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THUCYDIDES' HYPOTHESES ABOUT THE PELOPONNESIAN WAR

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In hindsight disastrous events often seem both inevitable and yet, paradoxically, escapable. Thucydides' *History* conveys just such a contradictory impression. In the words of one critic: "As in a tragedy, one feels the working of deeper forces, yet is aware at the same time that had certain seeming accidents not taken place, the outcome could have been averted."[1] The purpose of this paper is to examine those passages in the *History* in which Thucydides uses explicit contrary to fact conditional sentences to state that events in the Peloponnesian war might have happened differently. No complete study or even list of these hypotheses has ever been attempted.[2] These statements, however, are significant because they confirm the impression of tragic paradox in the *History* and provide new evidence about Thucydides' attitude to the war and his conception of history. Study of patterns in the list of 19 passages below, moreover, suggests that we might discover his implicit hypotheses and biases also in other passages which share similar elements of diction, style, and context but where no conditional

[1] John H. Finley, *Thucydides* (Cambridge, Mass. 1942) 203–4.

[2] See, however, K. J. Dover, "Thucydides' Historical Judgement: Athens and Sicily," *PRIA* 81 (1981) 231–38. Dover, in the course of elucidating 7.42.3 (see 15. below), refers to it as "among the half dozen most substantial might-have-beens," which he numbers at "twenty" in all in the *Histories* (232), but he does not list them. I believe I have found 19 "substantial might-have-beens," and if, as Dover does, I were to include "rhetorical" hypotheses and those not referring to the Peloponnesian war, the total number would be at least 32 (see below, note 6). My research, however, confirms that Dover is correct to support the authenticity of 7.42.3, which had been called an interpolation by E. C. Kopff, "Thucydides 7.42.3: An Unrecognized Fragment of Philistus," *GRBS* 17 (1976) 22–30. L. C. Pearson, "Thucydides as Reporter and Critic," *TAPA* 78 (1947) 37–60, esp. 49, cites 4 of Thucydides's hypotheses. More recently, see T. Krischer, "Die Rolle der irrealen Bedingungssätze in der Geschichte des griechischen Denkens," *Glotta* 57 (1979) 39–61. Krischer's topic, however, is more general than mine, encompassing also present contrary to fact, future less vivid, and also many conditions which are not hypotheses but deductions (e.g., Thucydides 1.10.2 as "Gedankenexperiment" [40]). Also, Krischer gives only highly selective examples ("einige Beispiele" [41]), citing, in fact, none of the Thucydidean hypotheses I list below and, for example, only 5 of the 28 historical hypotheses I have identified in the *Iliad* (see below, note 14). Similar is the approach of F. Solmsen, *The Intellectual Experiment of the Greek Enlightenment* (Princeton 1975) 225–40, esp. 235 ("Past History"). Solmsen too concentrates on "deductive" hypotheses.

sentences occur and no latent judgment by the author has been suspected. The 19 occasions on which Thucydides explicitly hypothesizes about the Peloponnesian war are:[3]

1. 2.18.4: If it had not been for the procrastination of Archidamus, the Athenians would have left more goods outside their walls for the Peloponnesians to plunder (ἐπελθόντες ἂν διὰ τάχους πάντα ἔτι ἔξω καταλαβεῖν).
2. 2.77.5: The Peloponnesians attempt to take Plataea by using fire against its bulwarks, and if a wind had come up the city would not have escaped (οὐκ ἂν διέφυγον).
3. 2.94.1: At the beginning of winter (93.1) a wind (καί τις καὶ ἄνεμος αὐτοὺς λέγεται κωλῦσαι) frustrates a Spartan naval raid on the Piraeus by night (93.4). a) If they had not hesitated, however, they could have taken Salamis and sailed into the harbor (ὅπερ ἄν, εἰ ἐβουλήθησαν μὴ κατοκνῆσαι, ῥᾳδίως ἐγένετο). b) No wind would have held them back (καὶ οὐκ ἂν ἄνεμος ἐκώλυσεν).
4. 3.74.2: In street fighting at Corcyra, the oligarchical partisans set fire to some houses, and the city was in danger of being utterly destroyed if a wind had come up (ἡ πόλις ἐκινδύνευσε πᾶσα διαφθαρῆναι, εἰ ἄνεμος ἐπεγένετο τῇ φλογὶ ἐπίφορος ἐς αὐτήν).
5. 3.75.4: If the Athenian general Nicostratus had not held them back, democrats on Corcyra would have killed some of their opponents (διέφθειραν ἄν).
6. 3.82.1: If there had been peace in the Hellenic world there would have been no pretext for political parties to call allies from outside the city to their aid (οὐκ ἂν ἐχόντων πρόφασιν οὐδ' ἑτοίμων παρακαλεῖν αὐτούς).
7. 3.113.6: If the Acharnanians and Amphilocians had been willing to follow the advice of Demosthenes, they could easily have seized Ambracia ('Αμπρακίαν μέντοι οἶδα ὅτι...αὐτοβοεὶ ἂν εἷλον).
8. 4.54.3: If Nicias had not negotiated terms with the Cytheraeans, the Athenians would have expelled them (ἀνέστησαν γὰρ ⟨ἂν⟩ οἱ 'Αθηναῖοι Κυθηρίους) because they were Lacedaemonians and because of the strategic position of their island.[4]
9. 4.78.3: If local governments had been democratic instead of monarchical, Brasidas could never have crossed Thessaly (οὐκ ἄν ποτε προῆλθεν).
10. 4.104.2: It is said (λέγεται) that Brasidas could probably have taken Amphipolis even earlier (εὐθύς... δοκεῖν ἂν ἑλεῖν), if his army had not turned to plundering the vanquished.
11. 4.106.4: If Thucydides' ships had not arrived so quickly, Brasidas would also have captured Eion by dawn (ἅμα ἕῳ ἂν εἴχετο).
12. 5.5.3: The Locrians would not have made peace with Athens (οὐκ ἐσπείσαντο 'Αθηναίοις, οὐδ' ἂν τότε) if they had not had difficulties with other wars.
13. 5.73.1: The Athenians at Mantinea would have suffered more (μάλιστ' ἂν τοῦ στρατεύματος ἐταλαιπώρησαν), if they had not had cavalry.

