2

Ancient thought
(500 BCE–312 CE)

It is a commonplace to allege that ancient thought, especially Greek thought, has little to offer the student of international relations. With the exception of Thucydides, the great political philosophers of the ancient world, it is usually argued, said little about relations between polities since they assumed that the feature that defined such relations – war – was a permanent and ever-present fixture in human affairs and that thus little could be done to change the characteristics of such relations. This view is common to many who otherwise differ profoundly: international relations scholars, historians of political thought, political theorists, philosophers, classicists, and, of course, many others (see, for example, Donelan, 1990; Knutsen, 1992, 2nd edn., 1996; Williams, 1992).

However, this is a misreading. On three issues in particular ancient thought offers a lot for the student of international relations: (1) the way in which the classical period established – and questioned – distinctions between insiders and outsiders; (2) the way in which this distinction is taken to generate, and limit, moral obligations between individuals; and (3) the ways in which this distinction is taken to generate, and limit, obligations between collectivities. In this section classical thought will be taken to consist of the thought of ancient Greece and Rome roughly between the political reforms of the Athenian statesman Cleisthenes in the fifth century BCE (which introduced democracy into Athens) and the coronation of Constantine as Roman emperor (after the battle of Milian Bridge in 312 CE). After this period, identifiably "classical" elements of thought become inextricably linked with debates over the character and future of Christianity and this moves into a different kind of problematic which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Background

To start with, however, it is necessary to say something about a writer who lies outside our chosen timeframe, but who is central to any understanding of Greek political thought: Homer. As T. A. Sinclair says, in one of the best general surveys of Greek political thought, most of the central figures of classical Greece, "had all been brought up on Homer ... they had learned to look to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, not merely for historical facts but for ethical principles" (Sinclair, 1967: 9).

There are two aspects of Homer's thought worthy of special mention. The first is the centrality of Homer's epic poetry for the Greek language itself. The Greek language was a unity, although it had many different dialects, and the language of Homer, though not spoken as such at the times we are concerned with, was still a living language. It was the language of prose and dramatic poetry for the early classical period and it remained the language of epic verse for over a thousand years. This centrality has a number of implications. Most Greek political vocabulary we find first in Homer, for example, the key term *polis* itself. More significantly still, many central ethical terms are found first in Homer. Most significant of all, it is through the language of Homer that the Greeks experienced their strongest unity, but were also made aware, unambiguously and starkly, of their diversity and disunity.

The second significance of the Homeric epics, is, of course, that they deal very obviously with questions of "international relations" or at least with questions of war and peace. In the very heart of Greek culture, therefore, is to be found a presentation of the central dramas of politics as being wound around the differences of self and other, of individual loyalty versus communal obligation and of collectivities at odds with themselves and one another. And, one might add, of alliance politics, of betrayal, heroism, the perceptions and misperceptions of different regimes, and many other aspects of both domestic politics and international politics from Homer's day to our own.

It is useful to mention another issue here. Greek thought – and especially Platonic and Aristotelian thought – has often been held to be "communitarian" or "particularist" in orientation, in that it seeks to draw sharp distinctions between Greeks and non-Greeks and to use that distinction as a powerful designator of identity and thus as a central way of organizing politics both within and between political communities in the Greek world.

While there is some truth in this view, it is in tension with another aspect of Greek – especially Platonic/Aristotelian – reflections on the value of the *polis*. This political form is indeed special, but it is special in ways that are achievable by all – not just by Greeks. Here an instructive contrast is between Isocrates, an influential teacher of rhetoric, and his contemporary

Plato. Isocrates urged on his fellow Greeks a pan-Hellenism, built both on what we would today call "cultural" grounds and also pragmatic ones. Plato (and especially Aristotle) is usually held to have been broadly critical of such schemes, holding instead to the centrality of the *polis* and emphasizing the special characteristics of this political form as the form which allows (indeed encourages and enhances) the moral life, at least if it is properly arranged and organized. The real significance of this, in the current context, is that, to use contemporary language, most classical thought *combines* – though in different ways and to different degrees – "cosmopolitan" and "communitarian" aspects. The chief – though extremely important – exception to this view being that of the Sophists (a good discussion of this point, though put from a rather different standpoint, can be found in Pangle and Ahrensdorf, 1999, chs. 1 and 2).

For our purposes, there are five basic orientations discernible in classical thought. We will term these five orientations (a) the Sophistic; (b) the Thucydidean; (c) the Platonic (and Neoplatonic); (d) the Aristotelian; and (e) the Stoic. Added to this, however, should be the sensibilities of the great Greek tragedians and comic writers, whose influence on Greek political thought was so profound (M. Nussbaum, 1986; Euben, 1990). This chapter will focus on the last four, since Sophistic theory, though very important in general terms and powerful in terms of its influence on many Greek thinkers (to name but three: Thucydides, Plato, and Aristotle), had little to say directly about our concerns. However, a brief account would be helpful as an introduction.

