

DIODOTUS' PARADOX AND THE MYTILENE DEBATE (THUCYDIDES 3.37–49)*

In the spring of 428, immediately after the Spartans invaded Attica, the Mytileneans seceded from the Athenian alliance. A year later the city capitulated, whereupon Paches, the general in charge, singled out those men he thought most responsible for the insurrection and sent them to Athens for trial. If the figure in the *History* is correct (3.50.1), the total number of prisoners to be tried was about a thousand.¹ The Athenians, however, were angered by the behavior of the Mytileneans, who they thought had enjoyed preferential treatment,² and by the presence of a Peloponnesian fleet in Ionian waters, proof that the revolt was premeditated. They therefore voted to execute all Mytilenean men and to sell the women and children into slavery. A trireme was dispatched to convey their orders to Paches (3.36.2–3).

The next day, however, “they immediately changed their minds (μετάνοιά τις εὐθὺς ἦν αὐτοῖς) and upon reconsideration (ἀναλογισμός) thought their decision savage (ώμόν) and excessive (μέγα): to destroy an entire city rather than the men responsible” (3.36.4).³

*) My thanks to B. Manuwald and to J. Gregory for their invaluable criticism and suggestions. – Translations of the *History* are my own. References to Thucydides are from G.-B. Alberti, *Thucydides Historiae* (Rome 1972). The following commentaries are cited only by name: J. Classen and J. Steup (eds.), *Thucydides*, III (Berlin 31892); A. W. Gomme, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides*, II (Oxford 1956); S. Hornblower, *A Commentary on Thucydides*, I (Oxford 1991); E. C. Marchant, *Thucydides Book III* (London 1909); A. W. Spratt (ed.), *Thucydides Book III* (Cambridge 1896) and E. F. Poppo and J. M. Stahl (eds.), *Thucydides de Bello Peloponnesiaco Libri Octo*, II (Leipzig 21875).

1) J. Wilson, *Strategy and Tactics in the Mytilene Campaign*, *Historia* 30 (1981) 146–8 and Gomme ad 3.50.1 defend the figure, accepted by H. S. Jones and J. E. Powell (eds.), *Thucydides Historiae* (Oxford 1942). Contra, Alberti ad loc. and Classen-Steup 263–265.

2) As one of the few allies to maintain a fleet instead of paying tribute, Mytilene could, in some sense, be said to have been more autonomous; see M. Ostwald, *Autonomia* (Chico, Calif. 1982) 7–36.

3) Classen-Steup ad loc. “μέγα . . . = δεινόν.” LSJ s. v. μετάνοια, “change of mind or heart, repentance, regret.” Marchant observes the unusual rhythm here, which may emphasize the gravity of the decision.

Once the Mytilenean ambassadors in the city and their Athenian supporters perceived the change of mood, they convinced the magistrates to reopen the question (3.36.5).⁴ Thucydides offers two direct speeches from the second debate over the fate of the Mytileneans. Cleon speaks in support of the initial decision (also his own proposal); Diodotus opposes the execution of the Mytileneans, as he did in the earlier assembly (3.41).

The two speeches, as scholars have pointed out, correspond closely in both structure and detail.⁵ Especially striking is the attention both speakers pay to the shortcomings of the Athenian assembly, in particular to the pernicious effects of sophisticated rhetoric on political debate.⁶ The extreme rhetorical self-consciousness of the two speeches led Gomme to conclude that “the quarrel between Diodotos and Kleon is as much about how to conduct debate in the ekklesia as about the fate of Mytilene.”⁷

Cleon complains that the Athenians’ penchant for rhetorical display makes them too credulous; it has blinded them to the practical consequences of the novel and clever arguments by which they are enthralled (3.38.2–7). Conversely, Diodotus says the Athenians are overly suspicious, too readily inclined to reject a speaker’s good counsel because they think he will gain from his success in the assembly (3.43.1–2). He concludes:

It has come to this: good counsel expressed in a straightforward manner is no less suspect than bad, so that the advocate of the most atrocious advice must move the crowd by deceit, and likewise the man with

4) Hornblower ad loc. identifies τοὺς ἐν τέλει as the prytaneis.

5) In particular, see L. Bodin, *Diodote contre Cléon: Quelques aperçus sur la dialectique de Thucydide*, REA 42 (1940) 36–52; H. G. Saar, *Die Reden des Kleon und Diodotus und ihre Stellung im Gesamtwerk des Thukydides* (Diss. Hamburg 1953); C. W. Macleod, *Reason and Necessity*, in: *Collected Essays* (Oxford 1983) 88–102.

6) The attacks on sophistic rhetoric in Aristophanes’ *Nubes* suggest that the dangers of rhetoric were a topic of interest by 423 (unless these elements were added to the revised version). Gomme ad 3.38.6 points to the similarities between 3.38.6 and Ar. Eq. 1111–1120. J. H. Finley, Jr., *Thucydides* (Cambridge, Mass. 1942) 59–60 and 172–4 shows that the arguments in this debate could be contemporary with historical events.