[3] Unless otherwise noted, I quote throughout the Oxford text of H. Stuart Jones (1942).

[4] This hypothesis implies that if Nicias had been more forceful, control of Cythera would have benefited Athens in the war. The vulnerability of the Peloponnesus to an enemy controlling Cythera was well known (Herodotus 7.235.2–3).

14. 6.61.2: At Athens theories of a Peloponnesian conspiracy held that if those implicated in the mutilation of the Hermae had not been arrested, the city would have been betrayed (προδοθῆναι ἂν ἡ πόλις).
15. 7.42.3: a) Demosthenes did not want to delay (διατρίβειν) as Nicias had done, for the Syracusans would never even have had time to send for Peloponnesian reinforcements (οὐδ' ἂν μετέπεμψαν), if Nicias had attacked them at once. b) The Syracusans thought they could handle him alone, and by the time they could have realized their inferiority (ἂν ἔμαθον)... c) they would have been already encircled (ἀποτετειχισμένοι ἂν ἦσαν). d) If they had sent for help once encircled, it would have been too late (ὥστε μηδ' εἰ μετέπεμψαν ἔτι ὁμοίως ἂν αὐτοὺς ὠφελεῖν).
16. 8.2.1–4: a) The Athenians would have attacked the Peloponnesians (κἂν ἐπὶ σφᾶς ἕκαστοι ἐλθεῖν) if they had won in Sicily. b) Danger would have threatened the Peloponnesians (περιέστη ἂν αὐτούς), if the Athenians had prevailed in Sicily.
17. 8.86.4–5: a) If Alcibiades had not restrained the fleet from sailing on Athens, the enemies of Athens surely would have occupied Ionia and the Hellespont immediately (σαφέστατ' ⟨ἂν⟩ 'Ιωνίαν καὶ 'Ελλήσποντον εὐθὺς εἶχον).[5] b) No one else could have dissuaded them from doing this (ἄλλος μὲν οὐδ' ἂν εἷς ἱκανὸς ἐγένετο κατασχεῖν τὸν ὄχλον).
18. 8.87.4: a) If Tissaphernes had been resolute, he could have ended the war (διαπολεμῆσαι ⟨ἂν⟩ ἐπιφανεὶς δήπου οὐκ ἐνδοιαστῶς). b) He could have given an earlier victory to Sparta (κομίσας γὰρ ἂν Λακεδαιμονίοις τὴν νίκην κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς ἔδωκεν).
19. 8.96.4: a) The Peloponnesians could have sailed against the Piraeus if they had been bolder (εἰ τολμηρότεροι ἦσαν, ῥᾳδίως ἂν ἐποίησαν). b) If they had attacked or besieged the city they would have caused more stasis within it (διέστησαν ἂν ἔτι μᾶλλον). c) They would have forced the Athenian fleet to come to the rescue (ἠνάγκασαν ἄν). d) Practically the whole Athenian empire would have fallen into their hands (ἂν ἦν αὐτοῖς).

I have excluded hypotheses which do not concern the Peloponnesian war and those in speeches, and I have omitted hypotheses which are mere rhetorical flourishes or logical twists and not true speculations about the past. Excluded, for example, is Thucydides' rhetorical statement that "no one, before it happened, would have believed" (πρὶν γενέσθαι ἠπίστησεν ἄν τις ἀκούσας), the good morale at Athens in the dark days immediately after the Spartans fortified Decelea (7.28.3).[6] Thucydides occasionally uses past contrary to fact conditions to make deductions about the past—that Agamemnon must have had a large navy, for example (1.9.4), or that Hippias must already have been tyrant when Hipparchus was murdered (6.55.3). These deductive hypotheses also fall outside my study because they reconstruct what happened in the past rather than speculate on how the past might have been different.[7] On the other hand, I have

[5] I adopt here the reading of Dobree.
[6] The excluded hypotheses concerning events other than the Peloponnesian war are: 1.9.4, 11.2; 3.89.5; 6.2.4, 55.3. The other rhetorical hypotheses similarly excluded are: 1.102.1; 5.68.2; 6.31.5; 7.28.3, 44.1, 51.1, 55.2; 8.66.5.
[7] For another example of a hypothesis excluded because it is deductive, cf. 1.102.2: Thucydides describes how the Spartans call for Athenian help in their siege of Ithome, "because it was becoming clear to them" (ἐφαίνετο) that they

included as explicit speculations a few passages which lack minor grammatical features of past contrary to fact conditions.[8] Finally, in 1., 10., 14., and 16., I include speculations attributed to others where Thucydides only reports an opinion with which he agrees, and the hypotheses follow the gist of others he makes directly in his own persona. I include 14. even though Thucydides seems to believe the prevailing Athenian opinion about a Peloponnesian conspiracy was false. Thucydides wants to convey the precariousness of an Athens rife with rumors: If there had been a conspiracy, it would have succeeded. In sum, though occasional subjective judgements have been necessary, I do not believe the patterns which emerge from the list and which I discuss below would be altered by adding or subtracting a passage or two.[9]

