

## Platonic Republic or Thucydidean Empire: Imperialism in the Disputed Legacy of Leo Strauss

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### Abstract

Did Leo Strauss have a teaching on the subject of "imperialism" and if so what was it? The difficulty of determining the nature of this attitude, as with all studies of Straussian thought, lies in the highly nuanced, indirect, and sometimes intentionally cryptic way in which Strauss expounded his own views. In the case of "imperialism" we are fortunate enough to have his treatment of Thucydides' history of the downfall of 5th century BCE Athens, the hegemony of which had reached imperial dimensions, and its contrast with the political ideals Platonic thought. From an examination of these writings it can be inferred that if Strauss' attitude towards imperialism is in any way predicated on Plato's views it can be assumed to be decidedly critical of imperialism. Even Thucydides was skeptical of imperial adventures on practical grounds and beyond this there is an implicit metaphysical argument in Plato which provides an even stronger criticism of imperialism. This argument is nowhere explicitly stated and is best illustrated in the context of a comparison with Thucydides. Strauss provides us with precisely this comparison. Thus it can be inferred that in the dispute between neoconservatives and noninterventionists over the Straussian legacy, the neoconservatives are, on the whole, mistaken.

Key Words: Political Philosophy, Straussianism, Neoconservatism, Plato, Thucydides

The name of Leo Strauss(1899-1973), philologist and classicist, is today often invoked in the context of American schools of law, political philosophy, and history. To call Strauss a mere interpreter of texts is to miss both the originality of his thought and the salience of his impact on the academic establishment in the United States. This influence goes beyond academia to influential figures on the fringe of the political world. Nowhere has the alleged influence of Strauss been more controversial than on the emergence of the neoconservative movement. While the influence is undeniable, the extent and the content of this influence is debatable. In addition to extrinsic questions of the linkage of an ivory tower scholar to an activist political movement, there are intrinsic questions having to do with the nature and intelligibility of Straussian thought, and whether those who have sought to appropriate his legacy have genuinely understood the intentions of their intellectual mentor.

The thinkers who have been most notably associated with Leo Strauss in recent cultural and political discourse are those thinkers who constitute the neoconservative movement. As columnist William Pfaff, in an article strongly critical of this movement, notes

The main intellectual influence on the neoconservatives has been the philosopher Leo Strauss, who left Germany in 1938 and taught for many years at the University of Chicago. Several of the neoconservatives studied under him...something of a cult developed around Strauss during his later years in Chicago. 1

To say that the neoconservative movement traces its intellectual lineage back to Strauss is not to say that any ideology or attitude that this movement espouses would necessarily receive his approval. For example, the neoconservative movement is generally associated with a willingness to use state power, or *realpolitik*, an attitude which seems to be associated with Strauss because of the importance which he assigned to the thought of Niccolò Machiavelli(1469-1527) in the development of the modern world. However this is not to say that Machiavellianism receives the normative approval of Strauss. In fact, he compares Machiavellian political theory unfavorably with the classical Greek idea "public virtue."

In this paper we will attempt to determine what the true thoughts of Strauss on the topic of "imperialism" were. From the outset we will not endow the term "imperialism" with any pejorative or polemical content, or preclude the possibility of somebody making a successful defense of imperialism. Our object will be to tease out what Strauss said about imperialism in an attempt to see if it elicited his approval or disapproval. Unfortunately, nailing down the precise view of Strauss on any specific idea is much more problematic than with most thinkers. The difficulty lies in the highly nuanced, indirect, and sometimes intentionally cryptic way in which Strauss expounded his own views. To begin with Strauss did not explicitly set out his philosophy in works directly addressing the perennial topics of ethics, metaphysics, or even politics but rather presented it in the guise of an interpreter of classical texts. In addition, he believed that the most significant texts in political philosophy concealed their true meaning under an exoteric level of discourse. Thus it is often difficult to tease out what Strauss himself wishes to say through the medium of classical text interpretation. If one wishes to find out what Strauss thought about a specific issue or idea, say justice, or democracy, or prophetic religion, one has to glean it from his interpretation of Plato, Maimonides(1135-1204), Machiavelli or whomever he considered to have treated the issue in greatest depth.