7) Gomme 315. This impression may explain why there are so many extended analyses of the Mytilenean debate. In addition to Bodin, Saar and Macleod (see note 5), see J. A. Andrews, *Cleon’s Ethopoetics*, CQ 44 (1994) 26–39, D. Kagan, *The Speeches in Thucydides and the Mytilene Debate*, YCS 24 (1975) 71–94, R. P. Winnington-Ingram, *τὰ δέοντα εἰπεῖν: Cleon and Diodotus*, BICS 12 (1965) 70–82, A. A. Andrewes, *The Mytilene Debate: Thucydides 3.36–49*, Phoenix 16 (1962) 64–85, D. Ebener, *Kleon und Diodotus: Zum Aufbau und zur Gedankenführung eines Redepaares bei Thukydides*, *Wiss. Zeitschr. der Martin-Luther Univ. Halle-Wittenberg* 5.6 (1955/6) 1085–1160.

better counsel gains credence by lying (ψευσάμενον πιστὸν γενέσθαι). Thus, in [this] city alone,⁸ because of your excessive shrewdness, a man cannot openly do [the] city good unless he is thoroughly deceptive (ἐξαπατήσαντα) (3.43.2–3).⁹

Presumably Diodotus thinks that he himself is a “man with better counsel” or at least expects his audience to hold this belief.¹⁰ If so, then according to his own assessment of political debate, the Athenians should expect him to “deceive thoroughly” (ἐξαπατήσαντα) or to “gain credence by lying” (ψευσάμενον πιστὸν γενέσθαι). On the other hand, if he is able to persuade the Athenians with good counsel set forth in a straightforward manner, then contrary to his claim, all speakers do not have to lie in order to gain credence. In criticizing the Athenian assembly, that is, Diodotus assumes something like the role of the famous Cretan liar. As Andrewes observes, “Diodotus has brought the paradox dangerously close to the border of nonsense.”¹¹

One way to solve the paradox is to assume that Diodotus implicitly excludes himself from the set of speakers he describes and, therefore, excuses himself from the need to lie or deceive. Cleon did something similar when he first complained about his audience's weakness for clever speaking and then purported to be turning the Athenians away from their bad habits (3.39.1).¹² Thus he encouraged his audience to think that he would not resort to rhetorical trickery. To strengthen this impression he associated clever speaking with men of bad counsel (3.38.3). Cleon could safely assume that the Athenians would not think that he himself believed his own counsel to be bad. And yet, despite his pose as an enemy of clever speaking, Cleon offered an impressive demonstration of the very rhetoric he criticized.¹³

8) μόνην τε πόλιν must contrast Athens to other cities, not a city to individuals. See Classen-Steup and Spratt ad loc.

9) The word περίνοια appears only here in Thucydides. Marchant, ‘excessive shrewdness’; Spratt ‘excess of suspicion’. There seems to be no distinction between ‘deceit’ (ἀπάτη) and ‘lying’ (ψευσάμενον); ὁμοίως strengthens the parallel, as does the following categorical assertion that it is impossible to help the city μὴ ἐξαπατήσαντα. See Gomme ad loc. and B. Manuwald, *Der Trug des Diodotos* (zu Thuk. 3, 42–48), *Hermes* 107 (1979) 408 n. 2. Contra, D. Ebener (see note 7) 1123–4.

10) Cf. his words at 3.48.1.

11) Andrewes (see note 7) 74. See also Gomme ad 3.42.4 and Hornblower ad 3.43.2.

12) Poppo-Stahl ad loc., ‘what I just said’.

13) The Gorgianic antitheses of 3.38.4–5 are especially striking. Gomme ad 3.38.4 points to the *parisisis* and *homoioteleuta*. See also Hornblower ad 3.36.6 and 39.2. On some disguised fallacies in this speech see P.E. Arnold, *The Persuasive Style of Debates in Direct Speech in Thucydides*, *Hermes* 120 (1992) 46–50.

Diodotus, on the other hand, does not exclude himself from the set of men who must deceive, since in his view this set includes both speakers with “the most atrocious” and those with “better” advice. Nor, according to Diodotus, should this fact necessarily discredit a speaker with good counsel. He places blame for having to resort to rhetorical tricks squarely on the shoulders of his Athenian audience.¹⁴

Diodotus’ failure to lay claim to candor or to deny reliance on rhetorical skill is somewhat surprising, since Cleon has just encouraged the Athenians to expect duplicity from his opponents. When Cleon urges, “Let us not be led on by a contest of cleverness and intelligence and advise the people contrary to opinion” (παρὰ δόξαν, 3.37.5),¹⁵ he implies that men like Diodotus, who earlier had spoken against executing the Mytileneans (3.41), are roused by such contests and do speak παρὰ δόξαν.¹⁶ By παρὰ δόξαν he may mean that they speak contrary to generally accepted (i. e. the audience’s) opinion or that they themselves believe one thing while they say another.¹⁷

Alerted by Cleon, at least some Athenians could perceive in Diodotus’ speech the very duplicity that he appears to concede is required of all speakers. Any hint that Diodotus indulges in a display of intellectual and rhetorical virtuosity intended to enthrall his audience would seem to substantiate Cleon’s warning that his opponent will prey on the Athenians’ weakness for “current novelties” (δοῦλοι ὄντες τῶν αἰεὶ ἀτόπων, 3.38.5).¹⁸ But rather than dispel the suspicions that Cleon roused, Diodotus heightens them by casting his critique of Athenian political discourse into the form of a paradox.

14) Cleon, too, criticizes the audience, but does not excuse clever speakers on this ground.

15) Classen-Steup ad loc., “ἡμᾶς, wir, die wir als Redner . . .” LSJ s. v. δόξα II.1 and παρὰ C.III.4, ‘contrary to opinion’ or ‘contrary to expectation’ (literally, ‘beyond expectation’). These two meanings, however, overlap. Crawley translates, “against our real opinions.” On the grammatical ambiguity see Andrews (see note 7) 35–38: δόξαν could be the feminine noun (‘opinion’, ‘expectation’) or the neuter participle of ἕδοξε, ‘what seemed right’. See also Gomme and Poppe-Stahl ad loc.

