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**Citation for published version:**

Mantzouranis, K 2018, 'Thucydides' assessments of Pericles and Alcibiades as a lesson in leadership ethics', *Polis: The Journal for Ancient Greek and Roman Political Thought*, vol. 35, no. 2, pp. 523-547. <https://doi.org/10.1163/20512996-12340178>

**Digital Object Identifier (DOI):**

[10.1163/20512996-12340178](https://doi.org/10.1163/20512996-12340178)

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Peer reviewed version

**Published In:**

Polis: The Journal for Ancient Greek and Roman Political Thought

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## **Thucydides' Assessments of Pericles and Alcibiades as a Lesson in Leadership Ethics**

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### **Abstract**

The present study examines Thucydides' assessments of Pericles (2.65) and Alcibiades (6.15) drawing on advances from Leadership Studies. Moving away from conceptions of leadership as a quality of individuals, modern leadership theory views leadership as a relational process between leaders and followers. Thucydides' assessments of Pericles and Alcibiades examine not only their effectiveness (i.e., their success or failure in conducting the war), but more importantly, the impact of their personal ethics on their relationship with followers. For Thucydides, both leaders displayed administrative competence, but their diverse adherence to ethical principles had a grave impact on their interaction with followers and consequently on their position as leaders. The comparative study of the two passages highlights how Thucydides' understanding of leadership as a relational process anticipates an important strand of modern leadership theory according to which both effectiveness and ethics are inextricably intertwined in the concept of good leadership.

### **Keywords**

Thucydides – Pericles – Alcibiades – political leadership – leadership ethics

The death of Pericles in the first years of the Peloponnesian War marks a turning point in Thucydides' history. In his famous assessment of Pericles (2.65) Thucydides favourably contrasts Pericles with his successors and offers a telescopic view of the reasons that contributed to the downfall of Athens. The assessment of Pericles is often compared with another famous assessment, that of Alcibiades (6.15), where Thucydides offers a character judgment of one of the most controversial figures in post-Periclean Athenian politics. The thematic parallels between the two passages have often been noticed, as has the broader narrative function served by the comparison of Pericles with his successors in general, and Alcibiades in particular.<sup>1</sup>

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\* This article is based on a paper presented at 'The *agōn* in Classical Literature' Conference held in Corfu in June 2015 in honour of Chris Carey, and at the Classical Association Annual Conference in Edinburgh in April 2016; I would like to thank the audiences of both conferences for their helpful remarks. I am immensely grateful to Jon Hesk for his comments at various stages of writing, which helped me formulate and sharpen various aspects of my argument. I also owe special thanks to Jason König who read an earlier draft of this paper and offered suggestions for further improvement. Finally, I would like to thank the editor and anonymous referees of *Polis* for their suggestions and comments.

<sup>1</sup> S. Forde, *The Ambition to Rule: Alcibiades and the Politics of Imperialism in Thucydides* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 178, reads the two assessments as 'something of a counterpoint' to one another and maintains that Alcibiades exemplifies to the extreme (and thus shows both the possibilities and the dangers of) the distinctive Athenian character which is grounded on the concepts of freedom and individualism. D. Gribble, *Alcibiades and Athens: A Study in Literary Presentation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), reads 2.65 as a programmatic passage which establishes the theme of the rise of harmful individualism in Athenian politics after Pericles' death, and argues (p. 212) that Alcibiades serves as an outstanding example of this 'wider pattern of Athenian political decay'. Similarly, M. de Bakker, 'Character Judgements in the *Histories*: their Function and Distribution', in A. Tsakmakis and M. Tamiolaki (eds.), *Thucydides Between History and Literature* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013), pp. 23-40, p. 35, argues that 2.65 and 6.15 'serve as signposts to steer [Thucydides'] narratees into an interpretative direction that explains the outcome of the war as the result of the gradual disintegration of

This paper propounds the theme of *leadership* as the connecting thread between the two assessments and uses them as case studies for a new appraisal of Thucydides' understanding of political leadership. In the first part, I tread on some familiar ground to put forward the stronger claim that the two assessments can, and should, be read together as an implicit *synkrisis* between the two leaders: Thucydides invites us to compare the attributes of Pericles and Alcibiades, their ethics, and the impact of their leadership on the political life of Athens and the course of the war. In the second part, I draw on insights from the field of leadership studies to analyse the two assessments and explore Thucydides' understanding of the concept of leadership. I argue that a coherent model of leadership can be constructed from Thucydides' evaluation of the two leaders, and that the two assessments can be construed as a lesson in the ethics of leadership. This novel reading of the assessments of Pericles and Alcibiades seeks to complement existing studies on Thucydides' political thought and to draw attention to yet another aspect of the 'didactic' dimension of his work.<sup>2</sup>

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Athens due to the private interest of her prominent citizens.' L. Kallet, *Money and the Corrosion of Power in Thucydides: the Sicilian Expedition and its Aftermath* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. 41, explores the shift in Athenian politics after Pericles' death in relation to the theme of money and the nature of Athenian imperialism: 'the possession of *arche* leads to a loss of control through the exercise of power for wealth.'

<sup>2</sup> The tradition of reading Thucydides' history as a 'statesmen's manual' has formed a prominent strand in the modern reception of Thucydides, see, e.g., J.H. Finley, *Thucydides* (London, 1942), pp. 50, 104; G. Kateb, 'Thucydides' History: A Manual of Statecraft', *Political Science Quarterly*, 79 (1964), pp. 481-503; H. Erbse, 'Die politische Lehre des Thukydidēs', *Gymnasium*, 76 (1969), pp. 393-416; Forde, *Ambition to Rule*, pp. 2-3, 9; J. Ober, 'Thucydides and the Invention of Political Science', in A. Rengakos and A. Tsakmakis (eds.), *Brill's Companion to Thucydides* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp. 131-59; C. Wendt, 'Thucydides as a 'Statesmen's Manual'?', in C. R. Thauer and C. Wendt (eds.), *Thucydides and Political Order: Lessons of Governance and the History of the Peloponnesian War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 151-67; O. Schelske, 'Thucydides as an Educational Text', in C. Lee and N. Morley (eds.), *A Handbook to the Reception of Thucydides* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Limited, 2015), pp. 75-90.

### Pericles vs. Alcibiades<sup>3</sup>

In 2.65.7, Thucydides paints the picture of a sharp negative turn in Athenian politics after Pericles' death, and makes thus a case for comparing Pericles with his successors both as a group and individually:

But they did the very opposite, and in other things as well, which seemed to have nothing to do with the war, attending to private ambitions and private advantage (κατὰ τὰς ἰδίας φιλοτιμίας καὶ ἴδια κέρδη) they adopted policies which were harmful both to themselves and to their allies. These policies, if successful, were rather a source of honour and benefit for private individuals (τοῖς ἰδιώταις τιμὴ καὶ ὠφελία μᾶλλον ἦν), but if they failed they harmed the city in the conduct of war.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> My analysis is primarily concerned with Pericles and Alcibiades as Thucydidean characters, not with the historical accuracy of Thucydides' statements. On Thucydides as historiographer and narrative shaper, see esp. S. Hornblower, *Thucydides* (London: Duckworth, 1994); T. Rood, *Thucydides: Narrative and Explanation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); E. Greenwood, *Thucydides and the Shaping of History* (London: Duckworth Academic, 2006). On Pericles and Alcibiades as historical personalities, see D. Kagan, *Pericles and the Birth of Democracy* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1990); A.J. Podlecki, *Perikles and his Circle* (London: Routledge, 1998); W.M. Ellis, *Alcibiades* (London: Routledge, 1989); J. de Romilly, *Alcibiade ou les dangers de l'ambition* (Paris: Éditions de Fallois, 1995); P.J. Rhodes, *Alcibiades: Athenian Playboy, General and Traitor* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Translations are my own unless otherwise specified.