The Sophists – the term literally means "wise men" – were a phenomenon which flowered in the changing atmosphere of the fifth century, especially in Athens (see Gomperz, 1912; Untersteiner, 1954; Kerferd, 1955; Barker, 1959, ch. 2; Coulter, 1964; Sinclair, 1967, ch. 4; Guthrie, 1969, vol. III). Especially significant for their development was the evolution of the notion of *Arete*, usually translated as "virtue." Once it became acceptable to think of "virtue" being "taught" and learned rather than being in some sense an innate characteristic (as, for example, Homer and Pindar had taught) and in so far as it was understood as the capacity *to do something really well*, then clearly there was likely to be a demand for those who could claim to teach it. In this context, the transition of Athens to democracy was especially significant since this created an enormous market for such teaching.

As Sinclair puts it, "the distinguishing marks of the ... Sophist were his claims (1) to expert knowledge (2) to ability to teach (3) for a fee for his teaching" (Sinclair, 1967: 47). What, however, was this knowledge that the Sophists claimed and for which they expected to be paid? Thus, in contrast to the general thrust of previous Greek thought, which in differing ways always subordinated *nomos* – convention – to something (*physis* – nature – in Heraclitus, the gods in Hesiod, for example), the Sophists proclaimed the centrality of *nomos*.

This was especially true in the political realm. Being able to be a man of true "virtue" would of course depend on the context in which you worked. What you were trying to do well was central. In politics, such knowledge depended upon knowing the details of the *nomoi* (laws, conventions) that dominated public life in any given city as well as the ability to manipulate such things to your own, or your cause's advantage. It was to acquire this knowledge, most of all, that the Sophists offered their services as teachers.

Thucydides

Alone among the writers of antiquity, Thucydides has earned himself a niche in conventional scholarship on International Relations, as an exemplar – some might say *the* exemplar – of a tradition called "realist" (Nardin and Mapel, 1992; Doyle, 1997). We know little about Thucydides himself. He was born around the mid point of the fifth century BCE and died at the end of the century or in the first few years of the fourth century BCE. He fought as an Athenian *strategos* (or general) in the war he was to chronicle and was exiled at one point for a military failure. His claim to fame is the book he wrote chronicling the war between the Athenians and the Spartans, or as we call it, the Peloponnesian War.

Thucydides wrote, he tells us, so that his book would be "a possession for all time" (Thucydides, *History*: 1, 22, 4), as Clifford Orwin has put it, "[for] students of political life of whatever time and place" (Orwin, 1994: 4). This, indeed, is what traditionally realists have claimed about realism – that it is "timeless wisdom" (Gilpin, 1984; Buzan, 1996) and by far the commonest portrayal of Thucydides in international relations is as a realist. However, some classical scholars, unhappy with this view, have claimed in contrast that Thucydides was a relatively conventional man of his time; conventionally pious, conventionally concerned with justice, but also conventionally accepting that the rules of politics are different among cities than among men. A man who, in other words, is responding to the challenges of the Sophists by re-asserting, albeit with some emendations, traditional moral views.

In contrast to both above positions, some other scholars have recently suggested that while it is certainly true to say that Thucydides is concerned with (for example) justice, his concern for it, and manner of portraying it, is anything but conventional (Grene, 1965; Strauss, 1968; Lloyd-Jones, 1983; Euben, 1990; Forde, 1992; Orwin, 1994; Donnelly, 2000). On this view, Thucydides is far from being a conventional man of his time but nor is he quite a conventional realist.

The details of these three interpretations cannot be examined here. Instead, the responses Thucydides might give to the three questions with

which this chapter began are considered. On the question of "insiders and outsiders," Thucydides seems to take it as a given feature of political life that political communities engender the fiercest devotions and the greatest betrayals. In particular, the constant contrast, throughout the book, of the twin – and intertwined – problems of choice and necessity, suggests that human beings indeed live in communities which give them the greatest opportunities for nobility and glory, but that such communities themselves exist in a realm (or rather realms) of necessity. The tragedy is that all are locked into this cycle, the opportunity – Thucydides thinks – is that one can, therefore, learn from it.