The length of this list may surprise those who think of Thucydides as a reserved writer, who lets the facts speak for themselves. On the other hand, the

themselves were greatly lacking in siegecraft, "for otherwise they would have taken the place by force" (βίᾳ γὰρ ἂν εἶλον τὸ χωρίον). First, I exclude this passage because he attributes the hypothesis to the Spartans and does not seem wholly to agree with their reasoning. The Spartans in this case use conditional speculation only to arrive at a present conclusion—a conclusion perhaps limited by their Laconic dullness ("If we had sufficient technical skills to capture Ithome ourselves, we would have done so by now") rather than to frame an instructive hypothesis about the past ("We should have learned better siegecraft"). It is tempting to see (as does Solmsen, above, note 2) such scientific or pseudo-scientific deductions as significant events in the early history of applied logic, emerging from the sophists' lecture halls and courtrooms. Of the sophistic passages I have studied, however, only Antiph. *Tetralogy* 2 2.5 comes close to fitting my definition of a historical hypothesis. Deductive hypotheses, on the other hand, are common in Herodotus (e.g., 2.43.3; 5.45.1, 86.1 cf. Thucydides 3.89.5) and earlier (e.g., Xen. Fr. 38; Heracl. *Frag.* 99 [D.-K.]). Cf. Krischer (above, note 2). Eur. *Med.*, begins with a counterfactual speculation expressed as a wish (that the Argo had never sailed, indeed never been built [1–13]) and presents in the agon Medea's implied speculation that her tribulations might have been avoided had Jason possessed a visible χαρακτήρ (516–19). Jason counters with speculations about obtaining offspring without women (573–75). Cf. Eur. *Suppl.* 484–85. I see no necessary connection between these rhetorical or deductive hypotheses and the historical speculations of Thucydides. Similarly, we would not look to contemporary academic publications in the field of applied logic to elucidate James Thurber's charming story "If Grant Had Been Drinking at Appomatox" (in *Thurber Carnival* [New York 1945] 140–42).

[8] Thus, for example, in 4., I take ἐκινδύνευσε...διαφθαρῆναι as tantamount to διεφθάρη ἄν, and I understand a genitive absolute participle in 6. as standing for the imperfect used with ἔχω in past counterfactual conditions.

[9] Though I have eliminated hypotheses in speeches from formal consideration here, none of them violates and many reinforce the patterns studied below. E.g., 4.27.5, in the reported speech of Cleon, alludes to the dilatoriness of Nicias. The hypotheses in speeches are not numerous, are largely rhetorical (as we would expect), and where they concern the past, concern the more remote past of the Persian wars or the establishment of Athens' empire. The others: 1.74.4, 75.4, 76.1 (Athenians); 2.89.4 (Phormio); 3.39.5 (Cleon); 5.46.3 (Athenians); 7.13.1 (Nicias' letter), 7.66.1, 68.2 (Gylippus).

list may seem short to those who believe virtually every word in the *History* conveys the author's passion. Only a comparison of Thucydides' hypotheses with those of other authors can reveal both how noteworthy and how remarkably numerous Thucydides' hypotheses are. Also, such a comparison allows us to answer questions about the grammatical patterns which Thucydides' hypotheses follow or avoid. First, the nature of a conjecture depends greatly on whether the independent and main clauses are positive or negative and on the order of the clauses. In terms of its literary effect, there may be a significant difference between a speculation expressed, for example, as "Then y, if x" and the same speculation expressed as "If x, then y."[10] Second, we will examine the type of contingent event (the protasis) on which each hypothesis depends. In the hypothesis "If x, then y," what is the nature of "x"? Is it external, an accident which affects men, or internal, a trait or force of will within men which causes them to act in a certain way? Third, what is at issue in the hypothesis (the apodosis)? In the hypothesis, "If x, then y," is "y" a minor incident in a battle, the battle itself, or a whole war? Finally, if the hypothesis concerns a whole war, even indirectly, does the hypothesis contemplate a victory for the side we know was defeated or only a more expeditious triumph for the eventual victors?

If we take account of the several passages in my list involving multiple speculations, we have a total of 29 hypotheses in Thucydides' *History*. I can find only 9 comparable examples in Herodotus' *Histories*, a substantially longer book, and only one of these examples, the famous speculation about what would have happened if Athens had Medized (7.139.3), actually concerns Xerxes' invasion.[11] Herodotus, however, wrote about a different kind of war and

[10] The logician sees the counterfactual condition as a form of syllogism to be broken down into its constituent parts. See, e.g., R. M. Chisolm, "The Contrary-to-fact Conditional," *Mind* 55 (1946) 289–307; N. Goodman, "The Problem of Counterfactual Conditionals," *Journal of Philosophy* 44 (1947) 113–28. Philosophic work on conditionals concentrates on hypotheses in an imaginary world, e.g., "If that piece of butter had been heated to 150^{r} Fahrenheit, it would have melted," and not hypotheses about actual historical events. For a linguist's account accessible to the nonspecialist, see W.-P. Funk, "On a Semantic Typology of Conditional Sentences," *Folia Linguistica* 19 (1985) 365–413 (with extensive bibliography).

