The Coups of 411 and 404 in Athens: Thucydides and Xenophon on Conservative Turns

Breno Battistin Sebastiani

BOTH Thucydides' narrative about the coup of 411 (8.45–98) and Xenophon's about the Thirty (*Hell.* 2.3–4) intertwine two kinds of phenomena that reveal conflicting dynamics inherent in the Athenian democracy by the end of the fifth century B.C.[1] On the one hand, the antecedents or "coup techniques"[2] that had been mobilized by a few men to undermine democracy from within.[3] On the other, the effective resistance that readily knew how to reply to both coups and thus overthrew them quickly.

[1] For a cogent analysis commingling both episodes see P. A. Tuci, *La fragilità della democrazia. Manipolazione istituzionale ed eversione nel colpo di stato oligarchico del 411 a.C. ad Atene* (Milan 2013) 215: "pare che la componente antidemocratica, a partire dal caso di Tucidide di Melesia e fino a giungere al colpo di Stato del 404, passando attraverso le vicende del 411 qui esaminate, abbia progressivamente affinato le tecniche di opposizione passando dalla tattica basata su una lotta politica franca e trasparente al ricorso a forme di manipolazione molteplici e sottili, senza però abbandonare lo sfruttamento delle istituzioni cittadine, che anzi vengono elette come sede ideale per lo scardinamento della democrazia dall'interno, tramite il voto popolare."

[2] C. Bearzot, *Come si abbatte una democrazia. Tecniche di colpo di Stato nell'Atene antica* (Rome 2013).

[3] Despite recognizing the value of M. Finley's thesis about the rise to power of the Four Hundred (M. Taylor, *Thucydides, Pericles, and the Idea of Athens in the Peloponnesian War* [Cambridge 2010] 193: "Moses Finley, for example, claims that Thucydides' text shows that the Four Hundred came to power in 'a classic mixture of terror and propaganda'. However, although revolution, terror, and propaganda have their place in Thucydides, his narrative gives a much more nuanced picture of the rise of oligarchy than is usually recognized"),

Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies 58 (2018) 490–515
© 2018 Breno Battistin Sebastiani

Despite their obvious differences, both narratives display several common features worth being examined in parallel. In Thucydides one finds those intertwined coup techniques actually put into practice. He also describes the decisive role played by the majority of the Athenian population aligned with democratic principles (chiefly the sailors), and not only the role of its leaders.[4] Thucydides aimed at reconstructing all the nuances of human initiatives that culminated in 411 and its outcomes, hence converting into text what he had theorized at 1.22.[5] Xenophon, on the other hand, concentrated his analysis especially on aspects seen as paradigmatic for a reconstruction of the events of 404: he focuses his report on the violent acts peculiar to the coup of 404 and insists chiefly on Thrasybulus as the resistance's spokesman.[6]

Taylor's own thesis ("Implicating the Demos: A Reading of Thucydides on the Rise of the Four Hundred," *JHS* 122 [2002] 91–108, and *Thucydides, Pericles, and the Idea of Athens* 190–243) has a serious flaw: it considers violence in its physical form only, without taking into account its psychological aspects (e.g., intimidation), thus projecting onto an alleged "passivity" (192) of the Athenians the responsibility for the coup. Two specifically illustrative pages are "Implicating the Demos" 101 and *Thucydides* 218. For alternative views see K. Raaflaub, "Thucydides on Democracy and Oligarchy," in A. Rengakos and A. Tsakmakis (eds.), *Brill's Companion to Thucydides* (Leiden/Boston 2006) 213, and A. Wolpert, "Thucydides on the Four Hundred and the Fall of Athens," in S. Forsdyke et al. (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook to Thucydides* (Oxford 2017) 183.

[4] D. Kagan, *The Fall of the Athenian Empire* (Ithaca/London 1987) 131–186; J. Zumbrunnen, "Thucydides and the Crowd," in *The Oxford Handbook to Thucydides* 486.