None of Pericles' successors is mentioned by name in this controversial passage.<sup>5</sup> However, a comparison between Pericles and Alcibiades in particular would seem especially apposite given the prominent role that Alcibiades played later in the war and the popularity of the two men as objects of political debate and gossip in the latter part of the 5<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>6</sup> An implicit *synkrisis*

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<sup>5</sup> The passage raises a number of questions: (1) Who are 'they' (οἱ δέ): the Athenians in general or the politicians that rose to power after Pericles' death? And, if the latter, which politicians? (2) Which subsequent actions were actually contrary to Pericles' policy? (3) Which were the things that 'seemed to have nothing to do with the war'? (4) What does Thucydides mean by 'the war' in this section, the Archidamian war (431-421), or the whole Peloponnesian war (431-404)? For the difficulties in the interpretation of this passage, which have often been related to the broader question about the manner of composition of Thucydides' work, see A.W. Gomme, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides. Vol. II: Books II-III* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), pp.191-2; S. Hornblower, *A Commentary on Thucydides. Vol. I, Books I-III* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 342-3. Gribble, *Alcibiades and Athens*, pp. 169-75 plausibly suggests that the ambivalence of 'they' in 2.65.7 is suggestive of the 'double-sided nature of the process of political decay' in Athens after Pericles' death (p. 184): it is both Athenian leaders and the Athenian people as a whole who privilege private interests over the public good.

<sup>6</sup> M. Vickers, *Pericles on Stage: Political Comedy in Aristophanes' Early Plays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997) and *Aristophanes and Alcibiades: Echoes of Contemporary History in Athenian Comedy* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015) may overstate his case in seeing the surviving plays of Aristophanes as essentially satires on Pericles and Alcibiades, but there is enough evidence to suggest that Aristophanic comedy reflects some of the popular gossip circulating in Athens about the two men. Comparisons between politicians are, of course, a universally popular subject of political debate. In the case of Pericles and Alcibiades in particular, however, their kinship relation seems to have provided an additional ground for such comparisons, since the debate about the influence that Pericles supposedly exercised (or failed to exercise) on his younger and most promising relative appears to have been in vogue at the time. See, e.g., Socrates' comments about Pericles and Alcibiades and his younger brother in Plato's *Prt.* 320a, and Xenophon's (most likely) fictitious dialogue between Pericles and Alcibiades on the nature of law (*Mem.* 1.2.40-6).

between the two men could therefore be seen as Thucydides' response to this contemporary debate.<sup>7</sup>

Thucydides' appraisal of post-Periclean Athenian politics continues with an explicit reference to the Sicilian expedition, which establishes a closer link with Alcibiades:

As a result of this, a number of errors were made, as might be expected in a great city which held an empire, and among them the Sicilian expedition. This failed, not so much through an error of judgment about the enemy they were attacking, as because they who sent out the expedition made disadvantageous decisions for those who had already departed. And getting involved in personal enmities with a view to leading the people, they not only made the operations in the field less vigorous, but also fell into a state of discord at home for the first time. (2.65.11)

For Thucydides, the failure of the Sicilian expedition should be attributed more to the wrong decisions made in Athens after the departure of the fleet than on the inadequacy of its preparation. This is another obscure passage,<sup>8</sup> but scholarly consensus takes the 'disadvantageous decisions' to which Thucydides alludes to be the recall of Alcibiades from Sicily, which left Nicias as the sole commander of the expedition and caused Alcibiades'

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<sup>7</sup> See de Bakker, 'Character Judgements', p. 29 on character judgments as a way by means of which Thucydides might have wished to position himself in tumultuous debates in Athens about the responsibility of prominent individuals for the course of events.

<sup>8</sup> This statement about the Sicilian expedition is difficult to square with the overall narrative of Books 6 and 7 and with Thucydides' opening statement in 6.1.1: 'of [Sicily's] great size and numerous population, barbarian as well as Hellenic, most of [the Athenians] knew nothing' (transl. Jowett); see Gomme, *Historical Commentary Vol. II*, p. 195; Hornblower, *Commentary Vol. I*, p. 348, and for a fuller discussion and further bibliography Gribble, *Alcibiades and Athens*, pp. 179-81.

escape to Sparta.<sup>9</sup> Alcibiades, therefore, though not explicitly mentioned by name, seems to lurk behind Thucydides' explication of the reasons that contributed to the downfall of Athens. Now, the problematic relationship between Alcibiades and the Athenians and the reasons that led to his exile are explained in Thucydides' assessment of Alcibiades in 6.15, so the two passages appear to work complementarily: Thucydides' strategic placement of his judgment on the Sicilian expedition in the context of his appraisal of Pericles and his successors in 2.65 looks forward to, and is elucidated by, the character sketch of Alcibiades in 6.15.<sup>10</sup> The link between the two assessments is further corroborated by the fact that both passages summarize and anticipate future events until the end of the war and the final defeat of Athens.<sup>11</sup>

The strongest indication, however, that Thucydides invites us to relate the two assessments and compare the two leaders are the close thematic parallels and numerous linguistic echoes between the two passages. The main characteristic of the successors of the Thucydidean Pericles is that they conducted public affairs with an eye to their personal ambitions and interest, *κατὰ τὰς ἰδίας φιλοτιμίας καὶ ἴδια κέρδη*, and implemented policies which crippled the entire city in the event of failure, while benefitting only particular individuals if successful, *τοῖς ιδιώταις τιμὴ καὶ ὠφελία μᾶλλον ἦν* (2.65.7). This is precisely

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<sup>9</sup> Forde, *Ambition to Rule*, p. 180; Hornblower, *Commentary Vol. 1*, p. 348; Rood, *Thucydides*, p. 177; Gribble, *Alcibiades and Athens*, p. 178. For a different view, see Kallet, *Money*, p. 117.

<sup>10</sup> cf. C. Macleod, 'Rhetoric and History (Thucydides 6.16-18)', in C. Macleod (ed.), *Collected Essays* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), pp. 70-1, and Gribble, *Alcibiades and Athens*, pp. 176, 182.

<sup>11</sup> This is clearer for 2.65.11-12 than for 6.15, but A.W. Gomme, A. Andrews, and K.J. Dover. *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides. Vol. IV: V.25-VII* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), pp. 243, 245 and S. Hornblower, *A Commentary on Thucydides. Vol. III, Books 5.25-8.109* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 340, rightly, I think, agree that the crucial verbs *καθεῖλεν* (6.15.3) and *ἔσφηλαν* (6.15.4) refer to the final Athenian defeat at Aigospotamoi.



the kind of motivation that Thucydides ascribes to Alcibiades in his authorial note which introduces Alcibiades' speech in the Sicilian expedition debate:

And it was Alcibiades, son of Cleinias, who promoted the expedition with the greatest zeal, because he wished to oppose Nicias –Nicias was always his political opponent and had just levelled a personal attack against him– but also because he craved exceedingly to become a general (μάλιστα στρατηγῆσαί τε ἐπιθυμῶν) in the hope that by means of this command he would capture Sicily and Carthage, and through his success he would benefit personally in money as well as glory. (6.15.2)

According to Thucydides, Alcibiades was passionately supporting the expedition for two reasons, both equally self-regarding. First, his personal antagonism with Nicias; second, his desire to become a general, which seems to weigh heavier in Thucydides' judgement.<sup>12</sup> This double, personal motivation highlights how Alcibiades' political decisions were driven by his personal agenda and considerations of personal benefit.<sup>13</sup> Behind Alcibiades' excessive desire to obtain the generalship lies his expectation that a successful expedition of conquest would

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<sup>12</sup> Note the use of the superlative μάλιστα and the strong verb ἐπιθυμῶ which qualify the second reason. On the force of ἐπιθυμῶ, see Hornblower, *Commentary Vol. III*, p. 339. Jowett's translation captures well this emphasis on the second reason: 'but the desire to command was even a stronger motive with him.'

