pericles could say that Athens, offering great proofs and evidences of its power, would be the object of admiration both with present and future generations because its citizens with their bold feats "have forced the earth and all its seas to make way before our daring, establishing an eternal memory everywhere of the vengeance we have taken and the good that we have done," and that such country is worthy of all troubles experienced and all lives sacrificed for it.[44]

Beside the political and military power, Thucydides' Pericles underlines the supremacy of the Athenian spirituality and culture. "We [the Athenians] love nobility without ostentation and we have a virile love of knowledge."[45] Above all, he stresses the wholehearted dedication of its citizens to the common good and those who do not participate in public life are considered as useless. Making decisions about state affairs by themselves, they discuss everything, so that their supremacy comes both from their courage and their deliberation, whereas their understanding

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[42] Kosta Čavoški, *Power and Supremacy: Thucydides' Political Thought* [in Serbian: *Moć i prevlast. Tukididova politička misao*] (Belgrade: Catena Mundi, 2015), 109.

[43] Jacqueline de Romilly, *Thucydides and Athenian Imperialism*, trans. Philip Thody (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963), 147.

[44] Thucydides, 2.41.

[45] Ibid., 2.40.

of virtue is rooted in their conviction that they are free people.[46] The greatness of the city is based in the valid political system and virtue of the citizens, whereas the advantage of the Athenian democracy is in the rule of the majority which embraced the equality before law, respect of merit and uplifting in accordance with worthiness.[47] Precisely, this is the reason why Athens has become "the school of Greece."[48]

The basic political value, which completely vanished in the state of anomie due to the moral breakdown, was behavior in accordance with the valid laws. According to Pericles, the Athenians did not violate the established order mostly from awe and obedience to officials and laws, and especially to those laws which, although they are unwritten, bring the overall censure to those who violate them. The essential value of the Athenian political order was moderation and balance. And to attain them, temperance is of extreme importance because it corrects too big wealth and removes too big poverty, so that all citizens have equal access to public positions which are obtained thanks to abilities and acquired experience.[49] Finally, Thucydides' Pericles, while praising readiness of the citizens to the greatest sacrifice for the common good, whose basis is the free decision which is based in the sense of honor and awareness of duty, once and for all stressed the principle that happiness lies in freedom, and freedom in courage.[50]

Immediately after Pericles' speech, ensues the account of the appearance of the plague in Athens and its terrible effects which sharpens utterly the opposition between ideal and depraved order, rule of law and the state of anomie, i.e., well organized *polis* and *stasis*.

The fundamental motivating force of destruction and fading away of values was the outbreak of profound and unbridled fear. That fear, which totally subjugated the common sense of many citizens, destroyed all checks and controls, firstly the sense of shame. "Either people stayed away from one another out of fear and perished alone (and many households were left empty for want of any one to care for the sick)."[51] Thus, the plague at first loosened all social bonds, from family ties and relations of friendship to basic value of civic belonging on which the society is based. Taken by the fear and indifferent to their personal reputation, they yielded

[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid., 2.37.

[48] Ibid., 2.41.

[49] Ibid., 2.37.

[50] Čavoški, 110-114.

[51] Thucydides, 2.51.

to excessive pleasures and this yielding to passions and momentary pleasure "wherever it came from, that was now the good and the useful."[52]

With the moral disarray and vanishing of the basic virtue of moderation, the balance disappeared, which was for Pericles the essential political value and the most important property of the spirit of the Athenian constitution. And while the outbreak of the uncontrolled passions erased the sense of honor and negated the awareness of duty, the unbridled egoism destroyed the commitment and dedication to the common good, which is precisely this civic virtue and fundamental trait of the public life on which, as it was underlined in Pericles' speech, the state order was based.