[5] R. Osborne, "Changing the Discourse," in K. A. Morgan (ed.), *Popular Tyranny* (Austin 2003) 261; S. Jaffe, "The Regime (*Politeia*) in Thucydides," in *The Oxford Handbook to Thucydides* 394; Zumbrunnen, in *The Oxford Handbook to Thucydides* 475.

[6] A. Wolpert, *Remembering Defeat. Civil War and Civic Memory in Ancient Athens* (Baltimore 2002) 24. Cf. Osborne, in *Popular Tyranny* 262; J. W. I. Lee, "Xenophon and his Times," in M. A. Flower (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Xenophon* (Cambridge 2017) 15–36, at 15. As in the *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia*, probably the work of Cratippus or Theopompus, also in Xenophon's *Hellenica*

Before turning to the analysis of each narrative, however, and to define the paper's main object, some clarifications about the antecedents to both coups seem necessary.[7] In 412/1 Athens experienced a particularly delicate politico-economic situation derived from the conjugation of three major events: the disaster in Sicily (Thuc. 8.1–2), the strenthening of the Spartan position through an alliance with the King ([Arist.] *Ath.Pol.* 29.1), and the grave economic and military crisis provoked by the defection of

"the two most obvious features of Thucydides' historical narrative, the extensive use of speeches rendered in direct form and the temporal subdivision of the wars into winters and summers, ignoring the actual calendar of the *poleis* involved, are addressed and transformed in interesting ways": N. Luraghi, "Xenophon's Place in Fourth-Century Greek Historiography," in *The Cambridge Companion to Xenophon* 84–100, at 91. On Xenophon as a continuator of Thucydides see Luraghi 85–93; J. Marincola, "Xenophon's *Anabasis* and *Hellenica*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Xenophon* 103–118, at 103 and 106 ("As for the *Hellenica*, here Xenophon has inaugurated a type of history that was to become enormously popular in the ancient world, the 'continuous history' "); C. Pelling,"Xenophon's Authorial Voice," in *The Cambridge Companion to Xenophon* 241–262, at 254. On differences in how each historian composes speeches see E. Baragwanath, "The Character and Function of Speeches in Xenophon," in *The Cambridge Companion to Xenophon* 279–297. If Xenophon's narrative partakes of the Thucydidean in many features, many studies in the last decades examined its own specificities. The publication of V. Gray, *The Character of Xenophon's Hellenica* (London 1989), marks a watershed in modern historiography on Xenophon's *Hellenica*, by eschewing *Quellenforschung* problems and conducting a close reading of the text chiefly focused on the literary, historiographical, and moral issues it displays. Because of the wide range of problems addressed through a similar approach, several chapters in the collective works F. Hobden and C. Tuplin (eds.), *Xenophon: Ethical Principles and Historical Enquiry* (Leiden/Boston 2012), and M. A. Flower (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Xenophon*, are also fundamental to the present paper. Both are unthinkable without Gray's pioneering work.

[7] For detailed accounts see M. Ostwald, *From Popular Sovereignty to the Sovereignty of Law* (Berkeley 1987) 337–358; Tuci, *La fragilità della democrazia* 13–112 (antecedents to 411 coup), and Ostwald 460–475 (antecedents to the Thirty). For reconstructions of both coups see Ostwald 358–395 and 475–491 respectively.

Kios (Thuc. 8.14). Faced with such a vulnerable[8] situation, for the first time in almost a century (Thuc. 8.68.4) the Athenian demos was overthrown by an initiative planned and launched on several fronts, an internal coup whose chief aim (never publicly voiced but repeatedly exposed by Thucydides) was the *katalysis* or dissolution of the democracy.[9] When some rich aristocrats came to feel particularly harmed in their economic interests and at the same time ill-compensated in the political sphere, they gathered to plan how to dissolve the constitution, thus changing the current democratic way of life.[10] Three kinds of men formed the core of the Four Hundred plus Ten plenipotentiaries.[11] First, men like the selfish Alcibiades, then exiled

[8] On this notion and its correlate "fragility" (below), see Tuci, *La fragilità della democrazia* 11 and 215–216.