<sup>13</sup> This seems to be a feature characteristic of Alcibiades as it emerges elsewhere in Thucydides' narrative. Thucydides uses a two-reasons structure to indicate personal motivation behind Alcibiades' conduct of public affairs in two more instances: during Alcibiades' intervention in order to form an alliance between Athens and Argos (5.43.2), and in his dealings with the Persian satrap Tissaphernes (8.47.1). J. de Romilly, *Thucydides and Athenian Imperialism*, transl. by P. Thody (Oxford: Blackwell, 1963), p. 226 describes the two-reasons structure of 6.15.2, 5.43.2, and 8.47.1 as 'a juxtaposition of a theoretical motive and a more important one of personal ambition.'

benefit him personally both in wealth and in reputation, τὰ ἴδια ἄμα εὐτυχήσας χρήμασί τε καὶ δόξῃ ὠφελήσειν.<sup>14</sup> This motivation clearly echoes the ‘private ambitions’ and ‘private gains’ that Thucydides attributes to Pericles’ (unnamed) successors, whose political decisions were calculated to bring honour and benefit to themselves at the risk of the city’s welfare. The overarching concept is the idea of *private* considerations and *private*, as opposed to public, benefit, highlighted by the repetition of the key-word ἴδιος in both assessments: ἰδίας φιλοτιμίας – ἴδια κέρδη – τοῖς ιδιώταις... ὠφελία μᾶλλον ἦν (2.65.7); τὰ ἴδια ὠφελήσειν (6.15.2).<sup>15</sup>

It is significant that Alcibiades’ self-serving mentality and policies are further highlighted by the speeches that form the immediate context of Thucydides’ authorial remarks. The assessment of Alcibiades reiterates, and endorses, in Thucydides’ own voice the accusations against Alcibiades that Thucydides had placed earlier in the mouth of Nicias.<sup>16</sup> In his first speech on the Sicilian debate, Nicias had attacked Alcibiades, albeit without naming him, with the following words:

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<sup>14</sup> The structure of the sentence is noteworthy. τὰ ἴδια is the natural object of ὠφελήσειν and the participle εὐτυχήσας must reasonably refer to the outcome of the expedition: if the expedition was successful, or through a successful expedition, Alcibiades’ private affairs would benefit. By placing τὰ ἴδια close to εὐτυχήσας, however, Thucydides creates the impression of a link between the private affairs of Alcibiades and the idea of success or prosperity conveyed by the participle. He thus doubly emphasises the element of personal benefit that lurks behind Alcibiades’ political decisions and makes the effect of the overall statement even more striking.

<sup>15</sup> cf. Macleod, ‘Rhetoric and History’, p. 72; Gribble, *Alcibiades and Athens*, p. 177. On the importance of ἴδιος as a signpost word, see also de Bakker, ‘Character Judgements’, pp. 34-5.

<sup>16</sup> cf. Forde, *Ambition to Rule*, p. 76; Rood, *Thucydides*, p. 127; Gribble, *Alcibiades and Athens*, pp. 177, 185; Kallet, *Money*, p. 36; Hornblower, *Commentary Vol. III*, pp. 337-8.

And if someone, rejoicing in his appointment to command, advises you to sail looking to his own interest only –especially if he is still rather young to assume command– so that he may be admired for his horse breeding and derive some benefit from his command for the sake of his extravagance, do not allow this man to gain distinction for himself by putting the city at risk. (6.12.2)

Thucydides' authorial remarks in 6.15.2 and Nicias' attack convey the same idea. Nicias accuses Alcibiades of considering his personal interest only (τὸ ἑαυτοῦ μόνον σκοπῶν), and of wishing to derive some benefit from his command (ὠφελῆθῃ τι ἐκ τῆς ἀρχῆς), which will enable him to maintain his extravagant way of life. The Athenians should therefore be cautious not to offer a man of such disposition the opportunity to gain personal glory (ἰδίᾳ ἐλλαμπρύνεσθαι) by putting the entire city at risk (τῷ τῆς πόλεως κινδύνῳ).

Alcibiades himself explicitly expresses this self-serving mentality in the speech that follows immediately after Nicias' accusations and Thucydides' authorial remarks (6.16-18).<sup>17</sup> One of the remarkable features of this speech is Alcibiades' tendency to evoke well-known Periclean principles, which he then inverts in such a way as to place himself in the centre of attention. In 2.60.2, Pericles famously asserts that the welfare and prosperity of the individual is dependent on, and subordinate to, the general prosperity of the city.<sup>18</sup> For Alcibiades, however, any benefit to the city is only a side effect of his *own* outstanding performance:

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<sup>17</sup> Alcibiades' speech is therefore meant to be read in the light of these (negative) evaluations of Alcibiades' character, cf. Kallet, *Money*, p. 36.

<sup>18</sup> 'In my judgment it would be better for individuals themselves that the citizens should suffer and the state flourish than that the citizens should flourish and the state suffer.' (transl. Jowett)

The things for which I am ill spoken off are a source of honour for myself and my ancestors, and an advantage to our country. (6.16.1)

The personal glory and honour that Alcibiades won with his outstanding performance at Olympia reflects on the city, which benefits indirectly from the achievements of its most remarkable individual.<sup>19</sup> In a similar fashion, Alcibiades echoes the Periclean sentiment about the unpopularity of those who exercise imperial power, but applies it –significantly– to individuals, rather than cities, and uses it to assert himself and justify his own way of life.<sup>20</sup>

This type of self-serving political behaviour, which Thucydides attributes to Pericles' successors in general, and Alcibiades in particular, is instigated by two distinct motives. First, personal ambition and the desire for honour or reputation: φιλοτιμίας – τιμή (2.65.7); δόξη (6.15.2); ὅπως θαυμασθῆ – ἐλλαμπρύνεσθαι (6.12.2). Second, the desire for financial gain and material enrichment through the conduct of politics: κέρδη (2.65.7); χρήμασι (6.15.2); διὰ

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<sup>19</sup> On Alcibiades' reversal of the Periclean principle about the priority of the city over the individual, cf. Macleod, 'Rhetoric and History', p. 75; Forde, *Ambition to Rule*, pp. 80-81; D. Gribble, 'Individuals in Thucydides', in A. Rengakos and A. Tsakmakis (eds.), *Brill's Companion to Thucydides* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp. 439-68, p. 463, and *Alcibiades and Athens*, p. 192.

<sup>20</sup> Pericles' principle applied to cities: 'to be hateful and cause displeasure (λυπηρούς εἶναι) in the present has been the fate of all those who aspired to rule over others' (2.64.5); Alcibiades' reversal focusing on individuals: 'I know that men of such disposition and those who distinguished themselves in any way cause displeasure (λυπηρούς ὄντας) during their lifetimes to their fellow-men and especially to their equals...' (6.16.5). cf. A.W. Gomme, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides. Vol. II: Books II-III* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), p. 180; de Romilly, *Thucydides and Athenian Imperialism*, p. 210; Macleod, 'Rhetoric and History', p. 75.

πολυτέλειαν (6.12.2).<sup>21</sup> The theme of money and personal enrichment deserves attention, as Thucydides dwells further upon it. Thucydides presents Pericles as a man distinguished for his integrity and incorruptibility. This statement is put in Pericles' mouth, who describes himself as 'superior to money', χρημάτων κρείσσων (2.60.5) and is then reiterated as an authorial comment by Thucydides himself, who claims that Pericles has proven 'manifestly incorruptible', χρημάτων διαφανῶς ἀδωρότατος (2.65.8). The force of these statements about Pericles is not simply that he was 'not open to bribery', but the stronger claim that he was 'superior to the temptations of money', the sort of politician who 'would not make wealth one of his aims in politics, even one who would sacrifice his wealth, or his opportunities for wealth, for the sake of politics.'<sup>22</sup> Alcibiades, on the other hand, is presented as a man who indulged himself in an extravagant lifestyle which exceeded his means:

For, being held in honour by the citizens, he indulged his desires to a greater extent than his existing means allowed with regard to horse breeding and the rest of the expenditures. (6.15.3)

Excessive spending, of course, does not immediately make Alcibiades corrupt or susceptible to bribes. Still, this unwise use of wealth presents Alcibiades as subservient to money and has the sinister implication that Alcibiades *might* be prone to illicit means of wealth acquisition in

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<sup>21</sup> I follow Gomme, Andrews, and Dover, *Historical Commentary Vol. IV*, p. 237 and Hornblower, *Commentary Vol. III*, p. 334 in taking the phrase διὰ δὲ πολυτέλειαν to have a purpose-sense (rather than a means-sense) in this context.

<sup>22</sup> Gomme, *Historical Commentary Vol. II*, p. 168.

order to maintain his profligate lifestyle.<sup>23</sup> Such a deficiency in a leader's private life, however, can have grave political ramifications if this leader uses his public position as a means for personal enrichment, and as we have seen (6.15.2) Thucydides suggests that Alcibiades' extravagance and consequent need of resources was a major factor behind his passionate support of the Sicilian expedition. Alcibiades, if not actively nurturing the people's desires, certainly ingratiated himself with the *demos* and supported an expedition the people desired because he saw in it an opportunity to advance his financial condition. Instead of resisting the people, or trying to dissuade them from embarking upon a risky undertaking, he allowed himself to be led by the people and sacrificed the city's safety to the whims of the crowd with a view to his personal benefit. This sharply contrasts Alcibiades with the Thucydidean Pericles who, in virtue of his integrity and incorruptibility, is presented as leading the people rather than being led by them and feeling no need to pander to the people's desires, if he thought that he should speak (or act) contrary to them (2.65.8).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> See, e.g. Aristotle's argument that most prodigal people are apt to acquire money from wrong sources because their personal resources are quickly exhausted due to their desire to spend (*Eth. Nic.* 1121a30-34). See also K.J. Dover, *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), pp. 171-2 for forensic evidence on praise conferred for being 'superior to money' and blame for being 'enslaved by money'. Thus, the money-theme casts a more negative shadow over Alcibiades than Gribble, *Alcibiades and Athens*, p. 208 seems to allow.