For some people this subtle, Straussian method of reading seems maddeningly indirect, as if the interpreter was using the classic text like a ventriloquist's puppet to present his own views. Those sympathetic to Leo Strauss say that the subtlety of his approach reflects his own respect for the texts and a desire to get at what the author genuinely intended. He rejected relativism (as espoused by contemporary post-modernism, deconstructionism, or pragmatism) and attempted to elucidate the true meanings intended by the authors themselves. Strauss writes,

According to a saying of Kant, it is possible to understand a philosopher better than he understood himself (Critique of Pure Reason, B370). Now such understanding may have the greatest merits: but it is clearly not historical understanding. If it goes so far as to claim to be the true understanding, it is positively unhistorical...Historical understanding means to understand the author exactly as he understood himself. Everyone who has ever tried his hand at this task will bear me out when I say that this task is already a sufficiently tough assignment itself. 2

However he stressed that this true, objective, meaning was extremely difficult to grasp for two important reasons. First, one has to divest oneself of one's own modern prejudices and subjectivity, a well nigh impossible task. Secondly, many classical authors, particularly when they were writing on sensitive reli-

gious or political topics, encrypted their true, esoteric, opinions within the body of larger, exoteric, works. Needless to say, Strauss might be right. There could be a final, objective reading of Plato, and yet his own elucidation of it might be in error. The price of objectivism is fallibility.

Apart from controversies over method, it is safe to say that Leo Strauss was an interpreter whose interpretations went deep enough that they constitute a philosophy in themselves, not unlike Averroes (Muhammad ibn Rushid, 12th c.CE) the great medieval interpreter of Aristotle (384-322 BCE) whose interpretations themselves became the philosophy of "Averroism." Therefore it makes sense to ask what Strauss thought about justice or democracy or any other standard philosophical topic, even though it might appear that he is only trying to report the ideas or attitudes of some classical or medieval thinker. The attitude of Strauss towards imperialism has a particular urgency since it impinges on contemporary neoconservative thinking on globalism, interventionism, etc. or what in classical political discourse would have been called imperialism. Given what has already been stated concerning the intricate and subtle nature of Straussian interpretation, one might be excused for considering any attempt at a coherent Straussian theory of "imperialism" any more than that of any other well defined, specific idea, to be futile. However, matters are really not as bad as all that, and a close reading of the Straussian corpus in the correct areas actually goes a long way towards giving us an indication of what attitude Leo Strauss actually took towards imperialism. It is the contention of this paper that Strauss took a rather dim and critical view of imperialism, although not for the same reasons that, say, Marxists, would. What these reasons are can be elucidated from his interpretation of Thucydides' history of the Peloponnesian war, the classical treatment of imperialism as an empirical, historical phenomena.

Thucydides' history of the "greatest war among the Greeks" is more than just an account of an intra-civilizational conflict, it is also an account of a struggle between two types of contenders, an empire (Athens and the states over which it exercised hegemony) and a mutual alliance (Sparta, the other Peloponnesian states and their confederates). It should be noted that, apart from the period of history treated by Thucydides (from the end of the Persian wars to its defeat by Sparta in 404 BCE) Athens is generally described as a city-state rather than an empire however at this time Athens had acquired a large number of satellite states which paid it tribute and were bound to support it in warfare. Thucydides is an Athenian, however he is a dissident Athenian, and as such is presumably well positioned to give a balanced account of the war. In any case the outcome of the war is clear, it ends in a debacle for Athens and the dissolution of its empire.

If we are simply interested in the Thucydidean account of the war, the moral conclusion is obvious: Imperialism is an act of hubris which sooner or later brings about its own downfall. This plain textual interpretation is pointed out by conservative scholar Gary North in his satirical criticism of the neoconservatives entitled "It Usually Begins With Thucydides." North, an isolationist, attacks the neoconservatives from the right using much the same sort of reasoning that Pfaff uses on the left. In a sarcastic remark aimed at neoconservatives who defend hegemonic policies buttressed by an appeal to Strauss and the superficially attractive description of Athenian culture during the days of its empire as described by Thucydides, North states,

Dr. Kristol has done me a great favor in admitting in full public view what I find easy to believe: the centrality to the neo-

conservatives of Thucydides' account of the disaster of disasters of classical Greece, the Peloponnesian War (431-404B.C.). 3