[9] D. Gish, "Defending *dēmokratia*: Athenian Justice and the Trial of the Arginusae Generals in Xenophon's *Hellenica*," in *Xenophon: Ethical Principles* 161–212, is explicit (171): "the oligarchic faction had made use of democratic institutions and procedures to accomplish its overthrow of the regime." *Katalysis tou demou* and analogous syntagms are recurrent in Thucydides' text. He uses them to mean the *metastaseis* of the regime either in Athens or in other cities such as Samos or Thasos, e.g. 8.47.2 τὸ καταλῦσαι τὴν δημοκρατίαν, 8.49.1 τῆς τοῦ ἐκεῖ δήμου καταλύσεως, 8.54.4 καταλύσουσι τὸν δῆμον, 8.63.3 δημοκρατία κατελέλυτο, 8.65.1 τοὺς δήμους ἐν ταῖς πόλεσι κατέλυον, 8.68.4 τοῖς ξυγκαταλύουσι τὸν δῆμον, 8.86.2 τοὺς τὸν δῆμον καταλύοντας etc. From 410 onward, because of the decree of Demophantus, any attempt to abate the democracy would be criminally prosecuted (Andoc. 1.96–98), which might have been already anticipated by the Solonian law of *eisangelia* (*Ath.Pol.* 8.4).

[10] On the three major taxes—the *eisphora*, the *trierarchia*, and the *choregia*—paid almost exclusively by the richest men, see L. Patriquin, *Economic Equality and Direct Democracy in Ancient Athens* (New York 2015) 43–44. On these as sources of elite's anxiety see M. Simonton, *Classical Greek Oligarchy. A Political History* (Princeton 2017) 33.

[11] Thuc. 8.67.1: "First, they summoned the people to a meeting and proposed a resolution that ten secretaries be chosen with full authority and that these should draft a resolution to be brought before the people on an appointed day about how the state should best be governed" (text Jones/ Powell [OCT], transl. J. Mynott, *Thucydides* [Cambridge 2011]). *Ath.Pol.* 29.2, 32.3: "the Four Hundred with the powerful ten generals entered the council-house

and eager to return to Athens at any price.[12] Second, citizens known for their former democratic opinions and acts, like Peisander and Theramenes, but who had then changed their minds. And third, harsh traditional opponents to democracy like Antiphon. The coup was short-lived—four months only—but left a deep impression on the polis imagination, on Thucydides, and on posterity, given the grave rupture it represented.[13]

Regarding the coup of 404, the defeat by Sparta will be pointed to as the decisive factor that led to it.[14] But this is just the first difference between the two coups that we should keep in mind before going forward. The Four Hundred remained in power only four months because they failed to achieve their objectives (ending the war or gaining Persian support), and Athens was, as a result, in a more dangerous situation than when they came to power. The Thirty, by contrast, relied primarily on foreign support to maintain their rule. They were in many ways a puppet regime. It is true that their escalation in violence caused opposition to grow, but the Thirty were overthrown primarily because of Sparta, which withdrew its support in part because of

and began ruling the city" (text Oppermann [BT], transl. Rhodes [London 1984]). On the nature and composition of this extraordinary magistracy and the differences between Thucydides' narrative and that of the *Ath.Pol.* see Tuci, *La fragilità della democrazia* 13–28; H. Heftner, *Der oligarchische Umsturz des Jahres 411 v. Chr. und die Herrschaft der Vierhundert in Athen* (Frankfurt am Main 2001) 6–16; Osborne, in *Popular Tyranny* 256; Wolpert, in *The Oxford Handbook to Thucydides* 183.

[12] Taylor, *Thucydides, Pericles, and the Idea of Athens* 195; M. P. Nichols, *Thucydides and the Pursuit of Freedom* (Ithaca 2015) 159.