The lawfulness and piety disappeared with the destruction of the morality and fading out of the virtue; Thucydides says that "the plague initiated a more general lawlessness in the city" and people "were becoming more and more indifferent to the laws, both profane and sacred," and all legal determinations and religious norms were "fundamentally shaken." And since people "could not be bridled either by the fear from gods or human laws," the plague epidemic in Athens caused big lawlessness. This is the most fatal situation in state which he will call *anomia*.[53]

VI. Stasis in Kerkyra

At the very beginning of his *History*, Thucydides gives an inkling that "this war between Athens and Sparta actually was the greatest war there has ever been."[54] The Peloponnesian war, in contrast to the Trojan and Persian wars, had the marked traits not only of external but internal civil war, too, because it was waged mostly among Greeks as the united people who shared, according to Herodotus, the same language, the same blood, the same gods and temples, the same sacrifices and customs.[55] Thanks to his extraordinary spiritual strength, Thucydides was able not only to disclose the nature of this internal political war but also to think and think through the depravation of the political.[56]

Stasis, the civil war, was an important subject of literary treatments in tragedies in ancient Greece. So in *Eumenides* Aeschylus presented the

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[52] Ibid., 2.53.

[53] Ibid., 2.52-53.

[54] Ibid., 1.21.

[55] Herodotus, *Histories*: *The Persian Wars,* Volume 4*, Books 8-9*, trans. Alfred Denis Godley (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann, 1969), 8.144.

[56] Karl-Heinz Volkmann-Schluck, *Political Philosophy, Thucydides, Kant, Tocqueville* [in Croatian: *Politička filozofija, Tukidid, Kant, Tocqueville*] (Zagreb: Naprijed, 1977), 15.

reason and persuasion as the only proper means for solving the conflicts inside the *polis* and thus the goddess Athena warned the Erinyes not to instigate the wrath of the citizens and push the city into the fratricidal war,[57] so that they themselves express the hope that there will never be upheavals and strives in the city and that there will never be spilt blood of the citizens and then they praise the concord stressing it as a salvation which will overcome all dangers to which the city could be exposed and that only concord may keep the state safe.[58]

Because of its far-reaching importance, *stasis* was the subject of interest not only of the historians and tragic dramatists but also of the most renowned political philosophers. Plato in his *Republic* explains that external war and internal rebellion have two names so that there are two states appropriate with each of these kinds of collision, too. The former is the strife among citizens and fellow tribesmen, and the latter is the conflict between foreigners and various tribes.

> [...] Now the term employed for the hostility of the friendly is faction (*stasis*), and for that of the alien is war (*polemos*) [...]. We shall then say that Greeks fight and wage war with barbarians, and barbarians with Greeks, and are enemies by nature, and that war is the fit name for this enmity and hatred. Greeks, however, we shall say, are still by nature the friends of Greeks when they act in this way, but that Greece is sick in that case and divided by faction, and faction is the name we must give to that enmity.[59]

Aristotle discussed the internal upheavals and strives in the similar way. They are caused by different views about what the constitution (*politeia*) should be like, i.e., the form of the political order. And since the civil wars flared up precisely during the Peloponnesian war, Aristotle explained their causes in this way:

> And constitutions of all forms are broken up some times from movements initiating from within themselves, but sometimes from outside, when there is an opposite form of constitution either near by or a long way off yet possessed

[57] Aeschylus, *Eumenides*, trans. Herbert Weir Smyth (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), 863-865.

[58] Ibid., 976-980.

[59] Plato, "Republic," in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, trans. Paul Shorey, eds. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 470b-d.

> of power. This used to happen in the days of the Athenians and the Spartans; the Athenians used to put down oligarchies everywhere and the Spartans democracies.[60]

With great sense not only for chronology, which is inevitable in the historical writings, but also for composition of his History, Thucydides shows first of all the civil war in Kerkyra. He has described it with details and a lot of thorough thinking, having seen in it the prototype of all later civil wars which flared up in many *polises* during the Peloponnesian war, including this one in Athens. That made Finley to make a judgment that *stasis* was an endemic phenomenon in the Hellenic world in those times until the cities were the autonomous political communities.[61] Thucydides' idea was to form the abstract model of *stasis* as a historical phenomenon by discussing the civil war in the example of Kerkyra, in order to make it serve as a diagnostic prototype which would enable the observers to understand the nature of civil war and recognize it in the future. And as the battle at Mantinea represents the pattern of the Greek way of waging war, so Thucydides, too, has understood *stasis* as a phenomenon which will repeat in the same or similar manner in the same or similar form as long as human nature remains the same.[62] That is why Thucydides' analysis of the *stasis* in Kerkyra is "his most complete, most focused and most thorough discussion about the historical truths."[63] For Thucydides it was an opportunity to put forward not only the mere historical facts, military collisions between the opposed sides, violent takeover of power and cruel revenges to the opponents, but also the state of mind in civil war, the nature of strife inside the depraved political community and the phenomenon of the moral breakdown, destruction of legal and political order and dissolution of society.

