

Hello, reader! This paper is a first draft of a dissertation chapter, part of a wider project on the political role and significance of courage. The overarching argument is that courage has largely been theorized in terms of the affirmation of an inside through the struggle against an outside, an understanding largely drawn from and thematized by military examples. In place of this, I want to pursue an understanding of political courage as the openness to the outside, and accordingly the openness to undergoing change.

One persistent concern I have had throughout this project is what it might imply for solidarity movements. My aim is not to delegitimize group struggle or to advocate a both-sides approach that depicts courage as an individual and accommodationist move toward the middle ground. My turn to the literature on *stasis* is an attempt to grapple directly with this problem, since *stasis* in the Greek texts is depicted as a political pathology in which people are in a sense “too committed” to their causes, and need to be reintegrated into the center or *meson*. This chapter is my attempt (thus far) to come to terms with this tradition and to distinguish my approach to theorizing courage as openness from the approach that locates openness only in the center.

Thanks in advance for reading, and I look forward to our panel at the conference! If you'd like to discuss any part of this paper further, please feel free to reach out to me at samuelmccchesney2023@u.northwestern.edu

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

—*W. B. Yeats, "The Second Coming"*

a very popular error: having the courage of one's convictions; rather it is a matter of having the courage for an attack on one's convictions!!!

—*Nietzsche, quoted in Walter Kaufmann, Nietzsche, 354*

“Words had to change their ordinary meanings”

Political courage and *stasis*

1. Introduction

Running like a red thread through ancient Greek political thought is the distinction between *polemos* and *stasis*, external and internal conflict: where the former was the *polis*'s opportunity for glory, the latter was its ultimate disease. As Nicole Loraux puts it, the distinction was “basic for civil life, but profoundly ideological.”¹ This paper examines the political role and meaning of courage (*andreia*, literally “manliness”) in light of this distinction. In particular, given that Greek paradigms and exemplars of courage were drawn primarily from the realm of *polemos*, how might we think about the place of courage within the *polis*? Does the exercise of courage within the *polis* always imply *stasis*, or does courage have a place within the healthy political community?

The literal translation of *stasis* is “faction,” but the Greeks drew from this further implications not found in the English, implications doubly surprising to the English-speaking

¹ Nicole Loraux, “Thucydides and Sedition Among Words,” in *Thucydides*, ed. and trans. Jeffrey S. Rusten, Oxford Readings in Classical Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 264.

ear that hears in “stasis” only equilibrium or immobility. *Stasis* can refer to the opposition of two factions (hence equilibrium) as well as to the faction itself (a faction that does not move, that has solidarity). But if, by virtue of this double meaning, *stasis* also signifies that neither faction will move from its position, *stasis* thereby takes on a third meaning, namely the disappearance of the middle ground. And a fourth: the position from which a faction will not move becomes the faction’s principle *of* movement, a movement against the other faction and the destruction of *its* principle. And in that sense, the impossibility of equilibrium: once *stasis* has begun, it keeps rolling, and the movement only ends with victory or defeat. Hence the *History*, which Jonathan Price argues is fundamentally a story about *stasis*,² is also, for Thucydides, a story of movement, *kinēsis*.³ *Stasis* in the Greek thereby calls to mind the whole range of meanings from lack of motion to furious upheaval.⁴

On the face of it, a reader who is invested in class struggle, or the principle of solidarity, will have a tougher time with *stasis* than a reader who is invested in the middle ground. For the latter, a clear and attractive reading is available: *stasis* is a disease of the *polis*⁵ marked by the collapse of the center, the space from which the best draw their conviction, their judgments; in a *stasis*, the terms of *polis* life are set by the worst, the most extreme, and the passionate intensity with which they push their partial and opposed perspectives.⁶ The antidote to *stasis* is the population of the middle ground, and the relaxation of commitment that the middle ground affords. The classic story here is Aeschylus’ *Eumenides*, where the chain of killings is

² Jonathan J. Price, *Thucydides and Internal War* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

³ Thucydides, *History*, 1.1.2.

⁴ See generally Dimitris Vardoulakis, *Stasis Before the State: Nine Theses on Agonistic Democracy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), 95–97, 103. Cf. also Finley, who cautions that this semantic unfolding should be sought “not in philology but in Greek society itself”: M. I. Finley, *Democracy Ancient and Modern*, 2nd edition (London: Hogarth Press, 1985), 45.

⁵ As Price notes, Thucydides’ account of *stasis* drew heavily on the emerging biological and medical science of his time, suggesting a pathological account of *stasis*. Price, *Thucydides and Internal War*, 14–15. This imagery of *stasis* as illness was widespread, but Josiah Ober has identified an exception in the form of tyrant-killing, which was a “therapeutic” form of *stasis*: see Josiah Ober, “Tyrant Killing as Therapeutic *Stasis*: A Political Debate in Images and Texts,” in *Popular Tyranny: Sovereignty and Its Discontents in Ancient Greece*, ed. Kathryn A. Morgan (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 215–50.

⁶ Aristotle, *Politics* 1301a40–1302a15.

ended by the establishment of institutions grounded in *logos* that stand between, above, and apart from the warring parties.