[13] Even though Athens had been a democracy for a century (since the fall of the Pisistratids), the rupture promoted by the coup of 411 can be interpreted as another episode in a long history peppered by internal conflicts between the few and the many. In the chapter where the author of the *Ath.Pol.* itemizes the steps of the polis' constitutional evolution, this coup is said to have been the eighth constitutional change among eleven listed (41.2).

[14] On the importance of the *Ath.Pol.* for the reconstruction of the episode see W. J. McCoy, "Aristotle's *Athenaion Politeia* and the Establishment of the Thirty Tyrants," *YCS* 24 (1975) 131–145. For sources and further bibliography see P. Krentz, *The Thirty at Athens* (Ithaca 1982) 54.

discontent within the Peloponnesian League and in part because Lysander supported the oligarchs and Pausanias wanted to weaken him. Despite the victories of the democratic resistance, the Spartans could have crushed the democratic exiles if it had brought its full might against them.[15]

To define the object of this paper—which meditations from Thucydides and Xenophon are still worth retaining to enhance our comprehension of ancient conservative turns—I am building on the conclusions of S. Forsdyke, L. Tritle, and chiefly C. Bearzot's fundamental book.[16] The three insist on the similarities of procedures and agents, such as Theramenes and Thrasybulus, especially in the conjunction after the defeat by Sparta. I also take for granted that Xenophon was deeply committed to Athenian democracy, as argued by D. Gish,[17] and that Socratic influence was decisive in his view of Athenian democracy.[18] This however does not imply either a difference from, or

[15] For a comparison of the coups from the perspective of the different reactions to them, and which highlights the chief role of the "oath of Demophantus" to the reaction against the Thirty, see D. Teergarden, *Death to Tyrants! Ancient Greek Democracy and the Struggle against Tyranny* (Princeton 2014) 15–53. For a detailed comparison focused on the role that institutions played in the survival of oligarchies during the Classical period (not exclusively in Athens), see Simonton, *Classical Greek Oligarchy*.

[16] S. Forsdyke, "The Impact of Democracy on Communal Life," in J. P. Arnason et al. (eds.), *The Greek Polis and the Invention of Democracy. A Politico-Cultural Transformation and its Interpretations* (Chichester 2013) 227–259, at 238; L. A. Tritle, "Democracy and War," in *The Greek Polis* 298–320, at 300–308; Bearzot, *Come si abbatte una democrazia*.

[17] Gish, in *Xenophon: Ethical Principles* 161–212.

[18] S. B. Ferrario, "Xenophon and Greek Political Thought," in *The Cambridge Companion to Xenophon* 57–83, at 66: "three of his most important areas of concern are the ideas of Socrates regarding the positive cultivation of the democratic citizenry and particularly of its leadership (covered in most detail in the *Memorabilia*); the ways in which Athens as a political society can sustain and improve its way of life (again, an important theme in the *Memorabilia*, and the central subject of the *Poroi*); and the capacity of democracy to produce effective decisions and good government (particularly visible through a num-

necessarily a resemblance to, Thucydides, whose view of Athenian democracy is far from clear, especially if one takes into consideration the possible moment when the historian may have composed his narrative. Thucydides almost never issues explicit judgments in an authorial voice. In an unusual snippet, he narrates the appointment of the Five Thousand and then writes in the first person: "for the first time, in my life at any rate, the Athenians appear to have enjoyed good government, with a moderating balance between the few and the many, and this was the thing that first began to lift the city out of its sorry state" (8.97.2). If this authorial judgement can be interpreted in different or even opposite ways,[19] it also implies that for the historian the government of the few is not something to be a priori discarded as a valid alternative.

The significant point to be made from this summation is that both coups were preceded by critical economic conjunctures which chiefly threatened members of the polis with much to lose—a point that has not been deeply explored by P. Tuci or C. Bearzot.[20] It is true that economic interests were not the primary

ber of anecdotes in the *Anabasis* and *Hellenica*)." See also P. Ludwig, "Xenophon as a Socratic Reader of Thucydides," in *The Oxford Handbook to Thucydides* 516.