As a number of recent commentators have eloquently demonstrated (Euben, 1990; Orwin, 1994), the artfulness of Thucydides in performing this task lies especially in the way he begins with seemingly opposed presentations, specifically the "Athenian thesis" proclaiming the realm of necessity abroad, if not always at home – the most famous example of this being the Melian dialogue (see pp. 53–60 below) – and the Spartans stressing the primacy of justice and piety in human affairs (think of the speech of the Spartan ambassadors at Athens, for example). Gradually, however, we are led to see the ambiguities and hesitations on both sides. The Athenians always insist that there are some things sheltered from necessity and justice perhaps appears less irrelevant than might at first be supposed; the Athenian envoys to Sparta, for example, claim that while Athens is compelled to rule, within the bounds of compulsion she rules justly (Thucydides, *History*, 1, 72–8: Orwin, 1994: 194). Perhaps the greatest ambiguity in the Athenian thesis is, however, revealed in the most celebrated exposition of it, that is to say Pericles' funeral oration (Thucydides, *History*, 2, 37–46 and pp. 36–42 below). Pericles presents the Athenian empire as what Orwin calls a "freely chosen project"; it is, indeed, precisely this aspect of choice necessity which makes Athenian imperialism so potentially glorious for the citizens of Athens. Yet in this, the rhetorical heart of "Athenianism", Pericles is almost endorsing the "Spartan" argument about the "freedom from necessity." Even the war, seen by Pericles as forced upon the Athenians, is cited as an opportunity for (freely chosen) nobility. At the same time, Thucydides shows us the ambiguities on the Spartan side also. For all its claim to justice and piety, we find the Spartans as deeply embedded in necessity as the Athenians, and far less willing to face up to the fact. As Orwin says "If, unlike Athens, Sparta never faces this issue, that is because necessity itself so shackles her that she lacks the freedom for such reflections. In practice the Spartans equate justice with the advantage of Sparta, that is to say, whatever is required to meet the necessities that anchor their regime" (Orwin, 1994: 194).

However, this debate is not one that stops at the "boundaries" of the "foreign." In domestic politics too, similar forces clash. One of the central

characters in Thucydides' narrative, Alcibiades, sees domestic politics and foreign politics as the same, the city as simply an arena for citizen competition – an extrapolation, to be sure, but not perhaps a very great one, of Pericles' rhetoric in the funeral oration. But this leads to disaster, of course. As Euben, Forde, and Orwin all point out, Thucydides seems to be pointing up the fact that civic involvement, the creation of a common good, depends upon some sense of a common enemy and requires a degree of almost willful refusal of the "Athenian thesis" at the domestic level – Orwin and Forde go so far as to call it "hypocrisy."

Yet this view does not suggest that these features of politics are true only for Greeks. Quite the contrary. Thucydides plainly thinks that the war displays what we might call the "contours" of politics as such, which is why his account of it can be a "possession for all times." What, then, does this view imply for the second and third questions discussed above, to wit, what does Thucydides' view imply for the generation and limits of obligations among individuals and then, finally, among collectivities?

As Euben's discussion of Thucydides' account of the Corcyran revolution suggests (Euben, 1990), Thucydides was deeply aware of the perils and compromises, the errors and pettiness of political life, but he also seems convinced of the centrality for human beings of civic involvement. Perhaps the clearest example of this, and of what Thucydides thinks follows from this, is displayed in the contrasting speeches of Cleon and Diodotus in the Mytilenian debate (Thucydides, *History*, 3 and pp. 44–53 below). Orwin's view is that Diodotus' speech is the most careful reconsideration of the Athenian thesis offered in Thucydides. As he puts it,

> The intention of Diodotus in propounding the [Athenian] thesis is formally the same as that of the others who do so. He seeks to extenuate alleged transgression as so deeply rooted in the character of the actor that indignation is an inappropriate response to it [essentially, of course, the argument also of the Athenian envoys at Melos]. This defence, however ... rests neither on individual pathology nor (as so often today) on allegations concerning environment. It accuses not the aberrations of this or that individual or society, but human nature itself ... Diodotus casts transgression not as an aberration but as the fundamental human fact and bids us reflect on the consequences. (Orwin, 1994: 156)

These consequences turn out to be not dissimilar either for individuals or for cities.

Individuals, like cities, seek the primacy of their own good. This is simply a fact and not a matter for outrage or indignation. However, it is not strictly speaking imposed by "necessity" (as the original formulation of the thesis suggested); rather it brings out the tendency of people (again both individually and collectively) to resist such necessity. Hence the ambiguities in both

the Spartan thesis and in the original presentation of the Athenian thesis: perceptions of necessity and choice, concern for justice, and recognition of necessity "knowing no law." The chief obligation that emerges from a consideration of this claim is the obligation to be prudent and to avoid overreaching fragile, willful human capabilities either within cities (utopian plans for domestic politics, ideal cities, etc.) or between them. Diodotus, for example, stresses not the grandeur but the danger of the empire. The contrast between Athenian "overreaching" – and injustice – at Melos and the disaster of the Sicilian expedition points this up also.

On this understanding, then, neither conventional piety (which raises justice to the level of an ideal) nor strict necessity (the "logic of anarchy," as neorealists would today see it) is Thucydides' concern. Rather he tries to draw our attention to our political nature and its implications and in so doing shows us the role of "convention" as centrally subordinate to that "nature" – as Homer or Heraclitus also held, but for very different and potentially very radical reasons. This concern for our political nature as human beings unites us all in recognition of it even as it recognizes that we will be divided for all of the reasons that Thucydides' history so powerfully narrates and in this recognition lies our surest hope for real obligation and understanding.