For the former, who might see all this as an attempt to keep radical claims at bay, there is a need to complicate this picture. Classical scholars in the radical democratic tradition have focused instead on the patterns of disavowal in Greek thinking about *stasis*, of what for the Greeks was sayable and not sayable. Loraux, probably the most influential of this group, has pointed toward the overwhelming prevalence, within the Greek texts on *stasis*, of a metaphor of family conflict.⁷ This governing metaphor points toward the family—whether understood in terms of the *oikos*, the *phylon*, or the *genos*—as a unit of stability, one that both delegitimizes the internal conflict and contains within itself the possibility of resolution. In this sense, when conflict visits the *polis*-as-family it does so from “outside,” hence the image of a *polis* struck down by a virus or an infection.⁸ Yet as Loraux points out, the prevalence of Greek dramatic stories of family conflict and kin-slaying⁹ suggests that, far from the destruction of kin by a force external to it, *stasis* may equally be the emergence within the *polis* of a conflict inherent to the family.¹⁰ This leads to two related reactions. On the one hand, there is the reaffirmation of a *civic* fraternity that supposedly supersedes and suppresses the conflict inherent to the *oikos*: this is the classic Aeschylean story about the overcoming of the household in the *polis*, exemplified in the artificial *phylai* established by Cleisthenes.¹¹ On the other hand, there is the disavowal of the metaphorical element of the mythical kin-slayer as a figure of the political: the kin-slayer no longer represents civic strife, only the primordial rivalry and hatred between *actual* brothers that must be superseded by the harmonious *metaphorical* brotherhood of the

⁷ Nicole Loraux, “War in the Family,” trans. Adam Kotsko, *Parrhesia* 27 (2017): 13–47.

⁸ Nicole Loraux, *The Divided City: On Memory and Forgetting in Ancient Athens*, trans. Corinne Pache and Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2006), 25. See also note 5 above.

⁹ For fratricide, see Eteocles and Polynices; for matricide, Orestes; for patricide, Oedipus; for mothers killing sons, Medea; for fathers killing daughters, Agamemnon. Missing from this list—significantly, in light of the Corcyra narrative—are fathers deliberately killing their sons. Herakles kills three of his sons when Hera drives him insane, and Hades and Poseidon are devoured by Cronus, but survive.

¹⁰ Loraux, “War in the Family,” esp. 25–29.

¹¹ Aristotle, *Athenian Constitution* 21.

city. In this way, the metaphor of the family as response to *stasis* involves a “forgetting”: one must forget that the metaphor originally contained both reconciliation *and* enmity, and one must forget that *stasis* accordingly is a “constitutive principle” of Greek political life: it is not an illness borne from the outside, but a “congenital” feature that must be denied “in order to construct the generality ‘city’.”¹²

This paper takes this ambiguous metaphor as its point of departure for thinking about courage. I focus in particular on two famous passages about *stasis* in the Greek corpus. The first passage is from book five of the *Republic*, where Socrates employs the metaphor of family conflict to point toward the possibility of reconciliation between the *stasiotai*. Reading this passage in light of Plato’s discussions of courage in both the *Republic* and the *Laches*, I argue that Plato theorizes reconciliation as a process contingent upon the *relaxation* of norms of courage—which, by extension, suggests a certain lacuna of courage within the center of the *polis*. The second passage is Thucydides’ account of the *stasis* at Corcyra, which above all is presented as a crisis of the norms of *andreia*. The Corcyra narrative presents a radical challenge to Plato’s reconciliatory ethic by presenting *stasis* as a process that shatters and dismantles the *oikos*. Without the family, the metaphorical basis for reconciliation between the *staseis* is lost, leaving only two radically opposed factions working toward the elimination of the other. But Thucydides, like Plato, speaks for tradition: what his account of a lost family metaphor points to is a restoration of the *oikos* that in turn restores the *polis* and restores the integrity of *andreia* as a set of norms directed outward in a *polemos*.

What I suggest is that, to challenge this image of the political as a space paradoxically structured by and inapposite to courage, an account of political courage must reject the

¹² Loraux, *The Divided City*, 63–64, 66; cf. 30. My reading of Loraux differs significantly from that of Agamben, who claims that the proposition explored in Loraux’s essay “War in the Family”—that *stasis* is the emergence within the *polis* of a conflict inherent to the *oikos*—represents a more “original and radical” view than that presented in *The Divided City*, which appeared around the same time: Giorgio Agamben, *Stasis: Civil War as a Political Paradigm*, trans. Nicholas Heron (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 5. Rather than reading this proposition as the culmination of Loraux’s own view of *stasis*—a proposition Agamben goes on to reject in any case (*Stasis*, 14–15, 22)—I see it instead as setting up the problematic (the family as metaphor for the political) that she explores in *The Divided City*.

paradigm of *polemos* with its distinction between friend and enemy, beginning by recognizing that the integrity of this distinction is the entire reason for the metaphor of polis as family. Instead, we can theorize political courage as the overcoming of inside–outside distinctions.

2. Reconciliation and the political lacuna of courage

At 470b of the *Republic*, Socrates draws an idealized distinction between *polemos* and *stasis*. Where *polemos* refers to “enmity toward others [*allogriou*],” *stasis* refers to “enmity toward one’s kin [*oikeiou*].” The paradigmatic case of the former is conflict between Greeks and barbarians, who are “foreign and other” (*othneion te kai allogrion*) and therefore “enemies by nature” (*polemiou physei*). Greeks, by contrast, are kin (*oikeion*), belonging to the same race (*genos*), and therefore remain “friends by nature” (*physei philous*) even in conflict. Their conflict is not a natural one but a sign that Greece is “sick” (*nosein*). In the (implicitly healthy) *polemos*, it is permissible to “ravage the land and burn the houses of the other.” *Stasis*, however, occurs between “people who will one day be reconciled (*diallagēsomenōn*) and won’t always be at war.” Where parties in a *stasis* destroy each other’s homes and land, “neither is considered a patriot (*philopolides*).” No patriot would dare (*etolmōn*) to destroy the land, their own “wet nurse and mother” (*trophon te kai mētera*). In cases of *stasis*, the stronger party may take the year’s harvest from the weaker, but no more than this (470c–e).