He is able to use Thucydides as a cautionary tale to upbraid those who would commit acts of political hubris similar to those of the Athenians. However North really adds nothing to our knowledge since it is a matter of public record that Athens lost the Peloponnesian war and the neoconservatives would not need someone to point this out to them. The salient question is how did Strauss interpret Thucydides, keeping in mind that Strauss often used a subtle kind of Socratic dialectic to stand conventionally accepted interpretations on their head. It is not inconceivable that Strauss was able to extract a pro-imperial interpretation out of the historical account, allowing the neoconservatives to use Thucydides as a proof-text for their globalist policy positions. Everything hinges, not on what actually happened, or on what Thucydides wrote, but on how Strauss interpreted Thucydides. It is trivial to say that the Peloponnesian war provides arguments against political hubris, but the issue of whether the Straussian interpretation of Thucydides supports imperialism or not is important, since it is precisely the Straussian premises, based ultimately on Platonic sources, on which the neoconservatives claim to base their policy conclusions.

### **War, Peace, and the Ontological Differences between Plato and Thucydides according to Strauss**

It might legitimately be asked what is valuable in a Straussian reading of Plato or Thucydides on a topic such as imperialism. Strauss would maintain that in doing so we could avail ourselves of "the wisdom of the ancients." By "ancients" Strauss designates both the classical and the medieval political theorists of Western Civilization up to the time of the Renaissance. It was only at the time of Machiavelli that the meaning of political theory changed from the study of political virtue to the study of political power. The reason why such a recourse to the opinions of earlier thinkers seems quaint or irrelevant to contemporary minds is that we have been blinded by the illusion that "progress" applies to civilization as a whole with the same certainty that it applies to technology. Strauss writes of a representative progressist historian:

His tacit assumption is that the history of thought is, generally speaking, a progress, and that therefore the philosophic thought of the twentieth century is superior, or nearer the truth than, the philosophic thought of the twelfth century. I contend that this assumption is irreconcilable with true historical understanding. It necessarily leads to the attempt to understand the thought of the past better than it understood itself, and not as it understood itself. For it is evident that our understanding of the past will tend to be more adequate, the more we are interested in the past; but we cannot be seriously interested, i.e., passionately interested, in the past, if we know beforehand that the present is, in the most important respect, superior to the past. It is not a matter of chance that, generally speaking, the historical understanding of the continental romantics, of the historical school, was superior to the historical understanding of eighteenth century rationalism; it is a necessary consequence of the fact that the representatives of the historical school did not believe in the superiority of their own time to the past, whereas the eighteenth century rationalist believed in the superiority of the Age of Reason to all former ages. Historians who start from the belief in the superiority of the present-day thought to the thought of the past feel no necessity to understand the past by itself: they understand it only as a preparation for the present. 4

If we grant, with Strauss, the possibility that past thinkers had a clearer and wiser grasp on many of the issues which elude contemporary philosophers, historians, and social scientists, then we have a reason

for passionately seeking out their opinions on sundry topics. This is not to say that we should treat them as oracular fonts and grant them a superstitious respect. Such an attitude, which often discredits romantic and antiquarian studies, is a far cry from the critical and circumspect Straussian approach. However we will at least be able to avail ourselves of an outside criteria with which to judge issues which the pre-suppositions of modernity have relegated to an impasse.

In no case is this impasse more acute than in the case of "imperialism" which is clearly too overloaded with emotional and doctrinaire overtones to be a subject for objective contemporary debate. We know where everyone will stand on the issue before we have elicited their opinion. Marxists will condemn it unequivocally, albeit according to their own definitions and without regard to the concrete historical practices of Marxist states. Neoconservatives will tacitly defend it, albeit under some euphemism such as "global responsibility." This neoconservative boldness, willingness to take up an unpopular cause, was in fact abetted by the anti-utopian strain in Straussian thought. They felt liberated by the antimodernist tendency in Strauss, which they saw as license to shrug off the traditional utopianism of American liberalism in favor of a hard headed "Machiavellianism." Moreover Strauss did see Machiavelli as the key innovator in modern politics, a fact which, if there were no deeper strata in his thought, would justify those who see Straussian endorsement of the Thrasymachian doctrine of "might is right."