[11] It seems that Herodotus 7.139.3 reflects a topic of conversation current at Athens after the Persian wars (cf. Thucydides 1.74.4, 75.4, 76.1, 77.3, 6). The other historical speculations I identify in Herodotus are: 1.91.5, 170.1–2; 3.15.2, 25.5, 49.1; 4.140.2; 5.48; 8.30.2. In analyzing Herodotus' hypotheses I have applied the same criteria as for Thucydides (eliminating speeches, etc.) but have included those dealing with any political or military event, not just Xerxes' invasion of Greece. I do not include 7.120.2 (the Abderites would have been ruined if Xerxes' army, after having dinner, had stayed on to breakfast the next day) because it is a joke, not a hypothesis. H. Kleinknecht, "Herodot und Athen," *Hermes* 75 (1940) 241–64, esp. 244–45 and note 3, cites a mixture of rhetorical, scientific, and historical hypotheses (including 5 from my list above). I am unconvinced, however, by his attempt to prove that 7.139.3 shows the influence of Ionian medicine and science. On Herodotus 7.139.3 see now N. Demand,

not from personal experience. Perhaps he did not feel so free, it also might be argued, to speculate about events in the distant past. On the other hand, Thucydides' stress on the possibility of a different outcome in battle (10 of the 19 passages and 14 of the 29 hypotheses) might reflect his recent and personal experience of the particular uncertainties of the Peloponnesian war rather than any innate predisposition to speculation. Indeed, in this war the combatants often violated the fixed and predictable etiquette of hoplite warfare by fighting, contrary to custom, at night, in bad weather, or in winter.[12] Of the 19 passages from my list above, 9 in fact refer to irregular fighting, e. g., guerilla tactics, street battles, or surprise attacks (2., 3., 4., 5., 6., 7., 9., 10., and 14.). Moreover, 6 passages describe fighting or troop movements which took place wholly or mostly at night (2., 3., 4., 10., 11., and 14.). Nevertheless, I have not found a single hypothesis about the past in Xenophon's continuation of Thucydides' unfinished work, down to and including the final defeat of Athens in 404, an occasion if ever, one would imagine, for thinking back speculatively to the moments when Athens still seemed to have a chance to win. Xenophon was perhaps too unimaginative to think of alternatives, but neither does Aristophanes explicitly hypothesize about the war, even in the parabases of the most political plays.[13] In sum, when compared with these other authors and even given the character of the Peloponnesian war, Thucydides' hypotheses are remarkably numerous and for that reason alone worthy of study.

The only author whose use of hypotheses compares in frequency with that of Thucydides is Homer. By applying to the Trojan war the same criteria used in selecting significant past counterfactual conditionals in the *History*, I have identified 28 comparable hypotheses in the *Iliad*.[14] We must turn to the model of these Homeric hypotheses in order to clarify the patterns which emerge in

"Herodotus' Encomium of Athens: Science or Rhetoric?" *AJP* 108 (1987) 746–58, which she was kind enough to show me in a prepublication version.

[12] See W. K. Pritchett, *The Greek State at War, Part 2* (Berkeley, 1974), Chapter 8 "Surpise Attacks." Pritchett points out that there was no Greek word for "ambush." His tables show that on the rare occasions when attacks were made during the noon break for lunch and a siesta they were never, so far as our sources tell us, unsuccessful.

[13] Thus there evidently did not prevail at Athens during and after the war a pervasive counterfactual, "if only" feeling such as that we might identify in certain elements of German society in the closing days of World War II and after. See, however, the excellent discussion of Edmond Lévy in *Athènes devant la Défaite de 404; Histoire d'une crise idéologique* (Paris, 1976) esp. pp. 29–55, "La disculpation: La défaite et la guerre." Lévy shows that the Athenians often attributed their loss to treason or chance, but he cites no past counterfactual statements by Thucydides or any other author. See also above, note 11.

[14] 2.155–56; 3.374; 5.22, 679–80; 6.72–76; 7.104–8, 273; 8.90–92, 130–34, 217; 11.310–12, 504, 750–52; 12.290; 13.676, 723–25; 15.121–27, 459; 16.687, 697–98; 17.319–21, 530–32, 613–14; 18.165; 20.288–91; 21.211–14, 544–45; 22.202. I exclude hypotheses in speeches, those concerning the funeral games for Patroclus, and the common rhetorical formula, "So they would have wept on, had not night intervened," e.g., 23.154; 24.713, cf. *Od.* 9.220 and the charming variation at 23.241.

Thucydidean hypotheses. The possibility that Thucydides may have been influenced by Homer's hypotheses is not at issue here, though we know Thucydides studied his Homer closely.[15] A comparison of hypotheses in the *Iliad* and the *History*, proves useful simply because they are two long narratives of war in which an appreciable number of hypotheses occur. In fact, however, Thucydides' independence from Homer's style of framing hypotheses, which the ensuing analysis demonstrates, further marks his own style of speculation as a significant peculiarity of the *History*.

First, let us compare the grammatical patterns of Homeric and Thucydidean hypotheses. Homer's hypotheses, as we might expect, follow a formula. In 26 out of 28 cases in the Iliad, the apodosis comes first, and in 24 of the 28 the apodosis is positive and the protasis negative.[16] The overwhelming pattern is thus: "Then y would have happened, if x had not happened." Homer tells us, for example, of the fight for the body of Patroclus: "Then Hector would have carried off the corpse and won deathless honor, if the windswift messenger Iris had not rushed to Achilles...and addressed winged words to him: 'Rouse yourself, son of Peleus...'" (18.165–70). Here Homer imagines for a moment that something which did happen (Achilles rescued the body of Patroclus) did not happen. When Homer puts the apodosis first and makes the protasis negative, we hear of the dreaded or desired potential result first and before the benign or hostile agency which averted it. The result is a moment of artificial suspense in an otherwise predictable narrative. The success of this formula in creating the desired literary effect accounts for its inclusion in the poet's repertoire, where it all but crowds out every other possible arrangement.[17] Furthermore, this kind of "protasis negative" speculation requires much less creative supposition than the "protasis positive" form, in which we imagine *ex nihilo* the occurrence of an event that did not happen.[18]

Thucydides' hypotheses virtually never follow the grammatical pattern we find in Homer.[19] The predominant grammatical arrangement in the *History*, (20

[15] Thucydides both combed the *Iliad* as a source of information, e.g., for the complement of a Boeotian ship (1.10.4) and studied it as a rival book whose poetic account of a lesser war will be eclipsed by his own factual account of a greater one (2.41.4).