[19] See Mynott, *Thucydides* 573 n.1: "[t]he interpretation of this striking authorial judgement has attracted much (unresolved) dispute: see Hornblower's summary at III, pp. 1033–6, which has the despairing conclusion, 'It seems extraordinary that two important discussions of the same topic by powerful authorities (Andrewes; De Ste. Croix), reaching diametrically opposed conclusions, should have appeared in the same year 1981, written by members of the same Oxford college, but showing no awareness of each other's (new) arguments'." On the importance of this snippet as "the first time in extant literature that the concept of mixture was used to characterize a form of government" see D. E. Hahm, "The Mixed Constitution in Greek Thought," in R. K. Balot (ed.), *A Companion to Greek and Roman Political Thought* (Malden 2009) 178–198, at 178–179. For discussions on Thucydides' opinion about the Five Thousand see Raaflaub, in *Brill's Companion to Thucydides* 189; Jaffe, in *The Oxford Handbook to Thucydides* 404; Zumbrunnen, in *The Oxford Handbook to Thucydides* 486.

[20] Raaflaub, in *Brill's Companion to Thucydides* 215, is explicit in emphasizing

factors that led to the overthrow of the democracy in 411 or 404: Athenian military failures, the destruction of the Athenian fleet in Sicily and the surrender of Athens to Sparta, lie at the heart of both coups. Yet the economic impacts provoked by such circumstances did trigger oligarchic reactions,[21] thus intertwining both coups with a red thread which allows one to assess them in comparison. Availing themselves of these conjunctures, the oligarchs knew how to act quickly in order to prevent being deprived of either money or political influence, or both. In what follows, this paper proposes a comparative interdisciplinary survey about how the promoters of those coup techniques behaved and which were the constitutional changes they promoted (next section). In the third section (*Resistance*), it examines the attitudes of the main leaderships who opposed both coups. Finally, the paper ends with suggestions reinforcing the importance of both Thucydides' and Xenophon's narratives as still useful tools to make intelligible how coups are brought about and what they implied in ancient times, or perhaps even in contemporary ones too.[22] The paper's chief aim is to contribute

the role of the rich in oligarchic coups: "[o]ligarchy reserves power for those who contribute most with their bodies and money, that is, the wealthy horsemen and the hoplites (Th. 8.65.3; cf. Arist. *Ath.* 29.5), as opposed to the poor who man the ships (Ps.-Xen. *Ath.* 1.2). Pay for military service remains intact, that for political functions is, with few exceptions, abolished (Th. 8.65.4; Arist. *Ath.* 29.5). The oligarchs' true goal is to monopolize power (Th. 8.48.1; 8.66.1; 8.70.1), which they then protect by every possible means, including terror (8.48.6; 8.65.2; 8.66.2ff.; 8.70.2; 8.74.2–3)."

[21] For the fundamental notion of oligarchy as "a specific historical reaction to another concrete phenomenon, that of *dēmokratia*," see Simonton, *Classical Greek Oligarchy* 1–9.

[22] To be clear, I am not exclusively thinking of contemporary coups according to, say, "traditional patterns" (i.e., those carried out or kept in course chiefly through violent means, like the 1964–1985 Brazilian military dictatorship, the 1973 coup in Chile, or the 1979 Iranian revolution, among others). I have in mind something at the same time broader and subtler, a pattern grounded on combinations of techniques like those described in the next paragraphs. In other words, the focus of my suggestions is forms of conservative reactions against popular requests or rights, especially after the 2007/8

to a broader reflection on how conservative turns begin by fomenting post-truth inegalitarian environments and, at the same time, how such turns strengthen when fomented by these very same environments—both initiatives that usually culminate in coups, either openly or not. In this sense, I owe a great deal to E. M. Wood and especially to L. Patriquin.[23] Although not directly interested in coup techniques, their deeply ingrained concerns with the material demands inherent to the maintenance of any political organization, and of democracy in particular, can still be converted into useful insights.