Aristotle

Aristotle was born in Stagira, in northern Greece, in 384 BCE. His father, Nichomachus, was court physician to Amyntas III, king of Macedon, and thus Aristotle was brought up mainly in Macedonia. At seventeen, however, Aristotle was sent to Athens, the cultural centre of the Greek world, to pursue his education, where he became associated with Plato's Academy, and where he remained for more than twenty years. Plato was nearly sixty when Aristotle joined the Academy – and indeed when Aristotle actually arrived in Athens, Plato was in Syracuse taking part in the events described in the *Seventh Letter* to which we will return in a moment – yet he clearly recognized Aristotle's precocity and very soon Aristotle became a favored pupil. However, on Plato's death in 347 BCE Aristotle left Athens. It is often supposed he left Athens because Plato's nephew, Speusippus, was appointed Scholarch – head of the Academy – when he thought the position should have gone to him. However, as a metic – a non-Athenian-born resident of Athens – Aristotle could not own property in Athens and since the buildings and possessions of the Academy were transferred to Speusippus as well as the headship, it is unlikely that Aristotle had any expectations in that regard. By all accounts, he also got on well with Speusippus, at least personally. In any event, there were more

personal reasons for leaving Athens. This was the time when Philip II of Macedon was gradually bringing all of Greece under the Macedonian sphere of influence and anyone with a strong Macedonian connection was likely to be suspect, especially in Athens. Thus for the next few years Aristotle traveled, becoming at one point tutor to a number of the sons of the Macedonian aristocracy, including Philip II's young son Alexander, later to be known simply as Alexander the Great. Eventually, however, Aristotle returned to Athens and established his own school, called the Lyceum – often called also the *peripatos*, because of Aristotle's habit of lecturing while striding up and down (and hence our term peripatetic) – and composed most of the *Corpus Aristotelicum* – the works of Aristotle – as we have it today. However, Aristotle clearly retained his links with Macedon – Antipater, Alexander's regent in Greece when he embarked on the Persian war, was a close friend – and when, in 323, Alexander died, there was a general anti-Macedonian uprising throughout Greece, and especially in Athens. Aristotle thus withdrew to the city of Calchis on the island of Euboea, remarking, in a reference to Athens' execution of Socrates, that he did not wish Athens to sin twice against philosophy. He died there the following year, at the age of sixty-two.

The above biography is important in a number of ways. First, it emphasizes the extent to which Aristotle was fully cognizant with the politics and indeed the international politics of his age and was a not insignificant actor in them. Second, it shows just how much he traveled and how much he must have encountered the breadth of cultures and characters active in the Greek world of his own time. Among the most controversial aspects of Aristotle's thought is the extent to which his views depend upon a distinction between Greeks and non-Greeks. Traditionally, it was widely believed that Aristotle insisted upon this distinction and on it he based a political theory and an ethics that was, as we might say today, radically communitarian in that it believed that the good life for humans was possible only in the *polis*, that the Greek *polis* was the highest form of political community. This is broadly the view one still finds in many good commentaries (Barker, 1959; Sinclair, 1967). However, some modern writers (Yack, 1993; M. Nussbaum, 1986) have begun to question it.

Of course, as is also well known, Aristotle's political and ethical views are predicated on a general conception of human – and indeed natural – life which structures and organizes his discussions more generally. Aristotle offers a broadly naturalistic account of human life, placing it in the context of a natural world in which conflict and cooperation, nobility and baseness are common, and, indeed, inevitable. Again, one can see overlaps with a Thucydidean temperament here, but dryer, more analytical, and more sensitive to the nuances of human sociality (see Kraut, 1989; Masters, 1990; Barnes, 1995).

For Aristotle, political community is a certain sort of community, not any sort of community. "Politics," "the political things" – *ta politika* – occurs when "a self sufficient group of free and relatively equal individuals ... have the opportunity to engage in regular and public discussion about which laws and policies should direct their activities and who take turns, according to regular and recognized rules, at ruling and being ruled" (Yack, 1993: 7). The point of this, of course, is that while Aristotle considers the Greek *polis* to be the only known example of such a community – though not always, or even often, a very good one – it is certainly not the only *possible* example. Another point is that for Aristotle, the *polis* is not itself natural, rather it flows from the naturalness of human beings. This has the powerful consequence that "the end of the *polis* is thus not to develop itself into a complete and perfected form but rather to contribute to the development and perfection of human beings into their complete and natural form. Aristotle makes this clear with his repeated claim that the *polis* exists for the sake of the good life" (Yack, 1993: 16). Thus, the *polis* exists for something other than itself (see pp. 62–8 below).

This conception of Aristotle's understanding of politics makes sense of the central role conflict plays in his account in the *Politics*; after all the core of the book, books 3–6, is concerned with conflict in politics. Yet many have seen in Aristotle, both in his own time and subsequently, an especial commitment to politics as an area free of conflict or, and perhaps particularly, for simply ignoring the necessary role of conflict in politics. In contrast, scholars like Yack and Nussbaum have emphasized that Aristotle is deeply aware of the fragility of the good life – another of the many ways in which Aristotle echoes Thucydides – and understands how inevitable conflict is in human social life generally and in politics – as he understands it – in particular. Aristotle's most famous phrase itself contains the seeds of this specific understanding of politics. Humans, he famously asserts, are political animals (*Zoon Politikon*). However, he also asserts, in the *Eudemian Ethics*, that human beings are *communal* animals. All polities are communities, of course, but not all communities are polities.