[16] Exception to the apodosis first rule: 16.687 (If Patroclus had heeded Achilles' warnings, he could have escaped death). Exceptions to the protasis negative, apodosis positive rule: 11.504; 12.290; 16.687. Thus 16.687 is a particularly interesting "hapax," which perhaps reveals Homer's departure from the traditional style of presenting Patroclus.

[17] The formula also occurs, though less frequently in the *Od.*: 5.426–27, 436–37; 24.528.

[18] We may even suppose that this unsophisticated form of counterfactual condition was the first articulated by primitive man and from it all others developed. Certainly, in my experience as a teacher, the counterfactual condition is one of the last to be mastered by students learning a foreign language or their own.

[19] Only one (13.) follows the Homeric pattern exactly, and since it deals with an arid tactical question, even this example could scarcely be considered Homeric. Only two others (12., 17a.) have the suspenseful arrangement of apodosis first. The interlocking word order of 1. makes it difficult to classify, but the order of

out of 29 cases) is the "protasis positive," most strongly speculative form: "If x had happened, then..." Thucydides' hypotheses are thus remarkable not only for their sheer number but for their high degree of speculation. Thucydides' hypotheses about the weather, usually the wind, reveal in particular his sensitivity to possible alternative sequences. If a gale force wind had sprung up and played a role in delaying a battle or destroying ships, we could expect Thucydides to consider what might have happened in the absence of such a storm, using the Homeric "protasis negative" form. But Thucydides chooses to hypothesize, particularly in cases where there was no wind, on what might have happened if there had been a storm or even a breeze. So, for example, when the Spartans attempt to capture Plataea by fire, Thucydides speculates that "If a wind had sprung up, the city would not have escaped" (2.). In a more complex example, Thucydides describes how, early in the war, a Spartan fleet sails to make a surprise night attack on Salamis and the Piraeus. He reports that a wind, "it is said," λέγεται (2.93.4), makes the Spartans timid and they turn back. Thucydides comments on these circumstances with a double hypothesis: "If the Spartans had not held back, they could have seized Salamis, and no wind would have held them back" (3.). Thucydides casts doubt upon the existence of the wind—did the Spartans perhaps invent it to excuse their abortive mission?—but then hints that even a wind stronger than the one the Spartans reported would not have held them back if they had shown any enterprise.

Thucydides' speculations do not in general create suspense, but emotion of a different sort does color these passages. Someone, for example, may have thought anxiously, at the time of the siege of Plataea: "If a wind should spring up, we would be doomed." In retrospect, this anxiety has become, for Thucydides, a hypothesis ("If a wind had sprung up..."), and yet a ghost or afterimage of the original anxiety or worry remains. In contrast, Homer's suspense is a literary device, uncolored by the poet's personal feelings, because he speculates about remote events—even though he may have thought them historical. Homer's hypotheses can scarcely be taken literally, for there never was a time at which, for example, Teucer's bowstring had a chance of not breaking as he took aim at Hector (15.459). Homer knows and we know that Hector must survive to be killed later by Achilles. Moreover, no one worried about Teucer's bowstring before it broke. The perspective from which Thucydides frames hypotheses is far more immediate than Homer's, for we know the historian felt either the very anxiety which his hypotheses reflect or something akin to it.

Second, let us compare the protases in Thucydidean and Homeric hypotheses: What is the nature of "x" in the formulation "If x..."? Some Thucydidean contingencies are external events beyond human control. I have already noted the 6 passages in which nighttime occurs as one of the attendant circumstances. In 3 of of these "night" passages, fire and wind also play a role (2., 3., and 4.). Fire, wind, night, and the weather in general thus constitute a significant pattern in the external contingencies about which Thucydides'

thought is clear: "If Archidamus had not delayed, the Peloponnesians would have gained."

hypothesizes. These elements may not always be explicitly specified as the crucial factor, but their importance is clear. In 3., for example, the uncertainty of naval operations at night obviously played a key role in dissuading the Spartans from pressing their attack on the Piraeus even though it is the wind which Thucydides mentions at that point. Also, Thucydides uses hypotheses about the past only to comment on minor external contingencies of the war such as the weather, not such major events as the death of Pericles, for example, or the recall of Alcibiades. When Thucydides concentrates on minor external contingencies he increases our impression of the fragility and thus unpredictability of events, which even a slight breeze may deflect.[20]

In another group of hypotheses, however, the "if" clause depends upon the personalities of those involved rather than on external factors. In 11 passages the speculation hinges upon the timidity or decisiveness of a group or individual (1., 3., 5., 6., 7., 8., 10., 11., 14., 18., 19.). The timidity of Nicias and the decisiveness of Brasidas account for 4 of these 11 (8., 10., 11., 14.), and Brasidas also plays a part in a fifth passage (9.). Thucydides perceives that history is not totally dependent on such unpredictable factors as the wind. Given Brasidas' character, for example, we may be able to predict his actions, or at least understand them in retrospect. Moreover, Thucydides allows human factors to count more than uncontrollable circumstances, not only in total number of conditional sentences but in individual examples where both kinds of contingency are involved. Thucydides makes clear that the extreme cautiousness of the Spartan character—and not any wind—was the crucial factor in their failure to attack the Piraeus.[21]