However there clearly is a deeper strata, that of classical political rationalism which Strauss prefers, on normative grounds, to modern Machiavellianism. In this respect Strauss can be fruitfully compared to Heidegger(1889-1976), another thinker who digs deep into the philosophical past. Both Strauss and Heidegger reject modern rationalism and progress as one sided and superficial, and both look to precedents in classical antiquity to find a foundation for their thought. It is interesting to contrast their views of the what is called the "Socratic turn" in philosophy, in which ancient Greek philosophy turned from the discussion of nature to the rational criticism of human society. Heidegger saw this turn to abstract and reflective criticism of human institutions by philosophers as a negative development which separated humanity from Being and authenticity. Plato himself, while very different from his teacher Socrates in opinions and outlook, continues in the tradition of the Socratic turn. While Heidegger rejects Platonic rationalism entirely and seeks to return to the Presocratics, for Strauss it is only the superficial misinterpretations of antiquity which lead to the caricature of "Reason" among the scholastics, the enlighteners and their modern offshoots. He discovers in his reading of the ancients, and Plato in particular, a deeper and more severe rationalism, devoid of latter theological and popular embellishment. This commitment to reason and rationally elucidated moral axioms saves the students of Strauss, as opposed to those of Heidegger, from having to make the "nihilist turn" that is the turn away from rational discussion of human problems on the ground that human beings don't have a rationally definable essence, that nothing can be said about human beings other than that they exist, a view sometimes labeled "existentialism." The Straussians, even the neoconservatives, are able to retain a fundamental belief in the objective nature of virtue, justice, and fair play in a way impossible to existentialists. However this retention of humane values comes at a price: The Straussian cannot, like his or her Heideggerian or Nietzschean counterpart, simply "will" policies or practices into existence without ethical constraints. However unmodern and realistic, hence "politically incorrect" Strauss may appear, at its deepest level his thought endorses an objective

morality. The highly nuanced nature of Straussian thought makes it difficult to determine what the specifics of this objective morality are, but it is there none the less.

From the above considerations it can be seen that Strauss might either endorse or eschew imperialism. Either way, once the case was conclusive, it would imply a Straussian censure on those who contravened the ideal. The task therefore is to tease out from the Straussian corpus what his discoveries among the monuments of "ancient wisdom" said on the subject of imperialism. Immediately we hit a major difficulty in so far as Plato, the ultimate source for classical political rationalism, didn't write a dialogue on the subject of imperialism. If he had, our task would be greatly simplified, however Strauss points out that there is a good reason why Plato would have disdained to write on such a subject. From a Platonic point of view, imperialism, and even more importantly, war, are "movements." That is to say that they participate in being at a level far removed from that of the ideas, the *edoi*, which are outside of time. As such they are not of axiomatic interest in terms of the Platonic program.

Therefore if we are to elucidate the "ancient wisdom" in respect to the issue of imperialism we must find some source which supplements the Platonic dialogue. Fortunately there is such a source, one which we find at hand and treated in great depth in the Straussian cannon: The War Between the Athenians and the Peloponnesians by Thucydides. For Strauss there is nothing fruitful in ascribing the differences in two different works to a difference in the department of knowledge. Everybody knows that Plato was a philosopher and Thucydides was a historian. If we are satisfied with that sort of compartmentalization there is nothing more that we can say by way of contrast to each of these thinkers, since they remain incommensurable. However if we see them not as representatives of respective "disciplines" (itself a modern compartmentalization) but as engaged common projects, e.g. writing Greek prose, educating the intelligent public of their time, and so forth, we can make novel and perhaps valuable insights into their methods and conclusions, insights which, through a process of mutual reflection, deepen our understanding of both thinkers. Strauss notes that one project they share in common is the description of cities. As usual Strauss looks at the most basic differences first, differences so elementary that they are often dismissed as inconsequential before their significance is grasped. He notes that Plato's cities (both in the Republic and the Laws) are unnamed, timeless, and placeless. Thucydides' cities, on the other hand, are concrete historical existents. On the one hand there is Athens, the proud, mercantile, democratic, sea power. On the other hand there is Sparta, conservative and aristocratic with its power based on agriculture and infantry. Plato is attempting to define the best state, while Thucydides is describing states as they really are. Therefore we have every right to expect that a careful reading of Plato will yield up normative conclusions for political science. That is to say, we expect Plato to be able to tell us what is right and what is wrong with a state. On the other hand Thucydides will not tell us, in propositional form, what he considers correct political policies to be. Rather we have to infer his opinion indirectly by noting the way he reports the events and the speeches of the Peloponnesian war. In lieu of a clear normative statement Thucydides provides us with the data of history, the very history which provides the contextual background of the Platonic dialogues. Once we are familiar with this background we have a far better chance of grasping the concrete signification of Plato's political idealizations, for these idealizations will be (even if we accept Platonic ontology) to some extent abstracted from the historic reality of the times.