16) Cleon repeatedly implies that his opponents are clever speakers (e. g. 3.37.4; 38.2), while he associates himself with “simpler men” (e. g. 3.37.3–4).

17) At 3.42.6 Diodotus also appears to concede that some men speak παρὰ γνώμην τι, which he expands with καὶ πρὸς χάριν.

18) Macleod (see note 5) 98: “[Diodotus] leaves the reader with the thought that Cleon’s charges may stick.”

Puzzled by what seemed to me to be a risky rhetorical strategy, I have asked whether Diodotus' admission of deceit could have a more positive rhetorical function. Beginning on the historiographical level, I first examine the responses of Thucydides' readers to this speech. I then move to the historical level and pose a hypothetical question. If Diodotus' speech reflects a historical oration, as Thucydides claims all his speeches do (1.22.1), and a historical figure (whom, for the sake of argument, I refer to as Diodotus) delivered a speech in which he conceded that all speakers must deceive their audiences, why would he have included such a pronouncement?¹⁹ Could it have helped him to persuade the historical Athenian audience to reject their initial resolution?²⁰ My guiding assumption has been that the historical and historiographical levels of Thucydides' *History* complement rather than conflict with one another.²¹

Audience and historiography

A brief overview of modern scholarship on the Mytilene debate reveals a broad range of responses to Diodotus' speech among Thucydides' readers. Struck by the discordance between Diodotus' means and his ends, scholars have used a variety of arguments to try to explain his cold rationalism, even to reconcile it with the Athenian consensus that their initial sentence was savage and excessive (3.36.4), a judgment that generally coincides with readers' own inclinations.

19) Scholars disagree on Thucydides' method of composition of the speeches, but generally concur that he was highly selective about what he included. To say, therefore, that the paradox appears because a historical speaker used it would still fail to explain why Thucydides chose to include it in his literary composition. My own position is, in brief, that speeches resembling the literary compositions in the *History* could have been delivered (whether or not they were in fact), since Thucydidean speakers articulate views and use arguments appropriate to the particular historical context. For recent views of the speeches see S. Hornblower, *Thucydides* (Baltimore 1987) 45–72 and E. Badian, *Thucydides on Rendering Speeches*, *Athenaeum* 80 (1992) 187–90. For an overview of opinions see C. Orwin, *The Humanity of Thucydides* (Princeton 1994) 207–12.

20) I have treated the Athenians in this debate as a real historical audience, although my readers should add 'as Thucydides represents them.'

21) See L. Edmunds, *Chance and Intelligence in Thucydides* (Cambridge, Mass. 1975) 147.

Some have explained away the problem by adducing the license they assume Thucydides has taken with the speeches. In Wassermann's view, for example, "no one could have talked to an Athenian assembly in this rather impersonal and abstract manner and carried his point."²² Gomme (318) cautiously concedes that the hardness may be characteristic of fifth-century Greece. Yet puzzled by the lack of a speech representing the Athenian feeling of remorse, he also finds the debate somewhat remote from context and concludes (324), "This might suggest that Diodotus' speech at least ... was composed later, and that the real debate had been simpler and less sophisticated." From Gomme's perspective, then, it is Thucydides' penchant for sophistic thought that clashes with a historical speech whose arguments must have been more straightforward.

Some scholars have tried to resolve the conflict between the humane proposal and what appears to be merciless rationality by arguing that Cleon's speech forces Diodotus to rest his case almost solely on expedience.²³ Winnington-Ingram thinks that Diodotus' reintroduction of justice in the discussion of the role played by the δῆμος appears "in the only context in which the view of justice which Cleon had made acceptable could safely and effectively be used by him."²⁴ From this perspective, Diodotus may not believe what he says, and Cleon is right to imply that some orators speak "contrary to opinion," that is, to their own opinion. Yet this hypothesis does not adequately explain how cold-hearted arguments rejecting justice in favor of expedience could be expected to be persuasive.

Ste. Croix and Kagan take a somewhat harder line, consonant with the view that an argument from expedience would have been persuasive given the moral standards and the nature of interstate relations in fifth-century Greece.²⁵ In their view, Diodotus does mean what he says. But this approach does not adequately take into

22) F. Wassermann, *Post-Periclean Democracy in Action: The Mytilenean Debate* (Thuc. III 37–48), *TAPhA* 87 (1956) 34. Similarly, Andrewes (see note 7) 73 and Saar (see note 5) 70.

23) Again, Wassermann (see note 22) 36.

24) Winnington-Ingram (see note 7) 79.

25) G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War* (London 1972) 17–19 argues that Diodotus' speech reflects the amorality of interstate relations in the fifth century B. C. E. Kagan (see note 7) 88–89 thinks, "we should not doubt that his chief concern was political or that he believed in the effectiveness of the policy he proposed;" however, Kagan also recognizes the more humane elements in Diodotus' argument as well as the influence of Cleon's speech. See also Finley (see note 6) 177.

account the Athenians' recognition that the initial vote was savage and excessive.

Diodotus' opinions

Manuwald has turned the discussion in a promising direction by trying to ascertain wherein lies Diodotus' deceit.²⁶ He begins with the assumption that Diodotus' real views must at least correspond to his purpose. Consequently, only Diodotus' means are deceptive. In view of the reintroduction of considerations of justice at 3.47.3–4 following Diodotus' rejection of such arguments at 3.44.1, Manuwald concludes that Diodotus' real opinion must be either (a) that the Athenians should consider only what is expedient (in which case moral considerations are a trick to gain the favor of his audience) or (b) that the Athenians really should take into account justice as well as advantage. While Manuwald does not think the first possibility can be dismissed entirely, he finds the second more plausible, especially since it reveals yet another responson between the two speeches: Cleon purports to argue from justice and expedience when he is really concerned only with expedience; Diodotus claims to exclude justice, but in fact bases his arguments on both justice and expedience.