In this passage, *polemos* is the war in which the enemy is clearly defined, having been marked as “other” (*allogrios*). A *stasis*, by contrast, is a war that pivots on the possibility of reconciliation. The basis for this reconciliation is twofold: it rests firstly on the experience of a shared language (this being the phenomenal origin of the distinction between Greeks and barbarians), and secondly on the common *genos* by which this distinction is thematized. On the face of it, these two bases are in a considerable amount of tension: where a reconciliation that takes place through words implies the contestability of the political relation between its parties, a familial reconciliation implies the opposite, that of a natural set of relations that have become disordered and await restoration to their proper, healthy state. Matters are a little more

complicated since, as Loraux reminds us, siblings do fight, sometimes lethally.¹³ And note that in Socrates' family metaphor, the father is absent: that is, the appeal to the family is not an appeal to some overarching authority that can put the warring siblings back in their proper place. Instead, it is love for the shared mother that reconciles the siblings. Which is to say, the *basis* of the dispute may never be settled by way of some patriarchal judgment that assigns to each sibling his entitlements. There may never be a definitive answer to the controversy between the siblings; nonetheless, the siblings are expected to carry out their dispute in a moderate (*metrion*) way, holding back from a full outpouring of enmity for the sake of the mother.

Diallassō, to be reconciled, comes from *dia*, “through,” and *allassō*, “to experience change” (literally, to become other, *allos*); when the parties to a *stasis diallassousi* they experience mutual change. The possibility of reconciliation is therefore the possibility of a change in oneself that contributes to the reframing of the relationship; it is the recognition of the mutability of the relationship itself. Under a *polemos*, by contrast, an enemy can be destroyed because there is no chance of him being anything but an alien; the relation of self and other is stable and no change is anticipated. In the *stasis*, to view one's enemy in this way is not patriotic (*philopolis*)—it reflects a lack of love for the shared political world, for the motherland. Thus, reconciliation is about putting love for the shared world above self-love. This possibility does not arise under the nativist terms of a *polemos*, where one's designation of the enemy is coextensive with one's love for the community *and* with one's self-love: one's patriotism consists in the fact that one loves the *polis* in the same way that one loves one's self. Courage takes the form of a “self-affirmation” through the attack on what is other.

As Plato's discussion of courage in the *Republic* makes clear, his understanding of courage is drawn from the realm of *polemos*. Socrates compares the courageous man to a colorfast garment, one impervious to external influence.¹⁴ Courage is accordingly “the power to preserve through everything the correct and legitimate belief about what is terrifying and

¹³ Loraux, “War in the Family,” 25–29.

¹⁴ Plato, *Republic* 429d–30b.

what is not” (430b). Such courage can be attributed only to the man who is already fully reconciled to his community; if *stasis* is the condition of needing to be reconciled, this intransigent courage is precisely what the parties to a *stasis* need to be without. Within the polis, courage can only belong to the philosopher who possesses absolute certainty about the nature of justice and therefore must not move from his position (a certainty that is, of course, beyond even Socrates). For all others, there is a need to relax the exercise of courage, to not treat one’s domestic rivals as the enemies of justice, to save courage for the encounter with the alien outside the city’s walls.¹⁵

There is, then, a curious lacuna of courage within the city itself. This lacuna operates on at least two levels. First, there is the lacuna introduced by the philosophical strictures that Socrates, beginning in the early dialogues, places on the potential definitions of the virtues. A virtue is a trait that is good without qualification: it always benefits its possessor.¹⁶ With this definition, though, Socrates would always find that there cannot be more than one virtue, since any two virtues that are genuinely distinct may, even if only hypothetically, conflict with one another. As a result, the ontological idea or essence (*eidōs*) of a virtue—whether courage, moderation, or piety—has a habit of separating itself from any psychological description of the virtue, and merging with the *eidōs* of every other virtue.¹⁷ For Plato, the particular virtue of courage cannot be perfectly captured in thought because it is not an *eidōs* but instead an imperfect mixture of ontological idea and ontic psychology. In approaching the virtue of courage in speech, as Socrates attempts to do in the *Laches*, one is led inevitably towards the pure *eidōs* of virtue (namely, justice) contained within courage, and hence away from courage qua courage.¹⁸

¹⁵ In this respect, Plato mirrors the “ideal figure of the *polis*” held among the Greeks: “warlike outside its gates, civil and peaceful within.” Loraux, *The Divided City*, 32.

¹⁶ Plato is generally thought to have inherited this idea directly from Socrates. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1144b.

¹⁷ Plato, *Euthyphro* 11e–12e; Plato, *Laches* 198d–99e; Plato, *Charmides* 174b–75c; Plato, *Protagoras* 361a–c; Plato, *Meno* 88c.