The occasion for the civil war in Kerkyra was the intention of the conspirators to change the war alliance by takeover the power because the party of the democrats was allied with Athens, while the oligarchic party was for the alliance with Sparta. After the cohort of the oligarchs, armed with swords, had slaughtered the members of the Council, after the bloodthirsty struggles on the city streets and squares, the Democratic party won and the horrible bloodshed ensued, so that no rescue from the revenge was possible, not even in the sanctuaries in the temples.[64]

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[60] Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann, 1944), 1307b.

[61] Moses I. Finley, *The Use and Abuse of History* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1975), 129.

[62] Price, 13.

[63] Finley, 129.

[64] Thucydides, 3.70-75.

> One saw every imaginable kind of death, and everything that it is likely to take place in situations like this did, in fact, take place – and even more. For example, fathers killed their sons; people were dragged from the temples and slaughtered in front of them; some were even walled up in the temple of Dionysus and left to die.[65]

Such cruelties and horrors of civil war, Thucydides warns, are done and "always will be for so long as human nature remains the same"[66] which is in different circumstances more cruel or milder.

> In times of peace and prosperity both cities and individuals can have lofty ideals because they have not fallen before the force of overwhelming situation, whereas war is a 'harsh teacher' which provokes in men passions which are adequate for the violent and cruel circumstances.[67]

Thucydides writes down succinctly the phenomena of vanishing of the morality in the public life. In fanatical party conflicts ruthless insolence is more appreciated than common sense, aggressive behavior is met with trust and skill in making plots and intrigues with respect, whereas plotting of misdeeds and instigation to evil are being praised. The close cousin is more alien than the follower from the same party and people do not join the parties to promote the common good but out of love for power. Mutual trust is not inspired by divine law, but it is based on common violation of laws. Solemn oaths are worthless, and revenge is as sweeter as trust is more betrayed.[68] This moral breakdown destroyed the very bases of every society: family ties, mutual trust of the citizens and sense of belonging to the same social community, to the same *polis*.

The cause of this utter moral breakdown, Thucydides concludes, "was power pursued for the sake of greed and personal ambition, which led in turn to the entrenchment of a zealous partisanships," public interest and common good are considered as sheer phrases. Unbridled ambition has scorned legal limits and it was always ready to abuse the judicature and

[65] Ibid., 3.81.

[66] Ibid., 3.82.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Ibid.

did not observe piety.[69] He clearly sums the far-reaching pathology of *stasis*: getting around of all laws, both human and divine, and corruption of judicature which led to negation of lawfulness, disappearing of legal protection, and loss of trust in religious sanction, which are the bases of the legal order of state.

The final effect of all this was the manifestation of the worst properties of human nature, in Kerkyra as well as in the whole Hellenic world because of the series of the civil wars and the outburst of the most abject passions which led "to every sort of depravity imaginable."[70] Thucydides writes down the cruel revenges of those "who had been governed more by caprice than by prudence," the ruthless robberies in order to plunder, but also "implacable savagery" which people show only because they are "overwhelmed by wild passion."[71] His ending of the paragraph about *stasis* is very telling:

> As people's lives kept pace with the tumultuous changes in the city, human nature came to predominate over the laws; human nature, which habitually breaks law anyway, showed itself in its purest form as eager to be above the law, as the enemy of all authority. If it were not, if people were not insane with malice, they would not have placed revenge above piety, and self-interest above justice. In taking revenge on others, people annul the common laws of mankind, which are the hope of everyone who falters and would find safety, leaving nothing behind for the time when they are themselves in danger and have need of them.[72]

All these disastrous effects of civil war led to prevailing of the people with perverted and depraved character who could be easily made to kill bestially and commit abject crimes. That is why Thucydides could say that war changed the way of manifesting of human nature and that it was the teacher of violence (*biaeos didaskalos*), i.e., 'harsh teacher' which made people go to the extreme of their violence and wrath.[73]

That is exactly the difference between *stasis* in Kerkyra and the plague epidemic in Athens. Whereas war was the teacher of violence in Kerkyra,

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[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid., 3.83.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid., 3.84.