This understanding of community/political community has a number of more general implications. It first of all allows Aristotle to acknowledge the huge variety of communities of which humans are capable. All communities consist of individuals, sharing something (some good, some feature of their identity, or whatever); they engage in interaction related to what they share and, finally, they are bound to each other by some sense of friendship and some sense of justice (Yack, 1993: 29. See also Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, 1156a–1157b and 1159b27, *Politics*, 1252a1, 1261a–b). This latter point is perhaps the most important of all for as Aristotle says in the *Nichomachean Ethics*:

> In every community there is thought to be some sense of justice and friendship too: ... men address as friends their fellow voyagers and fellow soldiers and so too those sharing with them in any other kind of community. And the extent of their community is the extent of their friendship, as it is the extent to which justice exists between them. (1159b27–31)

The term "friendship" here (the Greek term is *philia*) is clearly being used in a rather more general sense than we would today use the term. In fact it is one of the central categories of Aristotelian political thought. It effectively means a kind of "mutual sharing in ends and actions." A similar point is visible in Aristotle's understanding of justice. Just as there are different kinds of friendships, so there are different kinds of justice.

For Aristotle, then, humans are natural beings who necessarily live in communities. However, there is an enormously wide variety of possible communities: families, tribes, clans, empires, and, of course, polities, as he understands them. Indeed, we might say that for Aristotle, it is perfectly *possible* to talk of the community of all humankind, perhaps even – though this is much more speculative – of a cosmo-polis, a world political community. As we will see this aspect of Aristotle's thought is picked up by the Stoics and has been hugely influential in our own times as well. In the context of this variety, there are certain sorts of communities – political communities – wherein the human good is best served and within this notion of political community various kinds of possible regimes (Aristotle's famous six types of political regime found in the *Politics* – see pp. 69–77 below).

Thus, for Aristotle, the kinds of obligations generated among individuals in part depended upon the sort of community one was discussing. Political communities required certain kinds of relations and obligations and, Aristotle believed, these were the kinds of communities in which humans could aspire at least to the good life as such. However, humans were frail and fragile, and political communities, no less than other kinds, were inevitable victims of strife and dissension and even well-ordered cities, few and far between though they were, would not necessarily survive the winds of chance and irrationality. In non-political communities the obligations and relations would be of different kinds, but they would nonetheless be central to the workings of those communities.

As far as obligations between communities are concerned, the fact that the *polis* exists for the sake of the good life, not the other way around, implies at least a kind of cosmopolitanism, as Nussbaum and others have rightly asserted. Moreover, Aristotle is clear that although strife and conflict are always a feature of communal life (both intra- and inter-communal strife), the political community at least, whatever might be the case in other communities, has a responsibility to act in accordance with the welfare of other humans, not just other citizens. A notable example of this is given in Aristotle's discussion of

Sparta in the *Politics*, for example (1271b1, and see pp. 70–76 below). While in many respects favorably disposed towards Spartan virtue, Aristotle nonetheless condemns utterly the reason behind the cultivation of virtue, that is, military power. Moreover, to suppose that virtues exist for the sake of success in war is called by Aristotle "absolutely murderous" (*Nichomachean Ethics*, 1177b10. See also Swanson, 1992; Yack, 1993: 7). This, in fact, is a common tone throughout Aristotle's ethical and political thought. He is critical of the tendency of various communities – the Scythians, Persians, Thracians, and Celts are mentioned as well as the Spartans – to glorify war and to praise domination and conquest. It is not, Aristotle thinks, appropriate to conquer and rule other regimes since it is effectively a denial of their freedom and their status as fellow humans (see *Politics*, 1324b22, 1333b26–36). These views may, of course, partly account for the coolness that developed between both Aristotle personally and the Aristotelian school in general and Aristotle's most famous pupil, that is, Alexander the Great. As many have pointed out, Aristotle is widely reputed not to have been an admirer of Alexander's campaigns nor of his adoption of Persian manners and style. Some have supposed this was because Aristotle held that "Greekness" was somehow special and that Alexander was betraying it. There may well have been something in this. However, it seems more likely to have been a simple opposition to the practice of conquest, both for itself and for the likely effects it would have on those who practice it, and also that from being, in at least some sense, the ruler of a *political* community, Alexander had seemingly abandoned *political* community for empire, a very different, and for Aristotle, inferior kind.