Manuwald successfully exposes important inconsistencies in Diodotus' arguments. But for several reasons I remain doubtful that we can infer from them Diodotus' real opinions or the nature and extent of his deceit. First of all, Thucydides provides remarkably little information about this speaker.²⁷ He says only that in the first assembly, as in the second, Diodotus spoke in greatest opposition to putting the Mytileneans to death (3.41), that in the second assembly his and Cleon's opinions were almost equally matched,²⁸ and that the vote in the second assembly was nearly equal, but that Diodotus' motion (or 'opinion') prevailed (3.49.1).²⁹ Thucydides

26) Manuwald (see note 9) 410.

27) Other ancient sources are equally unhelpful; see M. Ostwald, *Diodotus, the Son of Eucrates*, GRBS 20 (1979) 5–13.

28) ῥηθειςῶν δὲ τῶν γνωμῶν τούτων μάλιστα ἀντιπάλων (3.49.1). Hobbes: 'the one most opposite the other'; Crawley: 'the ones that most directly contradicted each other'; Latimore: 'proposals . . . opposing one another with very even strength'.

29) At 3.49.1 ἡ τοῦ Διοδότου could mean his 'resolution' (γνώμη, Hornblower ad loc.) or his 'opinion', since δόξης, the feminine noun closest to ἡ, is most likely its antecedent.

also tells his readers that after this vote was taken, the Athenians immediately dispatched a second trireme to halt the execution (3.49.2).³⁰ Diodotus' immediate purpose, then, seems clear. He wants to prevent the implementation of the Athenians' first decision.

Yet from this purpose we can infer only that his opinion was something like "We should not put to death all the Mytilenean men and sell the women and children into slavery" or perhaps simply "Let us rescind our earlier decision." We cannot infer what punishment, if any, Diodotus favored for the rebels. At the end of his speech, he does tell the Athenians to "judge at your leisure" (κρίναι καθ' ἡσυχίαν, 3.48.1) the men Paches sent to Athens. But the emphasis here falls on rejecting Cleon's demand for haste.³¹ To be sure, he may have realized that any judgment was likely to lead to condemnation of the rebels incarcerated in Athens; thus in practical terms κρίναι could mean 'condemn'.³² At the same time, asking the Athenians to judge these men at leisure is not synonymous with positively recommending the execution of all the prisoners. Elsewhere in his speech Diodotus does not hesitate to refer explicitly to execution.³³ He uses the word ἀποκτεῖναι (3.44.2) and discourses on the death penalty (3.45.1–4). Thus his reticence in the peroration appears significant. Furthermore, it is not Diodotus, but rather Cleon who proposes the execution of all the men sent to Athens, those judged by Paches to be most guilty.³⁴

Thucydides' account of the surrender of Mytilene raises similar doubt about Diodotus' real opinion concerning the fate of prisoners in Athens. From this account a reader can infer that even among the men Paches sent to Athens there were gradations of guilt: the men who were most involved with the Lacedaemonians sought refuge at an altar, thereby advertising their complicity (3.28.2).³⁵ But Paches is said to have sent not just these men to

30) In other words, even if ἡ refers to a resolution or motion, this motion seems only to have rescinded the earlier decision, as the succeeding comment suggests (3.49.2).

31) Cf. 3.42.1 and Gomme ad loc. See also 3.43.4 where Diodotus implicitly criticizes his audience for τῶν δι' ὀλίγου σκοπούντων.

32) Kagan (see note 7) 89 observes that the outcome was predictable.

33) In contrast, Cleon is for the most part euphemistic when referring to his own savage proposal, cf. 3.39.6 and 3.40.8; however, at the very end of his speech Cleon does call for the death penalty (3.40.7).

34) Κλέωνος γνώμη, 3.50.1.

35) Manuwald (see note 9) 418.

Athens, but also “anyone else he thought responsible for the revolt” (3.35.1). The criteria for inclusion in this second group are not clear, but if the number in our manuscripts (1,000) is correct, the large size of the combined total may imply that he did not restrict his round-up to Mytilenean oligarchs.³⁶ Indeed, Thucydides' narrative (3.27–28) provides a very murky picture of the political situation in Mytilene. At best it suggests that political lines were not neatly drawn between the δῆμος and ὀλίγοι.³⁷ If some of those who were sent to Athens were members of the δῆμος, and if, as Diodotus asserts (3.47.3), he thought the δῆμος innocent, he may not have favored the execution of all the Mytilenean prisoners in Athens.³⁸ Or he may have realized that the execution of the men sent to Athens was the best he could hope for. Then again, it is also possible that Diodotus did not believe the δῆμος was innocent.

It turns out, then, that while we know Diodotus' immediate purpose, our grounds for inferring his real beliefs and the full nature of his deceit are extremely shaky. As Winnington-Ingram observes, “[Diodotus'] heart may have overflowed with human-kindness; his pockets may have been stuffed with Mytilenean gold.”³⁹ In Winnington-Ingram's view we do not need to know what kind of man Diodotus was. That claim may hold true for other Thucydidean speakers, but in this debate Cleon spends considerable rhetorical energy undermining his opponent's character and impugning his motives.⁴⁰ Moreover, although Diodotus' complaint about Athenian suspicions is intended to dismiss them, it also shows that the Athenians thought motives important.⁴¹

But if Diodotus' true beliefs remain elusive, we are deprived of the key to the paradox and must return to where we began.