Furthermore, by making an analogical correspondence between ideal and concrete cities, one should be able to extend the normative conclusions of the Platonic political philosophy into areas which are not expressly treated in the Dialogues.

### **Plato and Thucydides: Ethical Agreement and Metaphysical Divergence**

Strauss directs us to the essential commensurability of Plato and Thucydides, a prerequisite for any fruitful comparison. It is essential to any comparison of persons, things, or works that they have some commonalities. In addition to their differences described above, we also know that Plato and Thucydides share many qualities in common, notably: they are both Athenian gentlemen writing during or in the aftermath of the Peloponnesian war. However the essential convergent quality, from the point of view of the comparison that we trying to make, is the fact that they share a common core of ethical values. They both share a common appreciation of "what is good," the subject of ethics. They do not share a common understanding of "what is real," the subject of ontology or metaphysics, a significant difference which shall be treated below. However the simple fact of valuing the same ethical goals puts them within a possible range of comparison. At the obvious level of practical morality they both share what might be termed the same sensibility, as Strauss says,

I have spoken of the agreement between Plato and Thucydides as regards specific moral and political judgments. Both regard moderation as higher than daring and manliness. Both regard the mixture of oligarchy and democracy as the best practical regime. The recognition of this broad practical agreement makes it all the more urgent that we define, however tentatively, their profound disagreement. 5

The profound disagreement can only be seen when the axiomatic assumptions of the ethical world are clarified in terms of the axiomatic assumptions of metaphysics. Strauss proceeds to do precisely this, Thucydides held that the primary or fundamental fact is movement or unrest, and that rest is derivative; that the primary and fundamental fact is barbarism, and that Greekness is derivative; in a word, that war, and not peace, is the father of all things. Plato, on the other hand, believed in the primacy of rest, Greekness, harmony. Plato and Thucydides agree as to this-that for man, rest and Greekness and peace are the highest. But according to Plato, the highest for man and the highest in man is akin to the highest simply, to the principle or principles governing the whole; whereas according to Thucydides, the highest in man is not akin to the highest simply. According to Plato, the highest in man, man's humanity, has direct cosmic support. According to Thucydides, the highest in man lacks such support: man's humanity is too remote from the elements to be capable of such support. 6

The above might be rendered as follows Thucydides has a Platonic ethics but a Heraclitean metaphysics. Heraclitus (fl. circa 500BCE) being the Presocratic philosopher who claimed that the world was made of fire, or to put it in modern terms, the energy of conflict. Thucydides believes that peace is good but that the world is governed by chaos. Plato, of course, has an integrally "Platonic" ethics/metaphysics and believes not only that peace is good but that this goodness is a reflection of the fact that the world is a well ordered cosmos rather than a chaos. These viewpoints cannot be taken for granted as exhaustive of all possibilities, as indeed there are two other logical possibilities, that the universe is well ordered and the human world is chaotic, a notion which finds resonances in the Biblical world view, and the transvalued view that chaos and war in both the universe and the human world are natural and good. It is doubtful

that this latter view was fully embraced by any classical thinker, but it does find modern representatives in, for example, Nietzsche and Social Darwinism. The fact that Thucydides and Plato both see "rest" and "peace" as axiomatic in ethics throws their metaphysical views into contrast in a way which would be obscure if they disagreed. However there is another area in which both Plato and Thucydides are agreed and that is on the subject of large scale rather than small scale political organization. It is to this that we turn next.