Coup techniques

However narrated by each historian with a distinct emphasis, both coups display common trajectories that draw the reader's attention in a particular way. C. Bearzot singles out the "coup techniques" put into practice by the conspirators of both 411 and 404, thus coping with the initial difficulty of examining Thucydides' and Xenophon's texts side by side. Schematically, these techniques are condensed into three main initiatives that indicate how the men acted in collusion, launched the three techniques at the same time, and, what was the main target they aimed at, concentrated power and resources at the demos' expense. The techniques are:[24] (a) to control institutional activities by clandestine acts of fraternities eager to influence the boule, the assembly, and the elections; (b) systematic propaganda to influence public opinion by urging the *soteria* or salvation of the city, to be achieved only by means of the dissolution of the democracy; (c) attempts to reduce the population to political inertia by means of intimidation, ideological confusion (because

crisis, about which books like S. Petrucciani, *Democrazia* (Turin 2014), or Y. Mounk, *The People vs. Democracy. Why our Freedom is in Danger and How to Save it* (Cambridge 2018), for example, offer many insights.

[23] L. Patriquin (ed.), *The Ellen Meiksins Wood Reader* (Leiden/Boston 2012); L. Patriquin, *Economic Equality and Direct Democracy in Ancient Athens* (New York 2015).

[24] Bearzot, *Come si abbatte una democrazia* 185–186. For a complementary view see Tuci, *La fragilità della democrazia* 199–214.

of the unpredictable behavior of Theramenes, Phrynichus, and Peisander, for example), open violence or lawfare (especially in 404).

According to these techniques, the main difference between Thucydides' and Xenophon's narratives is that the latter emphasizes the third technique especially in what concerns intimidating practices, violent elimination of political opponents and chiefly prosecutions, the main example of which was Theramenes' condemnation to death. Xenophon writes but a few remarks about the first technique; about the second, he seems to agree that *soteria* was a forceful issue after the defeat to Sparta.[25] In other words, he has not criticized the use of this idea as deliberate ideological propaganda.

In detail, each narrative displays the following points. Fraternities translate what in Thucydides are labeled *xynomosiai*, that is, groups with particular interests whose members were bound by oaths of fidelity and mutual assistance. In Thucydides' words, these "private associations already existed in the city to deal with lawsuits and elections" (8.54.4, slightly adapted). These associations are what other sources like Plato call *hetairiai* and had as their main aim "the will to subtract themselves from public control, openly refusing the democratic principle of publicity in politics."[26] By acting on the borders of the juridical and political spheres, these fraternities gave economic support to their members and gathered information about opponents, thus furnishing or suppressing evidence, directly interfering with juries and magistrates, intimidating through bribery or open violence, among other initiatives.[27] Most of the time these fraternities controlled

[25] Bearzot, *Come si abbatte una democrazia* 423.

[26] Bearzot, *Come si abbatte una democrazia* 136–137. See also L. G. Mitchell and P. J. Rhodes, "Friends and Enemies in Athenian Politics," *G&R* 43 (1996) 12.

[27] Besides the incisive statement by Thucydides (however somewhat vague as well (8.54.4): τάς τε ξυνωμοσίας, αἵπερ ἐτύγχανον πρότερον ἐν τῇ πόλει οὖσαι ἐπὶ δίκαις καὶ ἀρχαῖς), another contemporary allusion to direct inter-

the meetings of the boule and the assembly through prior choices of orators and the subjects to be debated. This, however, does not mean that they had absolute power. The replacement of Phrynichus and Scironides by Diomedon and Leon as naval officers in the winter of 412/1 shows that the demos was still somewhat able to take autonomous decisions (Thuc. 8.54.3),[28] yet Thucydides unmasks the eventual agreements between the people and the leaders of both the assembly and the courts that were reached chiefly through intimidation: "This, however, was a specious message, directed at the masses, since the ones making these changes were also going to be the ones in control of the city" (8.66.1).