36) See above note 1. Gomme ad 3.50.1 points out the difficulty in estimating the number of oligarchs on the island without knowing the population of the four cities of Lesbos. Furthermore, Paches may not have sent all the oligarchs, for there is evidence suggesting that at least one was spared. Cf. Antiphon 5.76–79. Gomme ad 3.50.1 wonders, however, whether this man could have acquired his wealth after the revolt.

37) Both κατὰ ξυλλόγους (3.27.3) and κατὰ στάσιν (3.2.3) suggest divisions within the city. For a judicious assessment of evidence see H.D. Westlake, *The Commons at Mytilene*, *Historia* 25 (1976) 429–40.

38) We have, of course, no way of determining whether either speaker was aware of the details Thucydides provides.

39) Winnington-Ingram (see note 7) 77; see also Macleod (see note 5) 98.

40) According to Thucydides Cleon was a highly persuasive speaker (3.36.6).

41) Cf. Arist. Rh. 1378a on the speaker's need to establish his virtue and good will in order to produce conviction.

What, if anything, does Diodotus gain from his apparent admission of deceit? In the following pages I offer several hypotheses.

The persuasiveness of paradox

On the performative level, Diodotus' paradox is a response to Cleon's emotional appeals intended to rekindle the Athenians' anger.⁴² It is Diodotus' way of saying, "You are clever; I am clever; let's be clever together: here is a puzzle." As an intellectual stimulus, then, the paradox is part of Diodotus' strategy to revive the Athenians' pride in their intelligence and to restore a rational atmosphere to the assembly to neutralize Cleon's counsel of emotionalism.

More important, Diodotus' admission that all speakers must lie or deceive could be a way to encourage different contingents within the audience to project onto his words what they think his "real" opinions are. The Athenians' change of mind, their reconsideration that it was savage and excessive to condemn the entire Mytilenean population, and the decision to reopen the question (3.36.4–6) together suggest that many Athenians were already inclined toward a more lenient sentence. But the Athenians were also at war and well understood the danger posed by the rebellion of one of their few allies still in possession of a navy. By alerting his audience to the possibility that there may be a distance between what he says and what he believes, Diodotus allows those Athenians inclined toward moderate punishment to detect in his words opinions that reconcile their sense of what is civilized with their notions of sound political counsel.⁴³ The paradox allows these Athenians to assure themselves that although Diodotus appears to take into account only expedience, in reality he offers advice that he also believes is just.⁴⁴

42) Winnington-Ingram (see note 7) 77–78; P. Huart, *Le vocabulaire de l'analyse psychologique dans l'oeuvre de Thucydide* (Paris 1968) 158–9.

43) Gomme ad 3.44.4 notes the parallel between Diodotus' insistence on expedience and the appeal in 1945 to send food to Berlin, "not from any pity for the conquered or generosity to Germans, but to prevent the spread of disease which would be dangerous to the Allies'."

44) My interpretation differs somewhat from Manuwald's in that I think Diodotus is appealing to men who would like to combine justice and expedience, although he himself may not truly believe that his proposal is both just and expedient or even that the combination is possible, especially in time of war.

At the same time, his admission allows Athenians differently inclined to disregard all but arguments based on expedience. If they detect the reintroduction of considerations of justice, they can dismiss it as part of his deceit. There were also Athenians who sympathized with the Mytileneans, as can be inferred from the narrative at 3.36.5: “When they perceived [the Athenians’ change of mind], the ambassadors from Mytilene who were present and the Athenians cooperating with them”⁴⁵ These citizens might be more likely to detect subtle appeals to forbearance and think that Diodotus’ speech was a call for mercy disguised in order to be persuasive. In short, members of each contingent could find emphasis that accorded with their opinion and dismiss all else as “mere rhetoric.”

My interpretation of the function of Diodotus’ paradox may seem to conjure an implausible picture of Athenians on the Pnyx engaged in the elaborate intellectual task of decoding alternative meanings underlying Diodotus’ ostensible arguments as they sift out the specious from the sincere. A skeptic might object that it is one thing to indulge in this kind of rhetorical analysis in the quiet of an academic office; it is quite another to suggest that such an exercise could have been performed in the ἐκκλησία in an atmosphere that offered little time or quiet for reflection.⁴⁶ Although we will never know how well-trained the Athenians were as listeners, it is reasonable to assume that the primarily oral culture of Athens would have honed its citizens’ aural skills. And if Cleon’s criticism offers a plausible picture of a fifth-century Athenian assembly, we have evidence that the Athenians were not only competitive speakers, but competitive listeners as well:

The first wish of every man among you is himself to be an accomplished speaker, or if not, to rival those who can speak in this way in seeming to be quite up with their ideas and applauding a sharp point almost before it is made – eager to anticipate arguments and slow in foreseeing their consequences . . . (3.38.6).

My hypothesis suggests that Diodotus’ admission of deceit provided a contest in which members of an Athenian audience could compete.

45) Spratt ad 3.36.5, “ξυμπράσσειν . . . lit. ‘acting with’, ‘abetting’: ‘in their interest’ (Jowett).”

46) See V. Bers, *Dikastic Thorubos*, in: P. A. Cartledge/F. D. Harvey (eds.), *Crux: Essays presented to G. E. M. de Ste. Croix on his 75th Birthday* (London 1985) 1–15.

For the paradox to work as I have suggested there must be passages that, once the candor of the speaker is suspect, are indeterminate. Listeners, that is, must be able to perceive a potential gap between what Diodotus says and what he believes, and then project into this gap opinions compatible with their own inclinations. Manuwald has identified several of these passages. In the remainder of this article, I will propose additional candidates and suggest how different contingents within the heterogeneous Athenian assembly could have understood Diodotus' equivocation in accordance with their own opinions.