<sup>24</sup> More than once in his narrative Thucydides presents Pericles as willing to take unpopular stances and maintain his policy even against the popular sentiment: in 2.21-22 Pericles resists the people's desire to lead them out of the city against the Spartans, which rouses their anger against him; similarly, his general policy of not expanding the empire while engaged in war with the Spartans (1.144.1) kept in check the people's expansionist desires (the opposite of what Alcibiades did in the case of the Sicilian expedition) at the risk of popular disapproval. I explore the relationship between the two leaders and the people in more detail in the second part of my paper.

It emerges, therefore, that there are strong parallels, thematic as well as linguistic, between the two assessments, which invite a comparison between the two leaders. Through the themes of personal ambition and attitude to money Thucydides points to a crucial antithesis in the way in which Pericles and Alcibiades understand the relationship between individual and community. While the political conduct of Pericles embodies the principle that the common good and the benefit of the city overrides the benefit of individual citizens, Alcibiades appears to be motivated primarily by considerations of private interest and to view his public role as a means for personal aggrandizement and enrichment. His self-regarding and self-serving mentality creates the impression that he constitutes a potential threat to the city's best interests, and presents him as virtually the opposite of Pericles' statesmanlike figure. Thucydides' comments on Alcibiades' ambition, political motivation, and attitude to money in 6.15 mark Alcibiades as a prominent example, perhaps *the* prominent example, of a wider pattern of moral and political corruption after Pericles' death, a theme which Thucydides introduces in 2.65.<sup>25</sup> More importantly, Thucydides' examination of the attributes and practices of Pericles and Alcibiades invites us to evaluate them *specifically as leaders* and consider the extent to which, and the reasons why, their leadership promoted or failed to promote the welfare of their city. Such a comparison would enable Thucydides' readership to form broader (and more practical) conclusions about the nature of political leadership, and the ways in which the attitude of individual leaders may further or impede the welfare of their community. Since Thucydides invites us to compare the two leaders, it is then legitimate to ask if a coherent picture of leadership emerges from this comparison. I suggest that by drawing on insights from the field

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<sup>25</sup> See Gribble, *Alcibiades and Athens*, p.212, who speaks about 'a wider pattern of Athenian political decay' and J. Price, *Thucydides and Internal War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 255, who extends this pattern of corruption to cover the entire Hellenic world.

of modern leadership studies we can analyse and elucidate Thucydides' account and form a meaningful model of Thucydides' understanding of the workings of leadership.

### **Towards a Model of Leadership**

Contemporary leadership theory views leadership as a *relational process* between leaders and followers, rather than as an attribute or behavioural style of a leader.<sup>26</sup> In this light, leadership can be understood as a particular type of human relationship which generates questions about the workings of power and (reciprocal) influence, about the obligations and duties of leaders and followers, but also about self-interest and self-discipline, or about personal good in relation to the common good of a group or an organization. Ethics and ethical questions are thus integral in leadership and an understanding of the ethics of the relationship between leader and followers is necessary for an understanding of the leadership process itself.<sup>27</sup> In

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<sup>26</sup> See G.T. Fairhurst and M. Uhl-Bien, 'Organizational Discourse Analysis (ODA): Examining Leadership as a Relational Process', *Leadership Quarterly*, 23 (2012), pp. 1043-62. See also P.G. Northouse, *Leadership. Theory and Practice* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2013), p. 5, who describes leadership not as a trait inherent in the leader but as a process of influence, i.e., 'a transactional event that occurs between the leader and the followers. [Process] emphasizes that leadership is not a linear, one-way event, but rather an interactive event.'

<sup>27</sup> J.B. Ciulla, 'Ethics and Leadership Effectiveness', in J. Antonakis, A. Cianciolo, and R. Sternberg (eds.), *The Nature of Leadership* (California: SAGE, 2004), pp. 302-27, p. 302. A focus on ethics is not the single way of conceptualizing leadership as a relational process. S.A. Haslam, S.D. Reicher, and M.J. Platow, *The New Psychology of Leadership* (New York: Psychology Press, 2011) also view leadership as a *relationship* between leaders and followers, but they place *group processes*, rather than ethics, at the heart of leadership. There are, of course, points of contact between the two approaches: for one thing, for the leader to count as an in-group member, (s)he must relate to the other members in a way that they find ethically acceptable (e.g. treat them with fairness and respect), so constructing one's image as an in-group champion presupposes and entails ethics and ethical behaviour.



addition, the study of leadership, by the very nature of its subject-matter, has a strong practical dimension. The main question about leadership is a normative rather than a descriptive one:

‘The ultimate question about leadership is not, “What is the definition of leadership?” We are not confused about what leaders do, but we would like to know the best way to do it. The whole point of studying leadership is to answer the question, “What is good leadership?”’<sup>28</sup>

And if leadership as a process of influence is to be distinguished from ethically unattractive methods of exercising power, such as coercion or tyrannical control, the use of the word ‘good’ in this context must have two senses: (a) technically good or effective, and (b) morally good. In other words, for this strand of leadership theory in order for one to be a good leader one must be both effective, that is, successful in getting the job-at-hand done, and ethical.<sup>29</sup> Accordingly, in the evaluation of the leadership process, special attention is given to the recognition of the autonomy of followers and the mutuality of goals between leader and followers, as well as to concepts such as respect, service, justice, honesty, and community as the foundational principles for the development of ethical leadership.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ciulla, ‘Ethics and Leadership Effectiveness’, p. 308. We may compare a very similar claim made by Aristotle about the study of ethics: ‘for we are inquiring not in order to know what virtue (or ‘excellence’, ἀρετή) is, but in order to become good’, *Eth. Nic.* 1103b27-28. A normative question about leadership seems to be implicit in Xenophon’s investigation in the *Cyropaedia*: having distinguished Cyrus as a model of informed leadership (ἐπισταμένως ἄρχειν), who achieved to secure the wilful obedience of his followers (I.i.3), Xenophon sets out to examine the natural capacities (φύσις) and form of education (παιδεία) in virtue of which Cyrus was able to become such a distinguished leader (I.i.6).

<sup>29</sup> J.B. Ciulla, ‘Leadership Ethics: Mapping the Territory’, in J.B. Ciulla, *Ethics. The Heart of Leadership* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), pp. 3-25, pp. 12-13, and Ciulla, ‘Ethics and Leadership Effectiveness’, p. 308.

<sup>30</sup> For an analysis of each of these principles, see Northouse, *Leadership*, pp. 430-7. The model of ‘transforming’ leadership put forward by J.M. Burns, *Leadership* (New York: HarperPerennial, 2010; originally published: New

This conceptualization of leadership not as a trait inherent in the leader, but as a process involving the interaction between leader and followers, has also resulted in the re-evaluation of ‘charisma’ and a switch of emphasis from the notion of charisma to the notion of trust.<sup>31</sup> Whereas charisma is an attribute of the leader, trust is a relationship between a leader and his or her followers:

‘Charisma is not a single quality, nor is it a single emotion or set of emotions. It is a generalized way of pointing to and emptying an emotional relationship that is too readily characterized as fascination but should more fundamentally be analysed in terms of trust.’

Far from being just a feeling, trust can be described as an active, reciprocal emotional relationship, which has a strong cognitive element and involves values, responsibilities, deliberations, and decisions.<sup>32</sup>

How useful can this understanding of leadership prove in the analysis of the assessments of Pericles and Alcibiades by Thucydides? A close reading of 2.65 and 6.15

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York: Harper & Row, 1978) assesses leadership on the basis of the *means* a leader uses, the *ends* that (s)he achieves, and the *impact* of the leader as a moral agent on his/her followers during the leadership process. For a discussion of the ethical issues pertaining to leadership, see also E.P. Hollander, ‘Ethical Challenges in the Leader-Follower Relationship’, in J.B. Ciulla (ed.), *Ethics. The Heart of Leadership* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), pp. 49-61.