¹⁸ Cf. Gregory Vlastos, *Socratic Studies* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 125. Harry Jaffa identified a similar tendency in Aristotle’s version of the unity thesis, suggesting

The approaching of idealized courage in speech, which turns out to be justice or virtue as a whole, is mirrored in the *Republic* by the approaching of the ideal city in speech, in which the more justice governs exclusively the more courage imperceptibly vanishes. Because justice expresses all that is good in courage, the former vitiates the latter. Where justice is present there is no need for courage; contrariwise, the absence of justice implies the need for courage. Accordingly, courage is required only of the city's "auxiliary" class, whose role is to protect the city from external threats.¹⁹ The courage of the auxiliaries operates in the realm outside the city's justice; the purpose of courage is to ensure the survival of justice within the city. Courage for Plato accordingly has a self-liquidating function: courageous acts overcome the chaos of non- or pre-political life and establish justice in place of this chaos.

This would imply that there is a role for courage in the unjust (or not fully just) state on behalf of the just party, those who possess the correct *archē*. In asking after the imperfect state, we should turn from the *Republic* to the *Laws*, but not before noting that 470b–e of the *Republic* already heavily suggests the second lacuna, namely that political life—and especially the condition of *stasis*—tends to rule out the absolute self-certainty on the basis of which courage can be recommended, and which is usually found only in the wartime encounter with the foreign enemy. We do, in fact, find such a suggestion confirmed in the *Laws*, where the Stranger suggests that men were "braver" (*andreioteroi*) before the invention of the "warlike arts" (*technas polemikas*) of political life, namely lawsuits and factions (*dikai kai staseis*).²⁰ Their superior *andreia* was based on certainty: they were told what was good and what was bad and were sufficiently credulous (*euētheis*) to accept this at face value. Political life introduces conflicts—especially conflicts over wealth—that greatly complicate the question of justice, thus the possibility of certainty, thus the position of courage. The "arts" of political life replace the *archē* of justice with the *kratos* of the prevailing party. We might say, reading this passage together with *Republic* 470, that what political life overcomes or displaces are the patriarchal

that "the more courage is a virtue, the less it is, in an important sense, courage": Harry V. Jaffa, *Thomism and Aristotelianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), 94–97.

¹⁹ Plato, *Republic* 429b.

²⁰ Plato, *Laws* 679d–e.

pronouncements that ground a self-certain courage, leaving only a nurturing but voiceless “mother” as the binding agent of collective life. Political life must therefore be in some sense “feminized,” not necessarily by the inclusion of actual women (although this is a feature of the commune of Guardians) but by the adoption within the *polis* of the domestic virtue of moderation, which tempers or replaces self-certain courage.²¹

3. The *stasis* at Corcyra

Thucydides’ account of the *stasis* at Corcyra destabilizes this account on a number of levels.²² The Corcyra narrative challenges the application of the family metaphor as establishing the possibility of reconciliation, both because *stasis* casts down the family and because it corrupts the stable linguistic order on which that metaphor was actually constructed. This, in turn, challenges the distinction between *stasis* and *polemos*, because the very identity of the city as that which establishes the distinction falls into disorder.

Thucydides’ account begins with the return to Corcyra, an island city and ally of Athens, of around 250 prisoners of war. These men had been captured by Corinth, a member of the Peloponnesian League, and officially, Corinth has released them following a huge bail payment by Corcyrean dignitaries. In reality the prisoners are insurrectionists, tasked with bringing about the end of Corcyra’s alliance with Athens. Once the prisoners have returned to Corcyra, they bring a suit against the leader of the democratic and pro-Athenian faction, Peithias, accusing him of enslaving Corcyra to Athens. This fails, Peithias retaliates with his own suit, and the conspirators take refuge in the temples. When they learn that Peithias is about to conclude an expanded alliance with Athens, they arm themselves, kill Peithias and sixty others, and proclaim Corcyra’s neutrality on behalf of the oligarchs. With the support of a Corinthian trireme, they attack and defeat the democratic party, who take shelter on the

²¹ For Ryan Balot this is a “transformation” of courage rather than a dilution: see Ryan K. Balot, *Courage in the Democratic Polis: Ideology and Critique in Classical Athens* (Oxford New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 333–37; cf. also 256–77, esp. 261, 263–65, 271.

²² Thucydides, *History* 3.70–83. Chapter 84 also relates to Corcyra, but is generally thought to be an addition by a later writer.

acropolis. Two days later, the democrats successfully counterattack with the help of the city's women and slaves. The oligarchs flee the city, burning much of it to cover their retreat.

The Athenian general Nicostratus arrives with a small fleet of twelve triremes, and negotiates a settlement between the two parties. Nicostratus is about to depart when the democrats persuade him to leave five ships behind as a peacekeeping force. In exchange, the Corcyreans will man five ships of their own and send them back to Athens with him. As soon as Nicostratus agrees to this, the democrats begin to enlist members of the oligarchic party as crewmembers for the ships. Interpreting this as a sign they are to be shipped off as hostages, many of the oligarchs take shelter in the temple of the Dioscuri. When Nicostratus is unable to persuade them to leave, democrats take up arms. If the oligarchs won't board the ships, the democrats say, they must have been planning to breach the settlement. Seeing the democrats arm themselves, the remainder of the oligarchic party seeks shelter in the temple of Hera.