Purely external events never provoke Homer to speculate as they do Thucydides. Events often depend on the whim of a god, who intervenes at a crucial moment (in 15 out of 28 cases), but this intervention almost never takes the form of a direct action which could otherwise only be explained, as in Thucydides, as pure chance or beyond human control.[22] In 25 out of the 28 cases a god intervenes only to change the mind of a character or suggest a course of action and not to affect events directly. Homer thus focuses on the psychology of his characters, divine or mortal, rather than on the events which befall them. The poet asks himself, in other words, what would have happened

[20] See H.-P. Stahl, *Die Stellung des Menschen im geschichtlichen Prozess,* Zetemata 40 (Munich 1966).

[21] Using the terminology of J. B. Bury in a thoughtful essay titled "Cleopatra's Nose" first published in 1916, we may say that Thucydides shows a preference for "mixed" contingencies which, because they can be explained, belong to the "logical development" of history. In *Selected Essays* (Cambridge 1930, repr. Amsterdam 1964) 60–69, esp. 67–68.

[22] Only two of Homer's hypotheses, the breaking of Paris' chin strap by Aphrodite (3.374) and the breaking of Teucer's bowstring by Zeus (15.459), depend on such pseudo-external circumstances. The other cases where Homer hypothesizes about a god's intervention are: 2.155–56; 5.22; 8.130–34, 217; 11.750–52; 12.290; 15.121–27; 16.697–98; 18.165; 20.288–91; 21.211–14 (I take Scamander to be a god), 544–45; 22.202. Perhaps the poet exploits the natural tendency of men to blame some supernatural force when their plans go awry.

if someone had not decided to do something. Moreover, in the normal pattern the contingency rests not upon the whim of a single individual but upon one person—often it is a god—encouraging a second to act or even to encourage a third to act. For example, Hector would have killed Nestor if Diomedes had not encouraged Odysseus to help (8.90–92). But Homer does not explain interventions by the particular or consistent personality of the individual. Diomedes encourages Odysseus at 8.90–92, but at 11.310–13 it is Odysseus who exhorts Diomedes to act.[23] Thus the contingencies upon which Homer's speculations depend, whether they involve gods or men, seem more literary conceits than serious attempts to identify the crucial contingency in an event or to consider alternative sequences of events in the Trojan war.

Finally, in the formulation "If x, then y," what is the nature of "y"? Given the contingencies we have examined above, what kinds of consequences proceed from them in Homer and Thucydides? Only one of Homer's hypotheses actually speculates on an alternate outcome to the war as a whole, defeat for the Argives or the Greeks' abandonment of the siege. When the Achaeans, prompted by Agamemnon, joyously clamor to abandon Troy, Homer says: "Then a return home for the Argives would have been accomplished contrary to fate [ὑπέρμορα], if Hera had not addressed Athena and said..." (*Il.* 2.155–56; cf. 3.373–75). This singular (and perhaps wickedly comic) example, however, only underlines how in Homer the only alternative outcome regularly considered is a quicker victory by the Greek side, either the return of Helen or the sacking of Troy. Indeed, the *Iliad* threatens to end almost before it begins in a trial by combat between Menelaus and Paris, for a victory by Menelaus, the injured party, would have decided matters in favor of the Argives. In none of Homer's hypotheses, however, does he seriously intend to consider alternative outcomes. He succeeds, rather, in creating a moment's suspense for an audience familiar with the story by pointing out the hair's-breadth by which events might have turned out differently.

It is not surprising that Thucydides' hypotheses sometimes (as in 7., 8., 9., 14., and 16.) refer to the possibility—where an Athenian loss or a loss to an ally occurred—of an event which would have helped his countrymen's cause ("if only x had not happened, then..."). Nevertheless, just as the protases touched only on minor contingencies, the apodoses refer only to immediate consequences, not to the overall outcome. Thucydides does not ever state that Athens could have won the Peloponnesian war.[24] In fact—and this is a curious and

23 Krischer (see above, note 2) 44, however, points out that *Od.* 9.299–305, where Odysseus changes his mind without any external suggestion, is an interesting exception to this rule. Nevertheless, the passage in question does not contain an explicit conditional. Among the gods, Iris, despite her traditional messenger's role, happens to intervene on only one occasion which provokes Homer to comment on what might have happened had she not done so. The job of meddling in human affairs at crucial, "might-have-been-otherwise" moments seems about equally distributed among the gods with 9 different gods intervening on the 15 different occasions.

24 Scholars readily supply the explicit hypothesis which Thucydides himself forbears to give. See, e.g., D. W. Knight, "Thucydides and the War Strategy of

unrecognized feature of Thucydidean hypotheses—he especially considers cases where Athens and her allies might have suffered more (as in 1., 2., 3., 10., 11., 12., 13., 14., 17., 18., and 19.). Moreover, 5 of these (1., 2., 3., 18., and 19.) show the strongly speculative, "If x..." pattern with the protasis positive. Particularly interesting is 3., where Thucydides raises the possibility of the destruction of the Piraeus early in the war, which would have been a devastating setback for Athens. In 3 passages in Book Eight (17., 18., and 19.), Thucydides repeats the speculation that Athens' defeat, now so much closer, might have come even sooner. The pattern of Thucydides' hypotheses suggests both development and change in his hopes and fears during the course of the Peloponnesian war. His sensitivity to the unpredictability of even trivial events hints at his initial belief—as a loyal Athenian and devotee of Pericles' policies—that Athens' loss, if it occurred, would be a wayward event, which could be, and then in retrospect, should have been avoided (1., 2., and 3.). On the other hand, since he so often raises in his hypotheses the possibility of Athens losing even earlier, the evidence also suggests that after Pericles' death and his own exile, Thucydides came to see that his city's defeat had always been a possibility and, once it became inevitable, was probably also deserved (17., 18., and 19.).[25]