Of course, Aristotle accepts that defensive war is perfectly permissible and even recommends the establishment of a citizen militia to help defend a city. Moreover, he thinks that offensive war is justified in two kinds of cases: when a free community is under attack and in need of help or outside intervention and when a community cannot rule itself. In both cases, "intervention," as we would today call it, benefits the humans of that community and, at least implicitly, the humans of the intervening community. Aristotle also speaks many times about the centrality of peace in the possibility of virtue in political communities: as Swanson puts it, for Aristotle "war must always serve peace and peace virtue" (Swanson, 1992: 117; see also *Politics*, 1325a5–7, 1333a30–b3, 1334a10).

Stoicism

It is traditional to refer to the period after Aristotle as the "Hellenistic" period of Greek thought (Sinclair, 1967, chs. 12–15; A. A. Long, 1986). The success of the great philosophical schools of Plato, Isocrates, and Aristotle led to a

proliferation of schools and sects, with the Academy (for most of this period a shadow of its former self) and Aristotle's *peripatos* increasingly challenged by rivals.

Unquestionably, the dominant schools of the period, other than the above two, were the Cynics, Skeptics, Epicureans, and Stoics. Although all these schools had particular contributions to make to ethics and politics, it is the Stoics who are by far the most important for our current purposes. As A. A. Long says,

> for more than four centuries [Stoicism] claimed the allegiance of a large number of educated men in the Graeco-Roman world [and, as Martha Nussbaum has recently shown, also some women (M. Nussbaum, 1996)], and its impact was not confined to Classical antiquity ... from the renaissance up to modern times the effect of stoic moral teaching on western culture has been pervasive ... (moreover) the influence of Stoicism has not been confined to ... philosophers. Cicero, Seneca and Marcus Aurelius were read and re-read by those who had time to read in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. (A. A. Long, 1986: 107)

While Stoicism began in Greece, and many of its most distinguished philosophical voices were Greek (most especially its founder, Zeno of Citium, who began teaching in the painted colonnade – or *stoa* – in Athens in about 300/301 BCE), its power partly depended on the influence it came to have in the new power in the classical world, Rome. Although over such a long period Stoic philosophy clearly evolved and changed, it is remarkable how consistent the basic Stoic orientation was.

Stoics were convinced that the universe was an ordered whole, amenable to rational explanation and proceeded so to explain it. The central human faculty, which allowed us to reason, think, and speak – the *logos* – is embodied in the universe. Humans and nature are thus one in the *logos*. If humans recognize this, they will act in ways wholly congruent with human rationality at its best. Of course, in order to do this humans must know how the universe is constructed and how you can reason. Hence the importance of natural philosophy and logic for Stoicism.

How did this cash out in terms of inside/outside? In principle, for the Stoics, no-one was "outside" the real community, the human community. Diogenes the Cynic, a powerful influence on the early stoa, is famous for having asserted, against all the customs and practices of the Greek views examined above, that he was a "citizen of the world." The Cynics were, of course, harshly critical of the customary attitude of the Greeks towards civic virtue – the attitude we have seen displayed in different ways in both Thucydides and Aristotle – and it is likely that, at least in part, Diogenes intended his saying as a deliberate provocation. However, the Stoics followed this lead and further developed the idea of the "world citizen" (*kosmou polites*), as Nussbaum and

others have pointed out (M. Nussbaum, 1997: 7–9). She also gives a number of citations which show the extent of the Stoics' "cosmopolitanism." We live in two communities, Seneca tells us in *De Otio*, the local community of our birth and the wider city, that community which is "truly great and truly common, in which we look neither to this corner nor to that, but measure the boundaries of our nation by the sun." Or again, this time in Plutarch, we read that "we should see all human beings as our fellow citizens and neighbors" (M. Nussbaum, 1997: 7).

It is important to see, however, that the Stoics were not saying that actual political (in the non-Aristotelian sense) boundaries were unimportant or that they should be abolished. They were chiefly what Charles Beitz has called "moral" rather than "institutional" cosmopolitans (Beitz, 1994). Though it is worth pointing out that they were heavily involved with the Roman imperial project and much Stoic, and neo-Stoic, writing of this period often shaded into an institutional cosmopolitanism with the potentially universal institution being the empire. Lactantius' famous remark that Rome was "the city that sustains all things" (cited in Marcellinus' *History*) is an example. Their point was simply that our allegiance was, first and foremost, to the ethical community that is constituted by all human beings as such. This does not mean that local attachments are not themselves valuable. Seneca and Cicero were, in one sense, great spokesmen for the Roman idea of civic involvement and Marcus Aurelius, of course, as emperor, could hardly be indifferent to the presence or lack of civic activism in the empire (see the discussion in p. 89 below).

These views have, of course, clear implications for the question of our individual obligations. Stoics famously thought of humans as living in a series of concentric circles, first encircling the self, next the family, next the extended family and close personal friends, next neighbors and local groups, city dwellers, fellow countrymen, and outside all of these is the largest circle of all: humanity as a whole. As Martha Nussbaum puts it, citing the Stoic Hierocles, "our task as citizens of the world will be to draw the circles somehow towards the centre" (M. Nussbaum, 1997: 9. See also M. Nussbaum, 1996). Our obligations, in this context, consist in giving each of the circles their due weight and respect, and this requires education towards the capacity for Stoic virtue. As Marcus Aurelius puts it, "Accustom yourself not to be inattentive to what another person says, and as far as possible, enter into that other person's mind ... Generally, one must first learn many things before one can judge anothers actions with understanding" (*Meditations*, VI, 53; see also A. A. Long, 1986: 179–209; M. Nussbaum, 1996; M. Nussbaum, 1997: 9).