Diodotus' art of equivocation

At 3.44.1 Diodotus says that if the Athenians have any sense, the debate will not be about the wrongdoing of the Mytileneans, but about good counsel for the Athenians. He elaborates by describing two different scenarios. First: "If I show that they are entirely guilty, not for this reason will I ask you to put them to death, if it is not expedient" (3.44.2). Here Diodotus states only what he will not do, given two conditions. It is difficult to extrapolate from this statement what he would do in other circumstances. But Diodotus' paradox invites the audience to speculate about just this, and so I will.

The statement is complicated by the combination of a preponderance of negatives with two protases.⁴⁷ First, what does Diodotus mean by "not for this reason"? In positive terms, he may suggest that he would for some other reason (presumably expediency) ask for the summary execution of the rebels. If this is his meaning, then he dismisses guilt and innocence as irrelevant – exactly what he appears to do in the preceding assertion that the debate is not about Mytilenean wrongs. But the double condition "if I show they are entirely guilty" and "if it is not expedient" complicates the attempt to extract a positive policy from Diodotus' words. Diodotus' position could be that if he were to show that the Mytileneans were entirely guilty, then he would ask for their execution and would do so because of their guilt, if it were expedient. In other

47) Arguments using negation and denial are not limited to Diodotus' speech. Cf. Archidamus (1.82.1). The number of negatives in 3.44, however, is striking, and combined with the double protases makes it virtually impossible to discern what positive advice Diodotus would offer. Contra, Spratt ad loc.

words, for Diodotus to recommend the summary execution of the Mytileneans, the defendants would have to be entirely guilty and their execution would have to be expedient.

Diodotus' second scenario is more problematic, in part because it is elliptical and contains a crux. There is, however, agreement about its general meaning: Diodotus describes the circumstances in which he would not oppose the Mytileneans' execution.⁴⁸ Filling in the ellipses, therefore, I have translated the passage: "And if [I show] that they deserve some forbearance [not for this reason will I ask you] to spare them (?) should it not clearly be good for the city" (3.44.2).⁴⁹ Although the general sense is clear, once again the audience is left with only a vague sense of any positive policy. Diodotus may mean that what is "good" (ἀγαθόν) for the city should be the determining factor. If so, he apparently would be capable of recommending the summary execution of the Mytileneans – even if some of them deserved forbearance – as long as he knew it was good for Athens. But, as in the first scenario, he could also mean that he will ask that they be spared because they deserve forbearance and because it is clearly good for the city. In short, while both scenarios seem to imply that he is ruling out the factor of justice (defined here as being entirely guilty or deserving some forbearance), he may be saying that he will ask the Athenians to take into account both justice and expedience.

My interpretation of this passage concurs in large part with Manuwald's general conclusion: Diodotus appears to combine justice with expedience. Moreover, in both hypothetical scenarios he avoids explicitly stating that he would, under any condition, call for the summary execution of the Mytileneans, and despite his apparently cold-hearted utilitarianism, throughout his speech Diodotus carefully refrains from asking for anything unjust, shameful

48) See N. van der Ben, *The Textual Problem in Diodotus' Speech Thucydides, 3.44.2*, *Mnemosyne* 40 (1987) 18.

49) ἦν τε καὶ ἔχοντάς τι ζυγνῶμης φείεντ', εἰ τῇ πόλει μὴ ἀγαθὸν φαίνοιτο (3.44.2). Conjectures include εἰάν, ἐλεεῖν, εἰάν οικεῖν, and εἶναι ἐν τῇ πόλει. See A. W. Gomme, *Thucydides Notes*, CQ 42 (1948) 10–14. J. R. Grant, *Thucydides 3.44.2*, *Philologus* 112 (1968) 292–93 proposes μὴ κτείνειν for εἶεν, which makes excellent sense and rhetoric of the antithesis, for the compounding of negatives strengthens Diodotus' obscurity. Van der Ben (see note 48) 18–26 proposes ἦν τε καὶ ἔχοντές τι ζυγνῶμης [sc. φανῶσι] (μὴ) εἶεν, εἰ τῇ πόλει [μὴ] ἀγαθὸν φαίνοιτο. But this change would create the only passage in the speech in which Diodotus gives explicit, positive advice to execute the Mytileneans.

or ignoble.⁵⁰ And yet, the Athenians could not be sure that this was Diodotus' real belief.

Those men, however, who thought that expedience – particularly in time of war – should outweigh other factors, could easily perceive in Diodotus' words a privileging of expedience. To them Diodotus would seem to deceive about the need to deceive, and so to be fully capable of urging the execution of the rebels, while thinking that at the moment the more lenient treatment was the more useful. That this treatment was also more just and merciful is merely a coincidence, not a cause for changing their decision.

On the other hand, Athenians who thought that a sense of justice should temper their decisions could find traces of the justice that Diodotus purports to exclude from his arguments. To these men Diodotus' emphasis on advantage would appear to be part of his deceit. Again, Athenians who felt that they should, as they had in times past, exhibit moderation toward rebellious allies could dismiss this entire passage as sophistry, rhetoric of situation, a response dictated by Cleon's persuasive speech.⁵¹ These men would be interested in the effects of Diodotus' speech, not his arguments.