### **Thucydides and Plato as "Anti-imperialists"**

In addition to sharing a fundamental ethical sensibility, Plato and Thucydides hold one other trait in common which is significant in the present context: a preference for small scale over large scale political organization. Indeed, if we are careful to distinguish classical from modern, mostly Marxist derived, attitudes, we can use the term 'anti-imperialism' as a kind of shorthand term to designate this shared attitude of both Plato and Thucydides. We must remember however that it is only a shorthand label, and does not attribute to either of these two thinkers modern notions of political correctness, equality, or moral universalism. Rather we must see two Athenian aristocrats who are in the process of criticizing a policy which has bankrupt their country, Thucydides (460-400BCE) earlier, and Plato (427-347BCE) a generation later. What evidence is there for this in the case of Thucydides? A proof text can be provided by Thucydides' rendition of Pericles' speech of 430, which, unlike the famous Funeral Oration given earlier, is delivered when the Athenians have already begun to sour on the war.

Your empire is now like a tyranny: it may have been wrong to take it; it is certainly dangerous to let it go. 7

Here we see, not so much a speech by Pericles as words put into his mouth by Thucydides. This is not just a pet Straussian interpretation, but the standard scholarly view of the loose way in which the historian handled his material. Thucydides himself admits:

I have found it difficult to remember the precise words used in the speeches which I listened to myself and my various informants have experienced the same difficulty; so my method has been, while keeping as closely as possible to the sense of the words used, to make the speakers say what, in my opinion, was called for in each situation. 8

Therefore we see that this candid admission of the tyrannical nature of Athenian hegemony can be more soundly attributed to Thucydides than to Pericles. This is, of course, no slight admission, since the term tyranny was a term of the severest censure in that time and place, Athens priding itself on its democracy. To reiterate, this is not to say that Thucydides was opposed to domination or hegemony in principle, but that Athenian policy had gone too far, becoming imprudent and impolitic. In terms of the atmosphere of the times these accusations were the most serious which could be put forth.

Plato's anti-imperialism, for the most part, can not be instantiated from empirical referents, but must be deduced from the outlines of his political philosophy contained in the Republic, the Laws and elsewhere. However we will be able to find one exception to this, provided we are willing to set aside the distinction between myth and history. This is Plato's account of the Atlantian war, set in mythological time, supposedly 9000 years before he wrote down an account of it in the Timaeus. Here Plato puts the following words into the mouth of an Egyptian priest who is explaining the purported deeds of his ancestors to the Athenian legislator Solon,



For it stood pre-eminent above all in gallantry and in all warlike arts....after encountering the deadliest perils it defeated the invaders and reared a trophy; whereby it saved from slavery such as were not enslaved, and all the rest of us who dwell within the bounds of Heracles it ungrudgingly set free. 9

Here we see an exemplary role reversal. In Thucydidean terms the concrete instantiations of imperialism and resistance to imperialism are Athens and Sparta. However in the myth from the *Timeaus* it is the Atlanteans who symbolize imperialism and the Athenians who do the resisting. This shows where Plato's sympathies lie. Not that this would be of anything more than biographical interest if Plato were not a great philosopher. Many Athenian aristocrats were out of sympathy with their country's policies during the Peloponnesian war. Their reasons, like that of Thucydides would have been considerations of prudence and self-interest. Plato, on the other hand, is interested in the correspondence between metaphysics and ethics, this has implications for the issue of imperialism, just as it does for everything else.

### **The Good and the Bad, The Strong and the Weak, Contrasting Metaphysical Assumptions in Plato and Thucydides and their Practical Implications**

To reiterate, Strauss summarizes the metaphysical outlook of Thucydides and Plato.

According to Plato, the highest in man, man's humanity, has direct cosmic support. According to Thucydides, the highest in man lacks such support: man's humanity is too remote from the elements to be capable of such support. 10

In the Thucydidian world the good is weak and the bad is strong. In this world of moral entropy human effort is required to sustain civilization. Order must be created in a political world built over the chasm of barbarism and chaos. In this building activity, modest projects (political communities) are more stable and pious than colossal enterprises (imperialism), for the same reason that card houses are more likely to collapse the higher they are built. Incidentally a better analogy might be found in what Strauss considers to be the other pillar, aside from Greek philosophy, on which the Western tradition rests, the Hebrew Bible and its ensuing interpretation. The Athenian Empire might be considered the Greek, Thucydidian version of the Tower of Babel.