This view has the implication that we need to restrain the passions that might otherwise get in the way of our being able to do this. It is this attempt that is the root of the popular sense of "stoical" as trying to rise above worldly

hopes and fears. Stoics have often been criticized for trying to make human beings a bit "dry," lacking in color or ambition, even fatalists. None of this, however, is true. Rather, as for example Seneca shows brilliantly in *De Ira*, the Stoic concern is to rein in the passions, even virtuous ones, or ones that might be virtuous in a particular context (like anger), because such passions may distort how we behave to others. We will not be able, under the influence of this or that passion, to give each of the circles its due and weigh up our evaluations as they should be weighed.

Similar concerns, of course, structure Stoic thinking on the relations between communities. Indeed, in key respects there is simply no difference for Stoics on the obligations generated for individuals within society and those generated for particular societies, in their relations with one another – though, of course, humans should respect the rules and customs of individual communities in so far as these do not violate the rational order Stoics believed they saw in nature. The Stoics were not, of course, pacifists. They believed in the justice of defending the right. Marcus Aurelius spent many of his years as emperor on campaign: indeed the book we know as the *Meditations* was largely written on campaign and there are many passages in it that suggest that though the defense of the empire *is* just, it must be *done* justly as well, without the anger or rage that might unbalance the warrior and only in as far as the defense is actually necessary. There is a hint, too, of the Aristotelian distaste for war and conquest in Marcus and in the sense of his book as a set of "spiritual exercises" designed to ensure he develops as a rational soul (Hadot, 1995, ch. 6) (see pages 86–9 below).

Plato and Platonism

Anyone who knows anything about classical thought will realize that there is one major figure we have so far not discussed: Plato. But there is a reason. For all its centrality in ancient thought, there is a sense in which it is far more difficult to discuss the Platonic tradition in this context than the other traditions simply because its provenance is so difficult to determine. Plato wrote nothing that contains his own explicit views save a set of letters the authenticity of many of which is, at best, highly uncertain. Everything else in the Platonic corpus is written in the dialogue form and Plato virtually never appears in the dialogues (he is mentioned, though, in several) and never actually speaks in his own name. The central figure of virtually all the dialogues is Socrates and it has been conventional practice to assume that Socrates speaks for Plato, at least in the so-called middle and later dialogues, beginning roughly with the *Republic*. Of late, however, that assumption has been increasingly challenged

from a variety of directions (Gadamer, 1980; Pangle, 1987; Griswold, 1988; Euben, 1990; Press, 1993). Various different schools of thought have emphasized the dramatic and dialogic character of the dialogues and challenged many of the received opinions about them as a result.

In the present context it is clearly not appropriate to engage in detailed discussion of this topic. Yet much more than simply interpretive differences are at stake in resolving it. A second point here is that rather than simply focusing on Plato himself, it is the role of the Platonic (and Neoplatonic) *tradition* as carriers of certain ideas which, while important in the classical period, become even more important later, in the late antique and early medieval periods – and in both the West and in Islam and Judaism – that it is important to look at here.

Thus, rather than offering detailed accounts of any of the Platonic dialogues, we shall say something about the only one of Plato's letters which most scholars accept as genuine – the seventh, which we will excerpt below (see below, pp. 91–3), and which says a good deal about topics that concern us here – before moving on to the legacy of Platonism in general.

So what does Plato do, in the *Seventh Letter*? In essence it is a public letter, explaining Plato's involvement in the political affairs of Syracuse, and in the process telling us almost everything we know about Plato's background and how he became involved in philosophy – perhaps its most important function. Plato had become involved in Syracusan politics at the invitation of Dion, the brother in law of Dionysius I, the tyrant of Syracuse. Dion admired Plato's ideas and wanted him to train the son of the tyrant in philosophy, to allow Plato to fulfill his conviction, of which Plato also talks in the letter, that the problems of politic he had observed in the Athens of the Peloponnesian war and, most especially, the revolution of the thirty tyrants and then the restoration of the democracy could only be met by the "unification" of philosophy and political power in the same person. Unfortunately, Dionysius II, as he became, proved a singularly inept pupil, and the politics of Syracuse went from bad to worse. Dion and the new Dionysius became increasingly estranged and Plato found himself caught in the middle. Eventually he left, only to return twice more; as the situation worsened still further, Dion was killed and Dionysius became increasingly unstable. At this point, Dionysius actually wrote a book expounding Plato's thought which Plato repudiates in the strongest possible terms, leading him to make one of the most curious remarks of his long career (Plato, *Seventh Letter*, 341), to the effect that there has never been, nor ever will be, an exposition of his doctrines, for the truth he seeks cannot be expressed in those terms.