<sup>31</sup> The scholarly debate on the extent to which, for example, Athenian leadership consisted on ‘expertise’ or ‘charisma’ is a typical example of a top-down understanding of leadership which views leadership as essentially an attribute of the leader, see W.E. Thompson, ‘Athenian Leadership: Expertise or Charisma?’, in G.S. Shrimpton and D.J. McCargar (eds.), *Classical Contributions. Studies in Honour of Malcolm Francis McGregor* (Locust Valley, NY: Augustin 1981), pp. 153-9.

<sup>32</sup> R.C. Solomon, ‘Ethical Leadership, Emotions, and Trust: Beyond “Charisma”’, in J.B. Ciulla (ed.), *Ethics. The Heart of Leadership* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), pp. 87-107 (quotation from p. 95).

suggests that Thucydides explores three aspects of the leadership of Pericles and Alcibiades: (a) their effectiveness, (b) their motivation or personal ethics, and (c) the impact of their ethics on followers and on the leadership process itself.<sup>33</sup> I will examine each of these aspects more closely.

### **(a) Effectiveness**

Pericles is first introduced as ‘one of the most able men of his day and the leading man in his city’ (1.127.3), and accomplished, in the Homeric fashion, ‘both in speech and in action’ (1.139.4).<sup>34</sup> Thucydides’ evaluation of Pericles throughout 2.65 abounds in words that highlight Pericles’ intellectual qualities and consequently his skilful and effective handling of public affairs. Pericles, Thucydides says, owed his influence to his position, ἀξίωμα, and his personal ability or sound judgment, γνώμη (2.65.8), a statement further analyzed by the Thucydidean Pericles who describes himself as capable of ‘knowing what is necessary and explaining it’, γνῶναί τε τὰ δέοντα καὶ ἐρμηνεύσαι ταῦτα (2.60.5). This diptych encapsulates the intellectual and communication skills which Thucydides considers crucial for an effective leader. γνῶναί τε τὰ δέοντα entails the intellectual capacity to devise a sound policy in any given circumstances, and the foresight to assess through reasoning (to the extent that

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<sup>33</sup> H.D. Westlake, *Individuals in Thucydides* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), pp. 5-19 aptly observes that Thucydides’ judgments of individuals comment on both ‘ability’ and ‘character’. A. Tsakmakis, ‘Leaders, Crowds, and the Power of the Image: Political Communication in Thucydides’, in A. Rengakos and A. Tsakmakis (eds.), *Brill’s Companion to Thucydides* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2006), pp. 161-87, pp. 173-81, offers a model of leadership in Thucydides which conforms to the qualities that practitioners in deliberative rhetoric ought to possess according to Aristotle’s *Rh.* 1378a6-8, namely prudence (φρόνησις), moral integrity (ἀρετή), and willingness to promote the interests of the audience (εὐνοία).

<sup>34</sup> cf. *Il.* 9.443.

this is possible) the likely consequences of this policy both in the short and in the long run.<sup>35</sup> The ability to ‘explain’, ἐρμηνεῦσαι, entails the leaders’ ability to successfully communicate their policy to followers, to persuade them of the soundness of their designs, and thus to motivate them to action and inspire them to endorse the recommended policy and make it their own.<sup>36</sup> With such intellectual and communication skills Pericles proved an effective leader in peacetime as ‘he kept the city safe’ (ἀσφαλῶς διεφύλαξεν αὐτήν) and ‘lead it to greatness’ (ἐγένετο ἐπ’ ἐκείνου μεγίστη, 2.65.5). And when the war began he again proved that he had accurately estimated (προγνούς) the city’s strength (2.65.5), a foresight (πρόνοια) which became even more evident after his death (2.65.6), through the comparison with his less competent successors. The assessment of Pericles concludes with another authorial comment on his foresight (προέγνω) regarding the balance of power between Athens and Sparta (2.65.13).

The assessment of Alcibiades in 6.15 also contains a –shorter, yet pronounced– comment on Alcibiades’ efficiency.<sup>37</sup> In the public sphere, Thucydides says, Alcibiades ‘managed the affairs of the war in the best possible way’, δημοσίᾳ κρᾶτιστα διαθέντι τὰ τοῦ

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<sup>35</sup> Hornblower, *Commentary on Thucydides Vol. 1*, p. 333; H.D. Westlake, ‘Thucydides and the Uneasy Peace: A Study in Political Incompetence’, in J.S. Rusten (ed.), *Thucydides* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 295-311, p. 309.

<sup>36</sup> The same diptych is echoed in the appraisal of Themistocles in 1.138.3 with the use of the infinitives αὐτοσχεδιάζειν (‘improvising’ the right thing to be done) and ἐξηγήσασθαι (‘explaining’ it). The intellectual ability to shape an organization’s policy and the verbal ability to communicate this policy to followers are considered, among others, central attributes for leaders in ‘trait’ and ‘skills’ approaches to leadership, see Northouse, *Leadership*, pp. 23-24, 46. The ability to ‘explain’ has important implications for the ethical aspect of leadership as well which I explore below.

<sup>37</sup> As Westlake, *Individuals*, p. 10 rightly states ‘[Thucydides] pays an unusually warm tribute to the military leadership of Alcibiades.’

πολέμου (6.15.4).<sup>38</sup> And as Thucydides' narrative reveals, after his defection to Sparta Alcibiades proved very effective both in devising a policy that would promote Spartan interests against Athens and in persuading the Spartans to follow it.

***(b) Motivation and personal ethics***

As shown in the first part of this paper, Pericles' and Alcibiades' adherence to ethical principles was the connecting thread between their assessments. More specifically, the overarching idea of the two assessments is that private interests and considerations of private benefit, not a concern for the entire city or the common good, directed the policies of Pericles' successors and Alcibiades in particular. This dominant concept was further analysed into the theme of personal ambition as a motivation behind political decisions, and the theme of money and the use of public office as a means for private enrichment. The thrust of Thucydides' argument was that the standards upon which Pericles' superiority as a leader was mainly based, namely his prioritizing the good of the city, and his integrity and superiority to money, were the very standards where Alcibiades was found most wanting.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, along with the

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<sup>38</sup> For the issues this statement raises, see below n. 55.

<sup>39</sup> E.F. Bloedow, "Not the son of Achilles, but Achilles himself": Alcibiades' entry on the political stage at Athens II', *Historia*, 39 (1990), pp. 1-19, p. 3, is right to stress that Alcibiades is motivated by 'selfish personal ambition', but he does not distinguish between the theme of ambition and the theme of money. As I have argued above, the two themes are closely interrelated as they are subsumed under the overarching idea of the prioritization of private over public benefit. Nonetheless, they can, and should, be distinguished for two reasons. First, they can be considered as analytically separate categories upon which a leader may be evaluated and criticized for failing to meet the appropriate moral standards: ambition is more intimately related with ideas of honour, reputation, or status, whereas wealth is a distinct object of pursuit. Second, both Pericles and Alcibiades are assessed in both of the aforementioned categories by Thucydides and Pericles is found to be ethically superior, while Alcibiades fails to meet the Periclean standards, in both categories.

intellectual and communication skills required for one's effective performance as a leader, a fully accomplished model of leadership requires the satisfaction of an ethical criterion as well: the leader needs to be devoted to, to serve and to promote the greater good of the wider community-organization.

This point is reinforced through the speeches that Thucydides puts in the mouth of the two leaders. This is how the Thucydidean Pericles describes himself as a leader:

And yet you are angry with me, a man who, as I believe, is second to none in devising and explaining a sound policy, and who is also patriotic and incorruptible. For he who knows what needs to be done but lacks the ability to expound it with clarity is no different than if he had not formed a plan in the first place; he who can do both, but has no love for his country, could not give counsel for her interests with the same unselfish devotion; and if one is both able and also loves one's country, but easily succumbs to money, then everything would be sold for that thing alone. (2.60.5-6)

This passage offers a remarkable explanation of how effectiveness and ethics intertwine in the model of good leadership. If Pericles had no love for his city and no wish to promote the common good (τῆ πόλει δύνους), his intellectual and communication skills would be of no use to the wider community, as none of his policies would be directed at benefiting it. Equally, his skills and love for his country would not be enough to make him a good leader, if he was not also impervious to the temptation of money and the opportunities for personal enrichment that go together with the exercise of power.