While this standoff is ongoing, a Peloponnesian fleet arrives. A sea battle takes place in which the disorganized Corcyrean fleet is defeated easily;²³ only some ingenious tactics by the twelve Athenian ships saves them from total destruction. Having retreated, the Corcyreans wait for the Peloponnesians to attack the city directly, and while they wait, tension and paranoia mounts. The attack never comes. Eventually, the Peloponnesians hear that a larger Athenian fleet is on its way, and they leave. The Athenian fleet arrives but does not land, and the democrats begin killing “as many of their enemies as they could lay their hands on.”²⁴ They persuade around fifty of the suppliants in the temple of Hera to go on trial, and execute all fifty; when the other suppliants see this, they commit mass suicide within the temple. The violence spreads; any Corcyrean with a grudge, or with an outstanding debt, finds that he can freely kill his enemy or debtor under the pretext of defending the democracy. Thus “death raged in every form ... sons were killed by their fathers, and suppliants were dragged from the

²³ Thucydides even mentions that some of the Corcyrean crews resort to fighting each other; the *stasis* infiltrates every level of the city's organization.

²⁴ Thucydides, *History* 3.81.2.

altar or butchered upon it; some were even walled up in the temple of Dionysus, where they too died.”²⁵ The slaughter continues for seven days, and the Athenian fleet does not intervene.

The proliferation of horrors at Corcyra—and elsewhere, since, according to Thucydides, Corcyra became the prototype of the various *staseis* that gripped the Greek world during the war—was accompanied by a general breakdown of the linguistic order that ordinarily facilitated the peaceful social reproduction of the *polis*. Thucydides communicates this in the famous and much-debated sentence, *kai tēn eiōthuan axiōsin tōn onomatōn es ta erga antēllaxan tē dikaiōsei*.²⁶ Richard Crawley’s classic translation, “Words had to change their ordinary meanings and to take that which was now given them,” is extremely loose, since “words” (*tōn onomatōn*) is not the subject of the sentence; the translation of *axiōsin* as “meaning” elides the word’s stem in *axiōō* (to value or think worthy);²⁷ and some key words in the sentence, particularly *erga* (deeds) and *tē dikaiōsei* (a dative of instrument meaning roughly “by way of judgment”), are suppressed.²⁸ At the risk of adding to an already extensive proliferation of translations,²⁹ I suggest “and people exchanged the conventional values expressed in the names given to actions, according to their own position.” In other words, when people named deeds,

²⁵ Thucydides, *History* 3.81.5.

²⁶ Thucydides, *History* 3.82.4.

²⁷ The *LSJ* lists “meaning” as a possible translation of *axiōsin*, but its sole citation for that translation is this very sentence.

²⁸ Caleb Thompson has a good discussion of the difficulties of translating the passage: Caleb Thompson, “Thucydides, Corcyra and the Meaning of Words,” *Ancient Philosophy* 33, no. 2 (October 1, 2013): 273–89.

²⁹ As Jonathan Price puts it, modern interpretations of the passage “vary to an absurd degree”: Price, *Thucydides and Internal War*, 12. See, variously, Thomas Hobbes: “The received value of names imposed for the signification of things, was changed into arbitrary”; Richard Crawley: “Words had to change their ordinary meanings and to take that which was now given them” (Landmark Thucydides); C.F. Smith: “The ordinary acceptance of words in their relation to things was changed as men saw fit” (Loeb); Rex Warner: “To fit in with the change of events, words, too, had to change their usual meanings” (Penguin Classics); Martin Hammond: “They reversed the usual evaluative force of words to suit their own assessment of actions” (Oxford World’s Classics); Jeremy Mynott: “Men assumed the right to reverse the usual values in the application of words to actions” (Cambridge); Nicole Loraux: “Whenever they made a judgement, seditious men exchanged the customary valuations applied to actions in words” (“Thucydides and Sedition Among Words”); and Price himself: “And people exchanged the conventional value of words in relation to the facts, according to their own perception of what was justified.”

they did so by way of a new set of values defined by an extreme partisanship. An action that was previously “unreasoning boldness” (*tolma alogistos*) was now “the courage of solidarity” (*andreia philetairos*); what was “thoughtful hesitation” (*mellēsis de promēthēs*) became “insincere cowardice” (*deilia euprepēs*); what was “moderate” (*sophrōn*) was now “a cloak for unmanliness” (*anandrou proschēma*).³⁰ As a result, the meaning of words changed—specifically, as indicated by Thucydides’ use of the word *axiōsin* (valuation), this change in meaning affects the evaluative words people use to describe actions (*erga*).³¹ This change especially afflicts *andreia* and its related terms (boldness, cowardice, unmanliness, etc); as Nicole Loraux puts it, the corruption of *andreia*-words is “the most generic of the perversions that Thucydides ascribes to *stasis*.”³²

3.1. *Andreia*: some key distinctions

To explain the prominence given to the corruption of courage specifically, a small digression is in order. *Andreia* was the virtue of the man, with “man” here defined in opposition not only to the woman but also to the god, to the slave, and to the animal. In this way, the term was involved in a diverse set of overlapping distinctions that define the position of the man within the *polis* and his relation to diverse contexts of struggle. *Andreia* seems to have become the most common word for the military virtue courage only with the advent of the classical *polis*; the word is virtually absent in the Archaic authors, for whom the outstanding trait of the warrior was instead his *thymos agēnōr* (proud spirit), a trait he shares with the gods. However, just as the gods do not live in a *polis*, neither do they possess *andreia*, since they are immortal.³³ Where the Archaic poets refer constantly, both implicitly and explicitly, to the divinity of the

³⁰ Thucydides, *History* 3.82.4.