Given Plato's many published works, it seems more than strange that he can say this. Yet, in this remark lies the paradox of Plato's thought and

character. Clearly he intended his dialogues to mean something: to attract people perhaps to the study of philosophy, to venerate Socrates certainly. The question is, did he mean them to have wider implications? In the dialogues, Plato raises questions, introduces themes, charms possible recruits to his banner, develops ideas. In none of them, however, does he develop a "doctrine."

What does this mean for our subject here? In the first place, it suggests that we should rely not simply on what Plato wrote but on the practice of the Academy under his leadership (see Cherniss, 1945; Grayeff, 1974: 21–7; Kramer, 1990). The advice he gives to Dion's party in the *Seventh Letter* is echoed by many of the actions of the Academy while Plato lived and, indeed, for a while after his death, when his nephew Speusippus became head of the school. Broadly speaking, Plato, and the Academy, recommended the establishment of constitutional regimes, with complex systems of checks and balances, such as are outlined in Plato's own last work, the *Laws*, and similar to those we have already met in Aristotle.

As with Aristotle, Plato does not seem to be writing only with Greeks in mind. In a famous passage in the *Republic*, Socrates suggests that the "city built in speech" – the ideal city that it is the purpose of the *Republic* to sketch out – is "Greek" only contingently and incidentally. It can be populated, as it were, by those who live "in some Barbaric place beyond the reach of our vision" (*Republic*, 499c–d). However, in Plato's formulation of this there seems a touch of the mystical which is absent in Aristotle or Thucydides and which gives particular power to some of his most famous dialogues – for example, *The Phaedrus* and the *Timaeus*.

This is certainly the view which was taken by his most interesting disciples in the late Roman period, the so-called Neoplatonists. The Neoplatonists, most especially Plotinus, were hugely influential on early Christianity and, indeed, have been a powerful if sometimes submerged current of thought ever since. As they did not have discrete orientations towards political topics, however, they have usually been ignored in histories of political thought. However, in so far as they commented on Plato and Aristotle – and Porphyry, Plotinus' pupil and biographer, says that most of Plotinus' seminars began with a recent commentary on something of either Plato's or Aristotle's – then we can be sure political discussion was hardly absent. Rather than displaying political doctrines, they, like Plato, adapted doctrine to rhetorical and political circumstance and in this sense they retain the ghost of an echo of Plato's old opponents, the Sophists, saving only that they were as committed to the belief in virtue and reason as the latter were in opposing it. Plato's dialogues, whatever else they are, are among the supreme examples of philosophical turning of the tables in human history. The "experts" and the "teachers of rhetoric" were overcome by a more brilliant rhetorician than any of them, who used his genius not to "teach virtue" but to show how to habituate people to it.

FURTHER READING

As a general background to Greek thought, Sinclair (1967) is still unsurpassed. On Thucydides, Hornblower (1987) presents the best general interpretation, though it is very much a classicist's treatment, and Orwin (1994) is perhaps the best recent interpretation of Thucydides as political thinker. On Plato, a good general introduction to his political thought, though very wedded to the "traditional" interpretation, is Klosko (1986). An introduction to alternative ways of reading Plato can be found in Griswold (1988). Yack (1993) offers a thoughtful interpretation of Aristotle, which emphasizes issues of conflict in his political theory. Euben (1990) offers a splendid series of readings of Thucydides and Plato which foreground diversity and conflict. Wood (1988) is the best reading of Cicero's political thought in a long while, while A. A. Long (1986) offers an excellent interpretation of Stoicism in general. Alternative considerations of classical thought about International Relations to those offered here can be found in Boucher (1998) and Pangle and Ahrensdorf (1999).

SOURCES

Thucydides, from *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. and ed. Rex Warner (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1954), Book 1, 21–3, pp. 47–9; Book 2, 34–46, pp. 143–51, and 50–4, pp. 150–6; Book 3, 36–49, pp. 212–23; Book 5, 84–116, pp. 400–8.

Aristotle, from *The Politics*, ed. Steven Everson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), Book 1, chs. 1–6 (pp. 1–9); Book 3, chs. 6–13 (pp. 59–73); Book 7, chs. 1–3 (pp. 156–61).

Cicero, from *On Duties*, ed. Miriam Griffin and Margaret Atkins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), sects. 53–60, pp. 22–5).

Marcus Aurelius, from *Meditations*, ed. and trans. C. R. Haines, Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann, 1930), Book 2, v. 17, pp. 41 and 43; Book 6, v. 36, pp. 149 and 151 and v. 44, pp. 155 and 157; Book 9, v. 1, pp. 231 and 233, and v. 9, p. 239; Book 12, v. 36, pp. 341 and 343.

Plato, from *Plato's Epistles*, trans. Glen R. Morrow, Library of Liberal Arts (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962), 324–326b (pp. 215–17, and 330c–331d (pp. 223 and 224).