Similar claims to patriotism are made by Alcibiades who also describes himself as φιλόπολις in his speech before the Spartans (6.92).<sup>40</sup> By that time, however, Thucydides' readers have grown increasingly suspicious of Alcibiades' true motives. Thucydides has made it plain in a variety of ways at the beginning of Book 6 (Nicias' speech, Thucydides' authorial assessment, Alcibiades' speech) that Alcibiades' political decisions were primarily self-regarding, determined by his personal ambitions and needs, and not resulting from a careful consideration of the city's best interest. His encouragement of, and alignment with, the people of Athens in supporting a dubious and risky expedition for the sake of potential personal gain is a case in point. Alcibiades' conduct in public life is formed primarily by private considerations and thus fails to meet the requirements of ethical leadership.<sup>41</sup>

### ***(c) Impact on followers***

The personal ethics of a leader, however, carry a weight that goes beyond the private sphere,<sup>42</sup> and in his assessments of Pericles and Alcibiades Thucydides explicitly addresses the issue of their relationship with the people and the ways in which their personal ethics had an impact on public life and the city as a whole. The assessment of Pericles begins with a reference to his deposition, a result of the growing displeasure of the Athenians in the face of the consequences of the war (2.65.3). Soon, however, Thucydides remarks, Pericles regained his leading position, because the Athenians thought that he was the one most capable of handling

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<sup>40</sup> For Alcibiades' contorted use of the term φιλόπολις, see Price, *Thucydides and Internal War*, pp. 260-1, who also draws attention to the fact that Pericles and Alcibiades are the only individuals in the *History* who use this term.

<sup>41</sup> cf. Kallet, *Money*, p. 36: 'Alcibiades illustrates the most extreme example of private over public interests; his behaviour is cast in terms of *moral transgression*.' [my emphasis]

<sup>42</sup> cf. Hollander, 'Ethical Challenges', p. 49; Ciulla, 'Ethics and Leadership Effectiveness', p. 302.

the affairs of the city and meet her needs, ὧν δὲ ἡ ξύμπασα πόλις προσεδεῖτο πλείστου ἄξιον νομίζοντες εἶναι (2.65.4). In Thucydides' formulation, the Athenians realized that Pericles did not only have a clear view of the best policy for the entire city and its citizens (what we might call 'the common good'),<sup>43</sup> but he was also the one person *par excellence* who could, and should, implement this policy.<sup>44</sup>

Pericles' relationship with the people is described in more detail in 2.65.8-9. Pericles, in Thucydides' famous phrase, 'was able to control the multitude in a free spirit',<sup>45</sup> κατεῖχε τὸ πλῆθος ἐλευθέρως, and 'was leading the people rather than being led by them', οὐκ ἤγετο μᾶλλον ὑπ' αὐτοῦ ἢ αὐτὸς ἤγε. The adverb ἐλευθέρως in this passage has been variously interpreted as referring either to Pericles (the freedom Pericles enjoyed in the conduct of his office) or to the Athenian people and their freedom under Pericles' leadership.<sup>46</sup> I argue that the expression κατεῖχε ἐλευθέρως, with the juxtaposition of the two apparently antithetical words and the (deliberate?) ambiguity of meaning, brilliantly captures the notion of *influence*, a key-concept in modern leadership theory for the description of the relationship between

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<sup>43</sup> Note the use of the emphatic ξύμπασα with πόλις to strengthen this point.

<sup>44</sup> Note the use of the adjective ἄξιος which suggests not only ability but also rightful merit, a point further intensified by the adverbial use of the superlative πλείστου.

<sup>45</sup> Jowett's translation.

<sup>46</sup> Gomme, *Historical Commentary Vol. II*, p. 192 interprets the adverb with reference to Pericles, 'as a free man should', followed by L. Edmunds and R. Martin, 'Thucydides 2.65.8: ἐλευθέρως', *HSCPh*, 81 (1977), pp. 187-93, who understand ἐλευθέρως in relation to Pericles' oratorical freedom, i.e., the freedom with which he spoke his mind without concealing his true opinion when he addressed the democratic assembly. Hornblower, *Commentary Vol. I*, p. 345, interprets the adverb with reference to the Athenian people, 'like free men'. See the rich bibliography in Edmunds and Martin above (pp. 187-8, n.2-3) for different interpretations of this paradoxical phrase and for a detailed discussion, A.M. Parry, 'Classical Philology and Literary Criticism', in A.M. Parry, *The Language of Achilles and Other Papers* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), pp. 141-7, pp. 143-7.



leader and followers.<sup>47</sup> On the one hand, Pericles was able to affect the beliefs or decisions of the Athenian people without having to yield to their wishes or abandon his own principles about what was right, proper, or beneficial. On the other hand, he was able to guide the people towards policies that he thought were conducive to the common good without forcing his will upon the people and without restricting their freedom as citizens in a democratic state.<sup>48</sup> In other words, Pericles was able to influence the people of Athens while at the same time recognizing and respecting their autonomy as followers, which is a central requirement of ethical leadership, and what distinguishes leadership from other forms of exercising power and control.<sup>49</sup> On account of his political integrity and the high esteem in which he was held, Pericles had no need to pander to the people's desires or ingratiate himself with the crowd, *πρὸς ἡδονήν τι λέγειν*, but was able to confront the people in a way that might even arouse

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<sup>47</sup> See, e.g., Northouse, *Leadership*, p. 5: 'leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal', and Haslam et. al, *New Psychology*, p. xix: '[leadership] is about achieving influence, not securing compliance'.

<sup>48</sup> S. Forsdyke, 'Athenian Democratic Ideology and Herodotus' *Histories*', *AJPH*, 122 (2001), pp. 329-58, draws attention to the tyrannical associations of the verb *κατέχειν* in Herodotus. According to Forsdyke, *κατέχειν* was an ideologically charged word, associated in Athenian democratic ideology with the idea of civic weakness under tyrannical rule in contrast to the strength of free democratic societies. Forsdyke describes Thucydides' phrase as 'oxymoronic' (p. 339) which suggests that she understands *ἐλευθέρως* to refer to the Athenian people (*contra* Edmunds and Martin). If, however, *κατέχειν* has such tyrannical associations, then Thucydides' addition of *ἐλευθέρως* apparently aims to create a contrast between the two words and to neutralise, as it were, the negative connotations of tyranny inherent in *κατέχειν*, while at the same time stressing the idea that Pericles was *still* able to direct the people towards his own policies.

<sup>49</sup> Ciulla, 'Leadership Ethics', p. 12. This, of course, applies only to those conceived of as legitimate members of the 'organization' that Pericles led, i.e., the adult male citizens of Athens. The attitude of Athenian democracy in general, and its leaders in particular, towards women, slaves, and the allies of Athens lies outside the scope of this paper.

their anger, ἔχων [...] καὶ πρὸς ὀργήν τι ἀντειπεῖν (2.65.8).<sup>50</sup> In addition, he was able to mould the mood and spirits of the people, and trigger the appropriate emotional reactions in them depending on the circumstances (2.65.9).

This description of the relationship between Pericles and the people tallies with the statement about Pericles' ability to 'explain' (ἐρμηνεῦσαι) and 'teach' (διδάξαι) in 2.60.5-6, and highlights the ethical dimension of Pericles' leadership. First, Thucydides draws attention to the fact that Pericles' rhetoric does not play to the audience's desires; it does not create false hopes or expectations, and it does not deceive the audience with an aim to secure political advantages for himself.<sup>51</sup> On the contrary, through his speeches Pericles aims to *instruct* the audience on the policies that would be most conducive to the common good, even at the risk of rousing the people's resentment against him. Second, the 'freedom' in the relationship between Pericles and the people combined with his practice of 'explaining' his policies to them highlight the *active* role of followers in the leadership process: far from being passive recipients of the leader's proposals, the people are cast as *judges* who are invited to assess the value of these proposals and decide on the correctness of a certain policy based on their own aspirations, values, and beliefs. The audience of Pericles' speeches may not formulate policies themselves, but after being thoroughly instructed by Pericles, they judge the soundness of the policies he

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<sup>50</sup> See, e.g., Pericles' firmness in 2.61.2 ('as for myself, I am the same man and have not shifted my ground', transl. Hornblower) and his outspokenness in 2.63.1 ('and you should not pursue the honours [of an empire], unless you are prepared to undertake the toils [of maintaining it]'). On self-confidence and determination as major leadership qualities in 'trait' approaches to leadership, see Northouse, *Leadership*, pp. 24-5.