[73] Čavoški, 127-131.

in Athens it was the plague.[74] Nevertheless, there was destruction of public morality, vanishing of virtue and negation of lawfulness. The important similarity is in that, as Robert Connor singled out, "in both cases *logos* was overpowered," implying with *logos* reason which should govern human and divine things. And not only the *logos* was overpowered, but it was also destroyed and turned into a means of violence, too.[75]

VII. Contrasting *loimos* – *stasis*

The parallel between Thucydides' description of the moral disintegration of society in the plague epidemic and the description of the pathology of *stasis* was pointed out in the literature early.[76]

There is marked similarity in neglecting both human and divine laws and in outburst of lawlessness, which Thucydides, precisely while showing disastrous effects caused by the plague epidemic in Athens, referred to with the concept of *anomia*:

> In addition to this, the plague initiated a more general lawlessness in the city. People dared to indulge more openly in their secret pleasures [...]. No one was willing to persevere in received ideas about 'the good' because they were uncertain whether they would die before achieving it. Fear of the gods? The laws of man? No one held back, concluding that as to the gods, it made no difference whether you worshipped or not since they saw that all alike were dying; and as to breaking the law, no one expected to live long enough to go to court and pay his penalty. The far more terrible verdict that had already been delivered against them was hanging over their heads – so it was only natural to enjoy life a little before it came down [...].[77]

The Athenians have scorned all legal and religious dams which would bridle and restrain them. That has been caused by fear from imminent death from plague which has erased both the sense of shame and fear from legal penalty or divine sanction. The throwing away of all restraints of law and piety in the civil war in Kerkyra was caused, as Thucydides says,

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[74] Price, 29-30.

[75] Robert W. Connor, *Thucydides* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 244-245.

[76] Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, Volume 1: *Archaic Greece*, trans. Gilbert Highet (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1939), 396-397; Price, 28-29.

[77] Thucydides, 2.53.

by the outbreak of the unbridled passions, greed, ambition, and – above all – enormous lust for power.

Orwin pointed to this difference in prevailing passions which equally led to anomie.[78] According to Thucydides' profound understanding of human nature, in difference from Athens, in which fear had the disastrous impact because of the plague and war troubles, in Kerkyra the rational fear, based on the moral scruples and the sense of shame, would be precisely benevolent. Pericles spoke, encouraging the low-spirited Athenians, that the political life in the polis depended on hope and fear. If our trust in hope is low, although it is the strongest in emergency than fear, based on common sense, can be lifesaving. Precisely based on this skill to restrain people implanting fear in them or supporting hope, the order in Athens – although nominally a democracy – was, in fact, "the domain of its foremost man."[79]

However, there was a marked difference in opposite ways of disintegration of the city, in those extremes between which there is every moderate political order. In *stasis* there is radical politicization of the political life which manifests in fanatical partisan disorganization which breaks the family and social ties, rejects all conventions and moral scruples, and does not stop at crime. But the plague leads to complete apolitical attitude and apathy, which causes the abandoning of the public life and all care is dedicated exclusively to oneself.[80] But for both cases the egoism is characteristic, either it is the personal egotism which in enormous fear from plague makes persons abandon their beloved who are left alone to die, or bare egoism of the exclusive party interest which is greedy for revenge and power. The enemy is invisible in the case of the plague, it is mysterious and unattainable, so the answer is escape into momentary pleasures and apathy; in civil war the enemies are also our own fellow citizens and fellow tribesmen and when the fighting for power starts. The only question is who will be the first to attack and who will suffer the defeat and revenge, which lead to radical politicization in which those, as Thucydides says, who shunned political parties were destroyed by both either because they did not join them or from sheer malice.[81]

Both the personal egotism and party egoism have erased the public interest in its own way, so that both indifferent apolitical stance and fanatical extreme politicization equally led to negation of the common

[78] Clifford Orwin, "Stasis and Plague: Thucydides on the Dissolution of Society," *The Journal of Politics* 50, no. 4 (1986): 841, 843.