³¹ For Jonathan Price, Thucydides’ choice of the phrase “exchanged the valuations” (*tēn eiōthuian axiōsin*) indicates that he meant something different, namely that “during *stasis* words retain their agreed-upon meaning but the value assigned to them, that is, how their meanings were enacted in society, changes.” But this does not seem to reflect a coherent account of language use; as Thompson points out, if words are newly applied to different sets of facts, this in itself amounts to a change in the meaning of those words. See Price, *Thucydides and Internal War*, 43; Thompson, “Thucydides, Corcyra and the Meaning of Words,” 276–77.

³² Loraux, “Thucydides and Sedition Among Words,” 268.

³³ Aristotle even calls courage “trifling and unworthy” of the gods (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1178b).

courageous hero and the spirit he shares with the gods, the Classical writers never call the gods *andreios*. So courage, *andreia*, is the virtue of the man as opposed to the god, and relates to his mortal nature and his political existence among similarly mortal peers. It relates not to his becoming divine, which would imply his transcendence of the *polis*, but to his excellence as a creature of the *polis*.

Andreia is also the virtue of the man as opposed to the slave. Courage belongs to the free man, so the thought went, because he has a stake in the world worth fighting for; he will not retreat in defense of the city. Since the slave has nothing but his life, he will always flee in the face of overwhelming odds. Courage therefore relates to the identification of real interests in the world that take precedence to bare life (*zōē*). By contrast, an excessive concern with bare life was held to be a “slavish” trait, one that made free, principled action impossible.³⁴ The Athenians saw tyranny as a system of mass enslavement by one man; they wondered how such a system could be supported and concluded that tyrannies must breed and rely upon cowardly subjects.³⁵ A similar set of concerns distinguishes the man from the animal. Since courage involves staking one’s life for the sake of certain principles, courage relates importantly to one’s mindset in the performance of the action,³⁶ and so a courage that is exercised unreflectingly is less admirable, less manly, than one performed with full cognition. Thus while the Spartans were often said to be the bravest soldiers,³⁷ some writers depicted their courage as an “animalistic” variety that lacked full intentionality.³⁸

³⁴ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 36 (including the footnotes). Of course, the status of the free Athenian man derived not from his own courage, but from the Solonian reforms. So, we should treat this story about courage and slavery not as a factual proposition but as an insight into the self-understanding—the ideology—of a political order in which some were already masters and some already enslaved.

³⁵ Demosthenes, *Olynthiac* 3.31; Aristotle, *Politics* 1334a; Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1.9.24; Hippocrates, *On Airs, Waters, and Places* 16; Isocrates, *Panegyricus* 145; Xenophon, *Hiero* 5. See also Balot, *Courage in the Democratic Polis*, 11.

³⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1137a.

³⁷ E.g., Lycurgus, *Against Leocrates* 105; Plato, *Alcibiades I* 122c.

³⁸ Thucydides, *History* 2.40.3; Aristotle, *Politics* 1338b. Cf. Balot, *Courage in the Democratic Polis*, 158–63.

In relation to sexual difference, *andreia* is the attribute of the man whose role is to protect and stabilize the *oikos*, a “rulership” that grounds his status as free citizen.³⁹ This also seems to have been the most problematic of the distinctions, since while a man who acts like a god could be ostracized, a citizen who acts like a slave could be punished by *atimia* (disenfranchisement), and a man who acts like an animal could be killed—in each case, affirming the man’s *behavior* as more revealing than the ambiguous physical evidence of his body—matters were more fraught when it came to the (for the Greeks) unambiguous evidence of sex difference and yet the persistent possibility of behavior contradicting this difference. In the *Laws*, the Athenian Stranger laments that it is not possible to turn cowards into biological women,⁴⁰ a punishment that would make a problematically “feminine” figure disappear from its troubling position within the male body politic. The closest equivalent to such a metamorphosis, the Stranger argues, is to condemn the cowardly soldier to a life “without risk,” barred from any military or public position. While the Athenians did not seem overly concerned about women “passing” as men in public,⁴¹ they were undeniably alert to the danger of “feminized” figures within the male public. As for the question of “manly” women, the myth of the Amazons was the primary story the Athenians told themselves about the alignment between their account of manliness and the truth of sexual difference, with the unnatural Amazons ultimately vanquished.⁴² However, Athenian theatre also attests to the ongoing awareness of the possibility of female courage, with a plethora of female characters referred to as brave.⁴³ Disturbed by these depictions,⁴⁴ and faced by the real possibility of brave behavior by those discursively denied courage, Aristotle tried to suggest that there were two

³⁹ Aristotle, *Economics* 1343b2; Aristotle, *Politics* 1259b, 1277b. Cf. Balot, 256–77.

⁴⁰ Plato, *Laws* 944d–e.

⁴¹ We do, of course, have Aristophanes’ *Assemblywomen*, in which Athenian women don drag and take over the city’s public affairs.

⁴² Lysias, *Funeral Oration* 4.

⁴³ For *andreia* specifically, see Aristophanes, *Assemblywomen* 519; Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* 1108; Aristophanes, *Thesmophoriazousae* 656; Sophocles, *Electra* 983. For *eupsychia* (strength of spirit), a word often used interchangeably with *andreia*, see Euripides, *Heracleidae* 569, 597; Euripides, *Iphigenia in Aulis* 1562.