<sup>51</sup> Selective use and manipulation of information, and cultivation of false hopes by relying on 'semblances', is characteristic of Alcibiades' rhetoric, see the most detailed analysis by Macleod, 'Rhetoric and History'. Cleon in the Mytilenean debate (3.37-40) offers another example of deceptive rhetoric.

advocates and make an informed decision on the course of action to be taken.<sup>52</sup> As a result, Pericles' rhetoric and leadership do not only train and habituate followers to decide responsibly and independently, but also promote understanding and encourage ownership of the decision by followers, giving them thus an additional motivation to act.<sup>53</sup>

Pericles, therefore, by virtue of his intellectual ability, concern for the common good, and integrity of character, was able to devise policies designed to promote the prosperity and flourishing of the entire city, and to direct the people to endorse and implement those policies. His leadership respected the autonomy of the people and his instructional rhetoric enhanced the people's decision-making skills and provided them with an enlightened understanding of the common good. This set of qualities and political behaviour enabled Pericles to build strong bonds of trust with the people and maintain his influence for a long period of time.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> See Pericles' statement in the Funeral Oration (2.40.2) that democratic Athenians either develop the city's policy (ἐνθυμούμεθα) or at least make judgments about it (κρίνομεν). For a detailed and well-argued discussion of Pericles' 'instructional rhetoric' and its positive effects on the Athenian demos, see H. Yunis, 'How do the People Decide? Thucydides on Periclean Rhetoric and Civic Instruction', *AJPh*, 112 (1991), pp. 179-200. For a similar view, see also R. Balot, *Courage in the Democratic Polis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 27-8 with n.7, and p. 44 with n.43.

<sup>53</sup> See Thuc. 2.40.3 and Yunis, 'How do the People Decide?', pp. 185-6. A leader's instructional rhetoric is not the only factor that contributes to the development of the capacity of Athenian citizens to make informed and reasoned judgments on matters of national policy. J. Ober, 'Epistemic Democracy in Classical Athens: Sophistication, Diversity, and Innovation', in H. Landemore and J. Elster (eds.), *Collective Wisdom: Principle and Mechanisms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 118-47, argues that democratic institutions themselves facilitated 'knowledge aggregation', and offers a detailed analysis of the ways in which the citizens' experience of participation in institutions such as the Council of 500, the allotted offices and the law courts tended to increase the political sophistication of individual citizens.

<sup>54</sup> The element of time in Pericles' leadership is not mentioned explicitly by Thucydides, but we know that this was in fact the case since Pericles was elected general almost continuously from 443 to 429. The effect of Pericles'

On the other hand, Thucydides describes Alcibiades' relationship with the people in bleak terms:

For, being held in honour by the citizens, he indulged his desires to a greater extent than his existing means allowed with regard to horse breeding and the rest of the expenditures; which is what subsequently brought down the city of Athens to a considerable degree. For most people, fearing the magnitude of his transgressions in his everyday life and habits, and the extent of his ambition in every single thing with which he occupied himself, thought that he desired to become a tyrant and became hostile to him. And although in the public sphere he handled the affairs of war in an excellent way, at a personal level every man resented his lifestyle, and so they entrusted the affairs of the city to others and before long they ruined the city.

(6.15.3-4)

We have seen that Thucydides credits Alcibiades with great efficiency in the way he handled the war affairs and fulfilled the public requirements of his position (δημοσία κράτιστα διαθέντι τὰ τοῦ πολέμου).<sup>55</sup> The ethical deficiencies in his private life, however, had serious political implications, as Thucydides sees a direct link between Alcibiades' private habits and

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long-lasting influence over the people is, to some extent, conveyed in 2.65 by the imperfects ἐξηγεῖτο, κατεῖχε, οὐκ ἤγετο, ἤγε.

<sup>55</sup> It is not clear whether Thucydides refers to the period between 420-415 (before Alcibiades' first exile) or between 410-406 (before Alcibiades' second exile). Gomme, Andrews, and Dover, *Historical Commentary Vol. IV*, pp. 242-4 and Hornblower, *Commentary Vol. III*, p. 341 agree on the latter view. The answer to this question does not affect my argument, and I agree with Gribble, *Alcibiades and Athens*, p. 183, that 'the language of 6.15 aims at a formula capable of expressing *both* events.' [author's emphasis]

the downfall of the city.<sup>56</sup> Alcibiades, like many Athenian politicians before him, pursued the path of public spending as a means to political power.<sup>57</sup> However, the extravagance of his expenditure, and especially the mentality with which he performed this traditional practice, made his case problematic.<sup>58</sup> The magnitude of Alcibiades' dissolute lifestyle and his unbridled ambition went far beyond, and showed contempt for, established democratic principles and practices; the lawlessness of his conduct was 'undemocratic'.<sup>59</sup> This type of behaviour aroused fear to the people who became hostile to him, thinking that his ultimate aim was to become a tyrant. To put it differently, Alcibiades' manifestly self-regarding personality and behaviour generated a fundamental lack of *trust* between him and the people of Athens. If trust establishes 'a framework of expectations and agreements [...] in which actions conform or fail to conform',<sup>60</sup> Alcibiades' self-serving habits and behaviour openly breached the expectations of the Athenian people about the behaviour of a leader in a democratic city. The double-echo of Alcibiades' 'lawlessness', *παρανομία* (6.15.4, 6.28.2), qualified as 'undemocratic', *ὀδημοτική*, stresses the extent to which the private conduct of Alcibiades violated the

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<sup>56</sup> cf. Westlake, *Individuals*, p. 9; Kallet, *Money*, pp. 36-7.

<sup>57</sup> For public expenditure as a source of political power, see L. Kurke, *The Traffic in Praise: Pindar and the Poetics of Social Economy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 163-94; J.K. Davies, *Wealth and the Power of Wealth in Classical Athens* (New York: Arno Press, 1981), pp. 92-5; Kallet, *Money*, p. 38.

<sup>58</sup> See, e.g., P. Millett, 'The Rhetoric of Reciprocity in Classical Athens', in C. Gill, N. Postlethwaite, and R. Seaford (eds.), *Reciprocity in Ancient Greece* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 227-53, p. 245: '[...] the relationship with the *dēmos* envisaged in Alcibiades' statement before the assembly is not reciprocal in the sense of an exchange between equals, but vertical, as if between patron and client.'

<sup>59</sup> Thuc. 6.28.2: the enemies of Alcibiades were trying to implicate him in the Hermae affair using as evidence the 'undemocratic lawlessness of his conduct', *τὴν ἄλλην αὐτοῦ ἐς τὰ ἐπιτηδεύματα ὀδημοτικὴν παρανομίαν*.

<sup>60</sup> Solomon, 'Ethical Leadership', pp. 100-1.

established norms and had major consequences in the public sphere, both for Alcibiades himself and for the city as a whole.<sup>61</sup>

It is significant that Thucydides' description of the resentment of the Athenian people towards Alcibiades sharply contrasts Alcibiades' first appearance in the *History*, where he is presented as being honoured by the people on account of his distinguished ancestry, ἀξιώματι προγόνων τιμώμενος (5.43.2). Coming from an aristocratic family with a rich record of services to the city,<sup>62</sup> Alcibiades enters Athenian politics already enjoying a capital of trust with the people, who apparently expected him to live up to the example of his ancestors and continue his family tradition of public benefactions.<sup>63</sup> However, as a result of the licence of his

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<sup>61</sup> For a detailed discussion of the political implications of Alcibiades' παρανομία, which was (interpreted as) an indication that he wished to place himself apart from or above others, see Gribble, *Alcibiades and Athens*, pp. 69-71.

<sup>62</sup> Alcibiades' great-grandfather, Cleinias I, contributed a trireme to the Athenian fleet at Artemisium (Hdt. 8.17) and his father, Cleinias II, died fighting for Athens against the Boeotians at the battle of Coronea in 447-6; for Alcibiades' family, see Rhodes, *Alcibiades*, pp. 17-19.