In Thucydides' controversial account of his own failure to relieve Amphipolis from the attack of Brasidas (4.106). Thucydides refrains from apparent direct comment and refers to himself in the third person, though he does point out that he arrived with his ships in time to save neighboring Eion. Some scholars praise the historian's objectivity here, since this event caused his censure and exile from Athens for 20 years.[26] Thucydides, however, does seize this

Perikles," *Mnemosyne* 23 (1970) 150–61, esp. 151: "Perikles, Thucydides, Bury, and Hammond, along with many others, are confident that had the strategy of Perikles been followed, the result...would have been nothing other than an Athenian victory." Knight maintains that Athens had in fact little chance of winning the war whether or not it followed Pericles' strategy. I would suggest that Thucydides himself, at least by the end of the war, came to agree.

[25] There is, of course, no way of telling whether statements which seem to convey an earlier, optimistic conception of the war are survivals from an earlier version of the book or, a conclusion to which I tend, the author's attempt to convey an earlier state of mind in a later, "pessimistic" version. For the current state of opinion on "early" and "late" passages see Dover's appendix in A. W. Gomme and others, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides, Vol. 5* (Oxford 1981) 405–15. For my own views on the extreme practical difficulties of revising a long book at the time (easier for Thucydides than Herodotus but still not simple), see S. Flory, "Who Read Herodotus' Histories?" *AJP* 101 (1980) 12–28 (with bibliography).

[26] See H. D. Westlake, "Thucydides and the Fall of Amphipolis," *Hermes* 90 (1962) 276–87, esp. 276–77: "He remains faithful to his historical principles, refusing to permit the intrusion of autobiography." But cf. J. R. Ellis, "Thucydides at Amphipolis," *Antichthon* 12 (1978) 28–35, esp. 28–29: "a loaded and misleading version." I agree with Dover (see above, note 2) that Thucydides' experience at Amphipolis made him brood about decisiveness in action and focus on the strengths and weaknesses of Brasidas and Nicias.

opportunity to make three significant hypotheses which touch intimately on his own participation. First (9.), Thucydides points out that Brasidas was lucky to have crossed Thessaly so quickly and without a fight. But second (10.) he says that Brasidas might have taken Amphipolis even earlier. Third (11.) he says: "If the ships [Thucydides' reinforcements] had not come quickly, Brasidas would have seized Eion by dawn." We can compare these passages with others cited here and consider that in all likelihood only the direction and strength of the wind would have prevented Thucydides from arriving even more swiftly with his relief fleet. But as Thucydides points out, if Brasidas' soldiers had not already delayed the Peloponnesian advance by their greed for booty, the historian might never have had a chance even to come close to saving Amphipolis no matter what the weather. On the other hand, Brasidas was lucky to have gotten across Thessaly without a fight. On balance, it seems likely that Thucydides blames himself more than any adverse weather or quirk of fate, just as he blamed the Spartans more than the wind for their failure to take the Piraeus. Whatever the exact tone of the Amphipolis narrative, study of Thucydides' hypotheses allows us to sense his contrary emotions coloring his apparently plain words.[27]

Another factor characteristic of the narrative context in which Thucydides' hypotheses occur corroborates the author's personal involvement in his narrative. Of the elements other than fire, night, and timidity or decisiveness, which link Thucydides' hypotheses, the most important is his use of superlatives or exaggerations. Almost every one of the hypotheses occurs in a passage where the author says that what did happen was the worst, the biggest, or the greatest event in the war or in human history. For example, the fire which might have burned Plataea (2.) was "such as no one down to this time had ever witnessed" (2.77.4). Thucydides says that the night raid on Salamis (3.) caused "a panic no less than any in the course of the war" (2.94.1). Finally, we can note that the most amazing exaggeration in Thucydides' work, his comment on the slaughter during the civil strife at Corcyra—"There was nothing that did not happen and even more!" οὐδὲν ὅτι οὐ ξυνέβη καὶ ἔτι περαιτέρω (3.81.5)—refers to a narrative which Thucydides three times (4., 5., and 6.) interrupts with hypotheses about what might have happened differently.

Thucydides establishes a pattern with his explicit hypotheses which influences the way we must also read some passages without conditional sentences. Since Thucydides often comments on the effect of wind on events by using a conditional, any mention of wind may strongly imply a "what if" comment by the author. Two examples of these implied hypotheses demonstrate the pattern. First, the Mytilenians obtain a last minute reprieve from execution because "by chance," κατὰ τύχην, a contrary wind did not arise to delay the ship bringing news of Athenian clemency (3.49.4). Second, the Athenians win a major

[27] On Brasidas see W.R. Connor, *Thucydides* (Princeton 1984), esp. 127–40. This is a book from which I have learned much and not just about Brasidas. I, however, see more Thucydides' guileless betrayal of his own unresolved conflicts of emotion and less his conscious manipulation of the emotions of his audience.

advantage when they fortify Pylos because "by chance," κατὰ τύχην, contrary winds trapped them there (4.3.1).[28]