[79] Thucydides, 2.62; 2.65.

[80] Orwin, 843-844; Čavoški,133.

[81] Thucydides, 3.82.

good. Both in the plague epidemic in Athens and the civil war in Kerkyra there were corruption and destruction of all social institutions, political, legal, and religious, and the loss of sense of belonging to one *polis* and dedication to common good, which have dissolved the very political community itself, and this was caused by the moral breakdown and vanishing of the lawfulness. Moreover, the shibboleths of the common good were understood cynically as mere words.

In the parallel plague-*stasis* another similarity is very characteristic, too: the changing of the meaning of usual words in public discourse, which manifests the confusion of ethical concepts, what Thucydides clearly noticed and succinctly accounted. He has only alluded to this confusion of the moral concepts in the paragraph about the plague in Athens when he has written down that it was considered as *good and useful* everything which caused the momentary pleasure and offered enjoyment and he further worked out this motive in his account of *stasis* in Kerkyra:

> People even changed the accepted meanings of words as they saw fit. 'Foolish boldness' came to be considered a 'courageous devotion to the cause;' 'watchful waiting' became 'an excuse for cowardice.' 'Prudence' was a 'mask for unmanliness,' and 'a jack of all trades' was 'a master of none.' Being 'beside yourself with rage' was posited as 'part of the human condition,' and 'thinking things over' to 'be on the safe side' was 'a glib excuse for a cop-out.' The lover of violence was 'semper fi,' and the man who challenged him a 'subversive.' If you plotted against someone and got away with it, you were 'smart,' and you were even more 'brilliant' if you saw plots coming. But if you planned ahead so as to have no fear of plots and counterplots, you were a 'traitor to the party' and 'panicked by the opposition.'[82]

Such changes in language and meaning of particular words led to undermining of all social institutions because the language is the lifeline of all communities where people live together, so that its changes ruin all forms of common life. However, this was only external indicator of the things which had been happening in the core of the political and legal order. The real cause of its destruction was the greed to have more at the expense of others (*pleonexia*) and the insatiable ambition (*filotimia*).[83] And while the outburst of these passions in political life caused the evident loss of measure and

[82] Ibid., 3.82.

[83] Price, 59, 64.

balance, distortion of the meanings of words, which was only the reflection of the confusion of ethical concepts, only more and more obscured the difference between virtue and vice and relativized both good and bad.

Thucydides' forcible account of the radical change of the meanings of some words in *stasis* made strong impression on his contemporaries, too. Plato was among them, too, who, it is true, in different context, thus accounted the conversion of one meaning into another which the supporters of democracy do:

> [...] and naming reverence and awe 'folly' thrust it forth, a dishonored fugitive. And temperance they call 'want of manhood' and banish it with contumely, and they teach that moderation and orderly expenditure are 'rusticity' and 'illiberality,' and they combine with a gang of unprofitable and harmful appetites to drive them over the border. [...] and in celebration of their praises they euphemistically denominate insolence 'good breeding,' license 'liberty,' prodigality 'magnificence' and shamelessness 'manly spirit.'[84]

Preoccupied with the mysteries of human nature, Thucydides discloses them precisely in extreme circumstances when, faced with dangers and the hardest challenges, it reveals itself even in its evil aspect, which is usually hidden. Such ordeals were the plague or the abyss of the civil war. He found out that human nature was capable both of good and bad. In peace and safety, it is milder, so that people are usually reasonable, they control their passions with common sense, they reveal themselves as honest and noble people and adopt moral stance. In times of peace and safety it is milder so that as a rule people are sensible, they control their passions with their common sense, they show themselves as honest and noble and they embrace moral stance. In violent and dangerous circumstances, however, it is crueler, because it is completely overwhelmed with passions in emergency, the more so as its position is more hopeless, so that people are capable of the most ferocious and worst misdeeds.[85] He was convinced that it is the truth which holds true for all times because human nature itself is unchangeable in its deepest core. Thus, he could say both that he had written about the things which had happened and which would happen again in the same or similar way in accordance with the human nature.[86]

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[84] Plato, *Republic*, 560d-561b; Čavoški, 136-137.

[85] Thucydides, 3.82, 3.84.

[86] Ibid., 1.22.

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