<sup>63</sup> Thucydides speaks of 'honour' (τιμώμενος), not trust, but the notion of honour in this context shares two important characteristics with our notion of trust. First, according to Aristotle's definition (*Rh.* 1361a28-30), τιμή is accorded to 'those who have already done some good' but also to 'someone who has the *potential* to do good' in the future. Alcibiades obviously falls under the second category: he has not performed any public services before he enters politics, but his distinguished pedigree and his wealth signify his potential to do so in the future. Similarly, the record of his ancestors' contributions to the city has presumably established a framework of trust between Alcibiades' family and the people, which Alcibiades himself enjoys in the first steps of his political career simply in virtue of being a member of that family; for the idea of trust as 'background', see Solomon, 'Ethical Leadership', pp. 102-3. Second, both trust and honour seem to depend more on those who bestow them to others than on those who receive them. See Aristotle's comment on honour, ἐν τοῖς τιμῶσι μᾶλλον εἶναι ἢ ἐν τῷ τιμωμένῳ (*Eth. Nic.* 1095b24-25), and Solomon, 'Ethical Leadership', p. 102: '[...] whereas leaders may be said to earn the trust of their followers, it is the followers who have the capacity to give that trust.'

personal life and habits this trust quickly dissipated and turned into hostility: every Athenian citizen at a personal level (ιδία ἑκάστοι)<sup>64</sup> resented Alcibiades' lifestyle (ἀχθεσθέντες), and this resentment was the essential cause behind both his exiles. The loss of the people's trust to Alcibiades led them to force him out of his position of leadership and to entrust the affairs of the city to others, which eventually brought about the downfall of Athens.<sup>65</sup>

Thucydides' observation about the reaction of the Athenian people to the private (mis)conduct of their leader elucidates Thucydides' understanding of the importance of ethics in leadership, as a leader's ethical deficiencies appear to have a negative impact both on the broader political climate and on the ethics of followers. On the one hand, Thucydides' remarks suggest that the eventual downfall of Athens came about not only because the city was deprived of an effective leader, but also because Alcibiades was succeeded by leaders who were less able than he was. The comparison between Pericles and Alcibiades, therefore, does not just model the qualities of the good leader in terms of effectiveness and ethics. It also suggests that character deficiencies in a leader and the distrust they generate can initiate a corrosive process, whereby the people react to the fact that their expectations have been betrayed by turning to even less able (and perhaps even more unethical) individuals, with disastrous consequences for the entire community.<sup>66</sup> On the other hand, a leader's ethics appear to have a direct impact on

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<sup>64</sup> The dative ἰδίᾳ logically responds to δημοσίᾳ above to contrast Alcibiades' excellent performance as a leader in the public sphere with the displeasure caused by his conduct as an individual in his private life. However, the placement of ἰδίᾳ next to ἑκάστοι invites us to read the two words together in a manner that adds emphasis to the private reservations of the Athenians themselves about Alcibiades: at a personal level (ιδία) each of the Athenians separately (ἑκάστοι) was disgusted by Alcibiades' conduct in his personal life.

<sup>65</sup> The idea of trust as an active and dynamic emotional relationship is also illustrated by Thucydides' reference to the deposition of Pericles and the fine imposed on him (2.65.3-4): far from being a static relationship, on which one can rely or hope to last, trust is hard-won and hard to maintain even for the ethically good leader.

<sup>66</sup> I owe this observation to Jon Hesk.

the ethics of followers. An ethical leader who manifestly prioritizes the common good over private benefit is better able to keep in check the self-regarding concerns of followers. Pericles, on account of his integrity, was able, and bold enough, to ask the Athenians to neglect their private houses and lands and sacrifice them to the common cause of Athens (2.62.3).<sup>67</sup> When, however, an unethical or overtly self-regarding leader becomes prominent, the individualistic tendencies of followers outweigh their willingness to commit to the common good and may lead them to make decisions on the basis of personal concerns rather than after a careful, rational calculation of the public good.<sup>68</sup> We have already seen that Thucydides considers the recall of Alcibiades as the major factor for the failure of the Sicilian expedition in 2.65.11, and in 6.15.4 Thucydides seems to suggest that, though the Athenians were certainly justified in feeling resentment for Alcibiades' conduct, they were also perhaps too quick to act on impulse, driven by this personal resentment, and suspect beyond reason that Alcibiades wanted to establish himself as a tyrant.<sup>69</sup> Ethical deficiencies in a leader, therefore, do not merely threaten the leader's ability to maintain his position of leadership. They also have wider negative implications for the welfare of followers and the ethics of the entire organization. These

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<sup>67</sup> Pericles himself had already proposed (2.13.1) to make his own farms and houses public property in the event that Archidamus, king of Sparta, spared them on account of his guest-friendship with Pericles.

<sup>68</sup> See, for example, Thucydides' description of the individualistic motivations of different Athenian groups for the Sicilian expedition in 6.24.3, which testifies to Alcibiades' deleterious impact on the Athenian population as a whole. For a similar view, see Price, *Thucydides and Internal War*, p. 237, who draws a vicious circle between a decline in morals and community identification, the rise of grasping individuals, and further decline of the community as a result of their influence.

<sup>69</sup> See n. 64 above for the use of ἰδίᾳ in 6.15.4, which seems to re-introduce the ἰδιότης-theme, this time with reference to the Athenian people as a whole, and 'emphasizes the intrusion of the individual Athenian and his private reactions into the political domain', as Gribble, *Alcibiades and Athens*, p. 192 aptly remarks. See also Hornblower, *Commentary Vol. III*, p. 340 for Thucydides' criticism of the Athenians' unfounded suspicions.



implications make the successful fulfilment of both criteria of good leadership (effectiveness and ethics) all the more crucial, especially in the case of leaders who, like Alcibiades, create expectations that they can satisfy both.

## **Conclusion**

In 2.65 and 6.15, Thucydides offers an authorial assessment of Pericles and Alcibiades. In this paper, I argued for a new connection between the two assessments on the basis of Thucydides' exploration of the workings of leadership. Through linguistic and thematic echoes, Thucydides invites us to make a *synkrisis* between Pericles and Alcibiades, out of which a coherent model of leadership can be constructed. On the one hand, Thucydides recognizes *both* effectiveness *and* ethical integrity as essential qualities for a leader; on the other, he carefully examines the impact that the presence or absence of these qualities has on the leader's relationship with his followers and consequently on the leadership process itself.

Thucydides' remarks are elucidated by, and reinforce, that strand of leadership studies which views leadership as a relational process between leader and followers and stresses the importance of both effectiveness and ethics as necessary attributes of the good leader. The assessments of Pericles and Alcibiades clearly show that the personal ethics of a leader crucially intertwine with his public performance as leader. Ethical deficiencies in a leader's private life can have grave political ramifications since they generate distrust and impact negatively on the relationship between leader and followers. The portrait of the Thucydidean Pericles fulfils central requirements of ethical leadership outlined by modern leadership theory: *respect* in the way he treated his followers; *honesty* in the way he communicated with them; *community* and *service* through his prioritization of the common good in his political decisions; most importantly, with his instructional rhetoric Pericles contributed to the intellectual and ethical development of his followers by habituating them to deliberate rationally,

autonomously and responsibly on policies that promote the welfare of the entire city. His effectiveness combined with his integrity of character enabled him to build strong bonds of trust with the people and thus maintain his influence over them for a long period of time. For Alcibiades, on the other hand, private benefit was the primary concern of his political career, with the public good being only a side-effect or an afterthought. His deceptive rhetoric misled the people and inflamed their greed for personal gain, and eventually, owing to ethical deficiencies in his personal life, he lost the trust of the people, and despite his efficiency in handling public affairs, brought about his own downfall and the downfall of his city. Aspiring leaders who read Thucydides' work can therefore draw valuable lessons from the study of his assessments of the two men. Pericles emerges out of his *synkrisis* with Alcibiades as the truly good leader because he manages to combine both senses of the word *good* in his leadership: he is an effective leader as well as an ethical one.<sup>70</sup>

The present analysis suggests a new way of reading Thucydides' views on leadership. Through the targeted comparison of the assessments of Pericles and Alcibiades, I hope to have shown how modern leadership studies can provide a useful analytical tool in investigating Thucydides' leaders and his understanding of the workings of this complex process.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> This twofold understanding of good leadership (effective and ethical) is not exclusive in Thucydides, but seems to reflect a wider tendency in Greek political thought: compare Isocrates' attempt to reform Athens from an imperial city to an enlightened hegemony, by informing traditional notions of honour and courage with the requirements of justice, fairmindedness and due consideration of the interest of allies/followers; for this reading of Isocrates' political project, see Balot, *Courage*, pp. 149-76.

<sup>71</sup> Future studies could further explore the extent to which the narrative of the events in which Pericles and Alcibiades participate supports or complicates the picture drawn in the two assessments. In addition, the leadership model described in my paper can be expanded and further refined to include other leading figures in Thucydides' narrative (Nicias, Cleon, Brasidas, Demosthenes, as well as Themistocles whose assessment seems to be intimately related to that of Pericles: on Themistocles as a 'prototypical exemplar for Pericles', see S. Hornblower,

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*Thucydides and Pindar: Historical Narrative and the World of Epinikian Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 311).