Finally, we have seen that Thucydides' hypotheses often concern the personalities of individuals who are either particularly strong or weak. Thus we may be able to see another type of implied "might-have-been" in any developed character sketch in the the *History*, Pericles offers a prime example of a man whose personality was crucial to the war, and Thucydides strongly hints at a hypothesis when he disparages those who came after the Athenian statesman (2.65.10).[29]

Thucydides shows us that powerful truths are at work in wars—the constancy of men's lust for power and the importance of money, walls, and ships in any conflict—but he also shows us that, in fact, the sequence of events is not inevitable, for the outcome of a battle often hinges upon tiny and unpredictable accidents. When Thucydides looks back on the war that Athens lost, he sees that defeat might have been only the result of a concatenation of trivial mishaps beyond human control. But this feeling is carefully controlled, for as we have seen Thucydides never says that Athens could have won, despite the many occasions on which he might have made such a speculation.[30] More definite and clearly expressed is Thucydides' realization that unpredictable mishaps also befell the Spartans, and if such had not been the case, the Spartans might have proved victorious even earlier. Also revealing is the extent to which Thucydides in retrospect attributes success and failure to the strengths and weaknesses of individuals or groups. Nor is his analysis of groups hidebound, for the Athenian Nicias has the Spartan defect of superstition just as Brasidas has the Athenian virtue of boldness. This emphasis shows Thucydides' retreat from a monolithic portrayal of τὸ ἀνθρώπινον—away from from his extreme position in the Archaeology, where the characters of individuals like Minos and Agamemnon were less important than the number of ships they commanded. Thucydides' admission of such feelings of frustration and remorse in the face of the complexity

[28] The question of Thucydides' conception of the role of chance in history has not been wholly resolved despite the important contributions, of Cornford, for example, or of Edmunds: F. M. Cornford, *Thucydides Mythistoricus* (London 1907, repr. 1965); L. Edmunds, *Chance and Intelligence in Thucydides* (Cambridge, Mass. 1975).

[29] Cf. Finley (see above, note 1) 203: "Had Athens, therefore, possessed another Pericles, the end would not have been what it was, even granted the degenerative forces implicit in the war."

[30] Now that the newly reinterpreted Thasos inscription has shown us that Thucydides almost certainly lived on into the fourth century and thus had ample time to second-guess the outcome of the war, his failure to do so more explicitly, seems even more revealing. See J. Pouilloux and F. Salviat, "Thucydide après l'exil et la composition de son Histoire," *RP* 59 (1985) 13–20 (with bibliography). Cf. the cautious comments of P. Cartledge, "A New Lease on Life for Lichas, Son of Arkesilas?" *LCM* 9 (1984) 98–102.

of human nature softens considerably the common portrait of him as a steely-minded pragmatist.[31]

In the *Poetics* Aristotle states a rule that the historian should report what did rather than what might happen (1451B). Aristotle surely would have considered what might have happened even further from the historian's task. Thucydides, however, writes his account of the Peloponnesian war not only to preserve the facts but to express his anguish at its outcome and, I believe, his wish, or at least his wish at one time—carefully qualified and restrained—that Athens, not Sparta, had won the war. Contrary to fact conditions then, contribute to our feeling that the *History*, is, as Adam Parry has called it, "an intensely personal and tragic work."[32] Though powerful forces apparently determine the fall of Athens, the end—like the destruction of an Oedipus or a Phaedra—might have been avoided at many points along the way.[33]

[31] It is often argued that Thucydides acquired a simplistic notion of human nature from the sophists and medical writers. See, e. g., W. Jaeger, *Paideia*, vol. 1 (New York 1945); M. Reinhold, "Human Nature as Cause in Ancient Historiography," in J. W. Eadie and J. Ober (edd.), *The Craft of the Ancient Historian: Essays in Honor of Chester Starr* (Lanham, MD 1985) 21–40 (with full bibliography). An often-cited text, the Hippocratic essay "On the Nature of Man" (5) does dwell on the consistency of man as a physical being. But this essay also begins (1) with an illustration of the inconsistency of man's emotional state: even the same orator with the same argument will not always convince the same audience.

[32] A. M. Parry, "Thucydides' Historical Perspective," *YCS* 22 (1972) 47–61, esp. 47. In this paper I thus support and hope to have extended some of the assumptions and conclusions of the "post modernis?" school of Thucydidean criticism, represented by W. R. Connor among others: "A Post modernist Thucydides?" *CJ* 72 (1977) 289–98. Cf. G. Bowersock, "The Personality of Thucydides," *Antioch Review* 25 (1965) 135–46 and J. R. Grant, "Towards Knowing Thucydides," *Phoenix* 28 (1974) 81–94. Finley (see above, note 1) makes a particularly felicitous comment: "The marvel of Thucydides' achievement is to have fused the sense of pattern and the sense of accident into a terrible and lifelike unity." See my articles: "Πᾶσα ἰδέα in Thucydides," *AJP* 109 (1988) 12–19 and "Τὸ μὴ μυθῶδες and the Usefulness of Thucydides' *History*" (forthcoming, *CJ*).

[33] I presented an early, summary version of this paper at the San Antonio meetings of the APA, and I found the brief but lively discussion on that occasion helpful in preparing this final text. I am grateful also to the Editor of *TAPA* and to my two anonymous readers for helpful suggestions and corrections. Finally, I would like to thank the American Academy in Rome and its librarian Lucilla Marino for the congenial surroundings in which I worked on this piece and the Committee on Research, Scholarship, and Creativity of Gustavus Adolphus College for a small grant which allowed me to extend my stay in Rome and finish my work.