The impression Diodotus creates that he is fully capable of ordering the cold-hearted execution of the entire Mytilenean male population could even have repelled some listeners sympathetic to the Mytileneans, while it simultaneously strengthened their support of his opposition to Cleon. A century later Aristotle advises, "When people are upset they are always less able to be on guard. Fundamental ways to rouse anger are to make it plain that one wishes to do wrong and to behave in an altogether shameless manner" (SE 174a20–23). If Aristotle is right, then with the illusion of a radical rejection of mercy (3.48.1), Diodotus could have roused in these Athenians anger against arguments based solely on expedience, while he strengthened the very impulse towards mercy that he ostensibly dismisses.

At 3.44.4 Diodotus appears to admit that Cleon's proposal is "more just," while dismissing it because justice is only relevant in legal, not political deliberations:

50) Van der Ben (see note 48) 22 argues against the view that εἶεν is aposiopesis allowing Diodotus to avoid uttering advice he does not want to give.

51) See Winnington-Ingram (see note 7) 79. Gomme ad 3.41 says that there is not much evidence of a party of mildness at this time; however, all the vicious reprisals he mentions (ad 3.49.4) come after this debate. See below note 62.

And I think you should not reject my useful proposal because of [Cleon's] specious appeal: his argument may have the attraction of being more just in view of your present anger against the Mytileneans. But we are not passing judgment on them so as to need what is just; rather we are taking counsel as to how they will be useful (3.44.4).

At the very least, his words allow Athenians who think expedience should outweigh other factors to think that his position is based on expedience. Strictly speaking, he does not say that Cleon's proposal is categorically more just, but restricts its appeal to the particular situation: "in view of your present anger against the Mytileneans."⁵² Nowhere, however, does Diodotus suggest that political decisions should be dictated by anger. To the contrary, he condemns passion (3.42.1 and 43.5). He therefore leaves open the possibility that his own useful proposal might be more just than Cleon's, at least in every respect but anger towards these allies.

Diodotus further advises, "So not as jurors should we harm ourselves by being strict in our judgments of the offenders, but rather [we should] see how in the future by being moderate in our punishment we can have allies able to provide revenue" (3.46.4). The Greek word order, whose effect I have tried to capture in my translation, creates the initial impression that Diodotus advises the Athenians not to act as jurors.⁵³ Here too Diodotus appears to stress practical considerations and dismiss legal or ethical factors.⁵⁴ But Diodotus does not ask the Athenians not to be jurors; rather he advises them as jurors not to be overly strict in their punishment.⁵⁵ Similarly, before commencing his peroration Diodotus says, "As for Cleon's proposal being at once just and expedient, it will not be found possible for it to be both" (3.47.5).⁵⁶ He does not altogether eliminate the possibility that justice and expedience can be combined; he only excludes the combination from Cleon's proposal.

52) Poppo-Stahl ad loc. Also see Ebener (see note 7) 1156 n. 116. Contra, Classen-Steup.

53) ὥστε οὐ δικαστὰς ὄντας δεῖ ἡμᾶς μᾶλλον . . . ἀκριβεῖς (3.46.4). The negative οὐ is directly juxtaposed to the noun/participle δικαστὰς ὄντας ('jurors') while the predicate ἀκριβεῖς ('strict') is postponed. Spratt notes the position of ἀκριβεῖς. Marchant compares 1.99.1 where Thucydides describes the behavior of the Athenians toward their allies: ἀκριβῶς ἔπρασσον.

54) Cf. 3.44. 4.

55) Saar (see note 5) 90.

56) A difficult sentence. Marchant: "Cleon's claim, namely the identity of justice and expediency in the punishment, is found to be impossible of being realized at once in such a punishment . . ." By 'such' Diodotus presumably means 'like Cleon's proposal'. Spratt also thinks τὸ αὐτὸ δίκαιον is appositional.

Even Diodotus' peroration (3.48) is problematic. Here he most forcefully and explicitly calls for the exclusion of pity and kindness. But underlying an earlier reference to allies as men who are "free, ruled by force, and likely to rebel to gain autonomy" (3.46.5–6) is the basic assumption upon which pity rests: Athenians and their allies are alike, since both are free men who value their liberty.⁵⁷ From this perspective the rebellion is not so extraordinary, while the initial proposal is indeed savage.

Conclusion

The overall effect of Diodotus' paradox on scholars has been to stimulate further analysis. It forces us to scrutinize more closely those concepts that underlie the debate.⁵⁸ Unlike the historical audience, we have time to examine the flaws in the speakers' arguments as well as in our own. Did the Athenians believe their allies to be intrinsically hostile? Was the Mytilenean δῆμος essentially friendly to Athens? Did the δῆμος have any choice but to collaborate in the rebellion? Did Cleon ask the Athenians to depart from customary policy, although he claimed to preserve the stability of law? What was the nature of interstate relations in Greek antiquity? Can the demands of justice and expedience be reconciled in time of war?

At the same time, if my hypothesis is correct, there are also parallels between the Athenian audience (as depicted in the *History*) and the reading audience. Modern readers are in the dark about Diodotus' character as well as his political views. It is not inconceivable that the Athenians were similarly unsure of his motives and bias, and Diodotus' paradox effectively obscures potential

57) Cf. Cleon's 'pity' (3.40.3) and Winnington-Ingram (see note 7) 75–76. Also cf. 3.45.6 where Diodotus speaks of 'rule of others', which may mean 'rule over other cities' or 'rule by other cities', i. e. both the allies and the Athenians naturally undergo danger for the most significant reasons (3.42.1; 45.6); see Macleod (see note 5) 99–100. That the revolt was not exceptional may also be implied in Diodotus' shift from the singular "city" at 3.45.2 to "cities" at 3.45.6.