⁴⁴ Aristotle, *Poetics* 1454a.

distinct species of courage, a “commanding” courage for men and a “submissive” courage for women (which of course simply begs the question).⁴⁵

3.2. *The dismantling of the oikos*

More so than any other word, then, the disintegration of *andreia*, notwithstanding its preexisting fragility, throws into disarray the position of the free, *polis*-dwelling man. The disintegration of *andreia* is therefore both a disintegration that takes hold at every level of the *polis*, and also a somewhat more specific affair than the generalized linguistic decay that a number of authors have associated with the Corcyra narrative.⁴⁶ What is at stake is not just the integrity of a linguistic tradition that can ground a reconciliation between the parties; this is part of the picture, but not all of it. A couple more features of chapter 82 deserve mention here. First, note that the linguistic breakdown concerns the way each party attacks those in the middle—those who would ordinarily caution restraint, try to see both sides, and condemn extreme behavior. There is no mention of how each party describes the other party—for instance, whether a democrat sees a wild attack by an oligarch as *andreia philetairos*, notwithstanding that the oligarch is *philetairos* toward his own party, not toward the democrat’s.⁴⁷ This is a sign that the two parties have already moved entirely beyond a linguistic relation to one another, such that it does not especially matter if the oligarch is courageous or not: the only question is how to eliminate him. This means that the middle ground ceases to be a space of reconciliation, since reconciliation is off the table, and those remaining in the

⁴⁵ Aristotle, *Politics* 1259b25–1260a25.

⁴⁶ James Boyd White, *When Words Lose Their Meaning: Constitutions and Reconstitutions of Language, Character, and Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 3; J. Peter Euben, *The Tragedy of Political Theory: The Road Not Taken* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 189–90; John Zumbrennen, *Silence and Democracy: Athenian Politics in Thucydides’ History* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2010), 29.

⁴⁷ This question of the enemy’s courage has been a persistent one within the contemporary literature on courage: see, among others, Amélie Oksenberg Rorty, “The Two Faces of Courage,” *Philosophy* 61, no. 236 (1986): esp. 153–54; Jason A. Scorza, “The Ambivalence of Political Courage,” *The Review of Politics* 63, no. 4 (2001): 638–40; George Kateb, “Courage as a Virtue,” *Social Research* 71, no. 1 (2004): 39–72; Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 9; Geoffrey Scarre, *On Courage* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 117.

middle need only to sort themselves into one of the two parties, or else be disposable. Second, although we are not told how each party describes their enemies, there is no suggestion that the two parties use words differently or employ a different language from each other; rather, the two parties experience a *parallel* revaluation of *andreia*. This is why I translate *tē dikaiōsei* as “according to their position” rather than “according to their judgment”: the relabeling of actions is not willy-nilly, but is entirely bound up with the question of whether the action expresses the proper attachment to the party. But the displacement of the middle as the source of the meaning of words, via the dual outward movement that sees actions newly labeled in parallel ways by two fully estranged camps, means that it is *as though* the two parties were speaking different languages. They happen to be speaking the same language, the language of a corrupted *andreia*, but this is a language that ironically precludes them from talking to each other. They have both lost an *andreia* that includes the designation of a space of relaxation among kin,⁴⁸ the space that Plato, as we have seen, thematizes as the congregation of sons in the presence of the mother.

In the discussion of linguistic decay, the participation of women and slaves in the fighting has often been overlooked. After the oligarchs’ initial victory, both sides petition the city’s slaves to join their side, each offering the slaves their freedom.⁴⁹ Thucydides does not describe the manner of the slaves’ participation, other than to say that they mostly sided with the *demos*; of the women, however, he writes that *hai te gynaiques autois tolmēros xunepelabonto ballousai apo tōn oikiōn tō keramō kai para physin hypomenousai ton thorubon*: “the women audaciously took part in the ranks of the *demos*, throwing roof tiles from their houses, and enduring the fracas contrary to their nature.”⁵⁰ Where many translations give a laudatory inflection to this passage,⁵¹ Thucydides’ description of the women’s actions as *tolmeros* should give pause. *Tolma*

⁴⁸ In Pericles’ funeral speech, this relaxation is called *rathymia*, which we might translate idiomatically as “chilled-out-ness” (Thucydides, *History* 2.39.4).

⁴⁹ Thucydides, *History* 3.73.

⁵⁰ Thucydides, *History* 3.74.1.

⁵¹ Mynott: “Their womenfolk also joined in the fighting, hurling pots and tiles from their houses and braving the turmoil with a courage that belied their gender”; Crawley: “the women also valiantly assist[ed] them, pelting with tiles from the houses, and supporting the melee with a fortitude beyond

was a morally neutral term, as likely to mean “recklessness” as it was “bravery,” and Thucydides in chapter 82 names *tolma alogistos*—“unreasoning boldness”—as one of the types of wild outburst that during *stasis* became confused for real courage. Moreover, by taking part in the fighting the women acted *para physin*, contrary to their nature—a sign that a stable linguistic order, stable enough to be thematized by nature, is unraveling.⁵² The involvement of the women and slaves is a portent of the crisis to come; but it also already represents a full-blown disintegration of *andreia* within the city. In this vignette, nothing expresses the transgression of *andreia* more strikingly than the women’s choice of weaponry: the women perform the double act of taking up arms by *physically dismantling* the *oikos*. And nothing better captures the crisis of judgment that takes place in *stasis* than the fact that these material transgressions of *andreia*—by both the women and the slaves—are not seen as threatening outbursts to be policed but are instead actively courted and welcomed by the parties.