However for Plato the good is strong and the bad is weak. Metaphysically, the world is a self-organized cosmos, it does not require administrative organization by human agents. In this world of moral negentropy civilization does not require building, civilization is the natural result of opening up to the influence of preexistent ideas. These ideas do in fact require effort to attain, but they are discovered not constructed practical policy: As in the *Republic*, true wisdom is the result of engagement in practical affairs, philosophers should rule the state, not only because it is good for the state, but because the experience cultivates wisdom. Thus small autonomous political communities are desirable not, from the point of view of Plato, because they promote abstract individual "freedom." They don't of course, and any notion that they might is quickly dispelled by a reading of the *Republic* or the *Laws*. Rather such small scale communities are desirable because they create the best conditions for the cultivation of transcendence. In a large imperial state a leisure class of intellectuals develops, but their separation from real power and responsibility prevents them from attaining wisdom, in other words, from becoming philosophers.

**The Straussian synopsis of the ancient tradition in relation to imperialism**

The closer one comes to the core of classic philosophical rationalism, the stronger become the arguments against imperialism. Both Thucydides and Plato can provide us with "anti-imperialist" proof texts, but the contrast demonstrates that the fountain of classical political rationalism is most principled at its source and becomes more ambiguous as it flows out into its eddies. The strong argument against imperialism is found, however implicitly, in Plato, not in his more pragmatic fellow citizen and near contemporary. It is the strong, salient arguments of the classical philosophers, however different their premises might be from those of the moderns which Strauss spent his life trying to track down. Therefore it would seem that the tendency of the Straussian project is in the direction of anti-imperialism. This is an important consideration to keep in mind, however embarrassing it might be for those factions among his followers, notably the neoconservatives, who might wish it otherwise.

## Notes

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3. North, Gary, "It Usually Begins With Thucydides" e-archived at <http://www.lewrockwell.com/north/north197.html>.
4. Strauss 1989, pp. 208-209.
5. Strauss 1989, p.97.
6. Strauss 1989, pp.100-101.
7. Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War translated by Rex Warner (New York: Penguin. 1972) p.161.
8. Thucydides, p.47.
9. Plato, Timaeus, Critias, Cleophon, Menexenus, Epistles translated by R.G.Burry (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press. 1929) p.43.
10. Strauss 1989 p.101.

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## プラトン主義の共和国かツキュディデスが論じる帝国か — レオ・シュトラウス氏の業績の中にみられる帝国主義について —

サンワル マーク

### 要 旨

レオ・シュトラウスは「帝国主義」という題目（主題）に関して教えてきたのか？ もしそうなら、教えてきたもの（内容）は何か？

この態度の性質を決定する困難は、シュトラウス思想の研究のすべてと同じように、直接には、シュトラウスが自己の見解を解説するときに用いる高度に微妙で、時には意図的に古めかしい方法に帰因する。「帝国主義」の場合、幸運なことに、アテネ帝国に関するツキュディデスの歴史書を彼が論じたものがあり、その歴史とプラトン思想とを対比したものがある。これらの書き物を調べることから、次のことが推定できる。もしも帝国主義に対するシュトラウスの態度が、プラトンの見解にともかくも言及するものであるとするならば、彼は帝国主義に対して決定的に批判的であったと仮定できる、と。ツキュディデスが、実践的地盤上、帝国主義的冒険に懐疑的であったとしても、それと同等に強い帝国主義批判をもたらしたプラトンに関する難解な議論を内在している。この議論は、どこにも明示的に叙べられていないし、またこの議論はツキュディデスとの比較という文脈で最善の形で叙述されている（描かれている）。シュトラウスは正確にこの比較をわれわれに提示している。かくして次のように推定できる。すなわち、シュトラウスの業績をめぐる新保守主義者と非干渉主義者との論争において、概して言えば、新保守主義者の方が誤っていると。

キーワード：政治哲学、シュトラウス主義、新保守主義、プラトン、ツキュディデス