58) J. Barwise and J. Etchemendy, *The Liar: An Essay on Truth and Circularity* (Oxford 1987) 4: "For a paradox demonstrates that our understanding of some basic concept or cluster of concepts is crucially flawed . . ." See G. S. Kirk, J. E. Raven, and M. Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers* (Cambridge and New York 1983) 266 and 274 on the kinds of reflection prompted by Zeno's paradoxes.

59) Diodotus and Cleon both express plausible views of what went on in Mytilene. See Winnington-Ingram (note 7) 79.

clues. Nor do Thucydides' readers have a clear picture of the political situation within Mytilene at the time of the revolt. Given the blatantly conflicting accounts offered by Cleon and Diodotus (both of which, presumably, would have sounded plausible), it seems that the Athenians did not know much more.⁵⁹

Without either the speaker's character or the facts of the rebellion to serve as guides, readers, like the historical audience of the debate, must rely heavily on their own ethical beliefs in assessing the speeches. Thucydides offers several clues about the Athenians' opinions. He says that the first trireme "did not sail in haste on an unusual mission" (ἀλλόκοτον, 3.49.4).⁶⁰ Moreover, there is no record of any Athenian precedent for such vicious punishment of an ally.⁶¹ Even the Potidaeans, who extended their revolt as long as they could, were not put to death, although the Athenians criticized their generals for accepting the Potidaeans' terms (2.70.4). The Athenians' treatment of the Scioneans in 421 is the first example of Greeks executing all the males of a captured (Greek) city and selling the women and children into slavery (5.32.1).⁶²

Evidence suggests that at the time of this debate, the Athenians thought themselves lenient and compassionate (for better or worse).⁶³ If so, then contrary to what Cleon implies at 3.37.5, his own advice is *παρὰ δόξαν* in the sense of 'contrary to accepted opinion', while Diodotus encourages the Athenians to act in accordance with their customary beliefs concerning the treatment of their allies, regardless of the pleas on which he bases his counsel.

60) It is not clear whether Thucydides as well as the sailors thought the task ἀλλόκοτον; see S. Hornblower, *Greek Historiography* (Oxford 1994) 135 and n. 10. For the purpose of my argument, the opinion of the sailors is sufficient.

61) Cf. Thuc. 1.98 (Naxos); 1.101 (Thasos); 1.114 (Hestiaea); 1.117 (Samos). On these passages see D. Kagan, *The Outbreak of the Peloponnesian War* (Ithaca 1969) 45–48, 126–127, 171. See also R. Meiggs, *The Athenian Empire* (Oxford 1972) 178–179.

62) P. Ducrey, *Le traitement des prisonniers de guerre dans la Grèce antique* (Paris 1968) 117–122; see also H. Kuch, *Euripides und Melos*, *Mnemosyne* 51 (1998) 147–150. Ducrey notes that Sybaris is the earliest instance (511 B. C. E.) of a town's total destruction after its capture (Dio. 12.10.1), but that there are no details about what happened to the inhabitants. It should be kept in mind that the decree for the Scioneans' execution was passed soon after the truce in 423 (Thuc. 4.122). In 422 the women and children of Torone were sold into slavery; but the Toronean men who were sent to Athens were returned upon conclusion of the peace (Thuc. 5.3.4) – most likely only a matter of lucky timing. Cleon was in charge at Torone and responsible for the decree concerning Scione as well.

63) Cf. Cleon 3.37.2. Macleod (see note 5) 96 and E. B. Stevens, *Some Attic Commonplaces of Pity*, *AJP* 65 (1944) 15–16.

The rhetorician Gorgias claims that λόγος, a powerful but invisible body, can work on opinions that already exist within the listener (Hel. 10).⁶⁴ A generation after the war, Plato's Socrates, criticizing rhetoric, advises Phaedrus to emulate the man who believes "that in reality the best [of those compositions that aim merely at persuasion] are a means of reminding us of what we know" (Phdr. 278a).⁶⁵ If my thesis is correct, Diodotus' λόγος, by admitting its deceit, works on the souls of the audience and reminds them of their ethical beliefs. Diodotus himself asserts that the Athenians know that his advice is better (3.48.1). The majority of modern readers concur.

Socrates, of course, alludes to knowledge rather than beliefs, but even Gorgias understood the risks of dependence on opinion: "Since opinion is slippery and insecure it casts those employing it into slippery and insecure success" (Hel. 11). The proximity of the Mytilene debate to Thucydides' account of the Corcyraean revolution and his excursus on the instability of the evaluative power of words (3.82–83) exposes the precariousness of a rhetorical strategy that depends so heavily on an audience's uncritical understanding of customary opinions about what is just and the relation of justice to expedience.⁶⁶

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64) C. P. Segal, *Gorgias and the Psychology of the Logos*, HSCP 66 (1962) 126. Gorgias (Hel. 10) says that like incantations λόγοι merge with the opinions already in the souls of the audience.

65) Winnington-Ingram (see note 7) 80 draws attention to the *Phaedrus*.

66) Wassermann (see note 22) 29 rightly views Diodotus' arguments as preliminary to the Melian dialogue. M. Cogan, *Mytilene, Plataea, and Corcyra: Ideology and Politics in Thucydides*, Phoenix 35 (1981) 1–21 argues that the distinction Diodotus makes between the guilt of the oligarchs and the innocence of the δῆμος may mark the beginning of a new ideological basis for the war: hereafter, the Athenians support democratic factions within cities, while the Spartans side with the oligarchs. If this is so, then paradoxically Diodotus' arguments for more moderate punishment may have promoted an ideology that lead to the intensification of brutality soon manifested in Corcyra.