If the participation of women and slaves involves a symbolic dismantling of the *oikos*—an action to which the oligarchs respond by burning the heart of the city—then for Thucydides a train is set in motion that culminates in the absolute horror of fathers killing their own sons. As he tells us, in the *stasis* kinship (*sungenes*) became more alien (*allotriōteron*) than party (*hetairikos*).⁵³ At this point, any possibility of the *oikos* performing its function as a stabilizing metaphor for the *polis* has clearly been lost. In this way, Socrates’ description of *stasis* as a war

their sex”; Warner: “The women also joined in the fighting with great daring, hurling down tiles from the roof-tops and standing up to the din of battle with a courage beyond their sex.”

⁵² Thucydides’ choice of words in this passage poses serious problems for the long-standing and influential reading of Thucydides whereby *stasis* is the overwhelming of human convention by a baser “human nature.” For instance, Clifford Orwin writes that “the gravest problems of politics (including and above all that of *stasis*) attest to the power of *nature* in human life, opposing and overwhelming that of convention. It is the natural frailty of the human body and the natural ambition and vindictiveness of the human soul which combine to nourish *stasis*.” But if this were the case, then why would Thucydides refer to the women acting “contrary to” their nature when they take part in the fighting? What is taking place is not the irruption of a nature that had previously been superseded by political convention; rather, it is the breakdown of a political convention that had been *thematized* by nature. By speaking for *physis*, Thucydides speaks for tradition, a tradition whose “naturalness” assures its stability and vice versa.

Clifford Orwin, *The Humanity of Thucydides* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 177n10; Loraux, “Thucydides and Sedition Among Words,” 279–80; cf. Price, *Thucydides and Internal War*, 62.

⁵³ Thucydides, *History* 3.82.6.

between kin ultimately begs the question, since the metaphor of political kinship is precisely what *stasis* undermines. As Price puts it, “the other side must become foreign (*allogrios*) in a profound sense.”⁵⁴ And Agamben: “In the *stasis*, the killing of what is most intimate is indistinguishable from the killing of what is most foreign.”⁵⁵ Moreover, Socrates’ description of *stasis* as a conflict that comes with built-in limits on conduct could easily be read as a sick joke: *stasis* was not limited by formal declarations of war or limited strategic objectives, and its tendency to destabilize the identities of the combatants meant the terms of conflict could be endlessly redefined and extended.⁵⁶ What Socrates’ image of a constrained conflict between kin seems to require is a stable perspective above the fray, one that can designate combatants as kin and remind them of the terms of conflict. But within the *stasis* itself, in which the center has been evacuated, this position is no longer available;⁵⁷ we are left only with the backward-looking objectivity of the historian.⁵⁸

4. Conclusion: toward political courage

While Thucydides’ account of *stasis* is marked by a pessimism absent in book five of the *Republic*, both Thucydides and Plato pin the possibility of reconciliation to restoration: restoration of a stable *oikos*, restoration of the governing metaphor that distinguishes kin from stranger, restoration of an *andreia* that affirms political kinship through the hostility toward the outsider. In this view, reconciliation is the reincorporation of the inside—an inside that has “fallen out”—according to a prior pattern: the pattern that prevailed before the *stasis*. The difference lies in Thucydides’ recognition that the destabilization of the city as that which grounds an inside–outside distinction leads to the adoption of a *plemos*—courage by a faction that poses as the city.⁵⁹ The pathologies of *stasis* are bound up with a courage that only thinks in terms of inside and outside—where the inside is to be affirmed through the rejection of the

⁵⁴ Price, *Thucydides and Internal War*, 34.

⁵⁵ Agamben, *Stasis*, 14.

⁵⁶ Loraux, *The Divided City*, 139–40; Price, *Thucydides and Internal War*, 34, 71–72.

⁵⁷ Thucydides, *History* 3.83.8.

⁵⁸ Loraux, “Thucydides and Sedition Among Words,” 278; Price, *Thucydides and Internal War*, 40.

⁵⁹ Loraux, “Thucydides and Sedition Among Words,” 268.

outside—and that as a result cannot get in view the place of a courage that operates on the inside. Indeed, on this view the operation of courage on the inside leads only to the perpetual division of the inside: the division of the city into factions; eventually, the division of factions against themselves.

Loraux writes that “in his relation to the tradition on *stasis*, Thucydides’ strategy contains much orthodoxy to compensate for his boldness in conceiving of civil war under the rubric ‘war.’”⁶⁰ This boldness—the introduction of courage into the space of politics to which it is a stranger—is compensated by the orthodoxy of a purely backward-looking reconciliation that restores the old linguistic order and turns courage back around to face the traditional outside. But what possibilities emerge if we think with the politicization of courage, or the “encouragement” of the political? I want to suggest that the divisions and subdivisions that characterize *stasis* reveal that political courage can only be staked on the dissolution or challenging of the inside–outside distinction, the distinction thematized by the metaphor of the *polis* as family. What characterizes political courage—as opposed to a martial courage pathologically imported into political relations—is that the struggle against a political adversary is not a struggle against an outside that must be eliminated, expelled, or dominated. Nor is it an affirmation of the ultimate correctness of the formation on behalf of which one struggles, a formation delineating an inside. For instance, the struggle on behalf of women or on behalf of workers is staked not on the integrity of existing categories of woman or worker, but on the possibility of their transformation through an overcoming of the material conditions that ground their categories. In this way, political courage aims at the kind of reconciliation—the mutual change or *diallaxein*—that, for Plato, was inapposite to the *polemos*—courage of the “colorfast” man who cannot be swayed. But such a reconciliation takes place not through restoration—of the return of women to the *oikos*, and slaves to the fields—but through a dialectical overcoming of the bases of division and categorization.

⁶⁰ Loraux, 268.

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