The *Hellenica* does not mention fraternities explicitly but gives a precious hint that may disclose how these groups long behaved. In the narrative about the trial of the generals of Arginusae (406), Xenophon writes that "Theramenes and his followers (*hoi oun peri ton Theramene*) suborned many men to wear black cloaks and have their hair shorn close during the festival so that, when they went to the Assembly, it might appear that they were relatives of the men who had died; they also persuaded Callixenus to accuse the generals in the Council. They then held an assembly in which the Council introduced its resolution, which had been proposed by Callixenus" etc. (1.7.8–9).[29] The proposal is introduced by Callixenus and the scene is made complete when "someone stood up in the Assembly and claimed that after the sea battle, he had been saved by clinging to a grain barrel, and that those who were drowning commanded him, if

ference in elections can be found in Ar. *Lys*. 577–578 (καὶ τούς γε συνισταμένους τούτους καὶ τοὺς πιλοῦντας ἑαυτοὺς / ἐπὶ ταῖς ἀρχαῖσι διαξῆναι καὶ τὰς κεφαλὰς ἀποτῖλαι, "and break apart the groups of men / who join up together in their factions / seeking public office—pluck out their heads" [transl. I. Johnston]). See also Bearzot, *Come si abbatte una democrazia* 142; Tuci, *La fragilità della democrazia* 58–65 and 98–101.

[28] See also Tuci, *La fragilità della democrazia* 56.

[29] Text E. C. Marchant (OCT), transl. J. Marincola, *The Landmark Xenophon's Hellenica* (New York 2009).

he should be saved, to make known to the Athenian people that the generals failed to rescue those men who had fought bravely on behalf of their country" (1.7.11). Xenophon makes explicit what in Thucydides' text remains only suggested, that is, how a fraternity guided by men like Theramenes would behave, and by what methods it achieved its goals. Furthermore, that Theramenes is focused on as the main agent behind the scenes and in so central an episode as this trial does not seem a mere coincidence, as the event is right in the middle of the period between the coups of 411 and 404—seen as a byproduct of the former and a rehearsal for the latter.[30]

Other small hints about fraternities in Xenophon might be found in two other places: in the account of how Theramenes persuaded the Athenians to send him as ambassador to Lysander (*Hell.* 2.2.16), and at the beginning of the account of how the Thirty had been raised to power: "it was decided by the people in the Assembly (*edoxe toi demoi*) to choose thirty men" etc. (2.3.2). One may doubt whether so grave a decision would have been the outcome of a peaceful and unanimous popular sentiment as Xenophon seems to imply, even if *edoxe toi demoi* is to be read as a simple formula for a decree. To find, however, information about how the fraternities actually behaved during the coup of 404 one must turn to Lysias *Against Agoratus* and *Against Era-*

[30] Another instance of fraternities possibly acting behind the scenes might be Euryptolemus' discourse in favor of the generals (*Hell.* 1.7.16–33). Euryptolemus was a cousin of both Alcibiades and Pericles the son of Pericles, one of the generals on trial. Gray, *The Character of Xenophon's Hellenica* 83–91, sees in this discourse "a monument to his *philanthrôpia*." For detailed examinations of the Arginusae episode see Ostwald, *From Popular Sovereignty* 431–445, and Bearzot, *Come si abbatte una democrazia* 80–102. For a close and cogent analysis of the episode "as an insightful account of the institutional virtues, as well as the limits, of *dēmokratia* at Athens" illustrating Xenophon's commitment to Athenian democracy see Gish, in *Xenophon: Ethical Principles* 161–212; for a more nuanced view see Ferrario, in *The Cambridge Companion to Xenophon* 71. On the Socratic influence upon Xenophon's political ideas, especially on "the capacity of democracy to produce effective decisions and good government" see also Ferrario 66.

tosthenes.[31] From *In Eratosthenem* 13, for example, we learn that Critias after Aegospotami may have been involved in plots that would lead to 404. He was then one of the five clandestine ephors, a kind of shadow government whose chief aim was to take control of democratic institutions.[32]

The second initiative taken by the conspirators in both coups was to insist on *soteria tei polei* (Thuc. 8.53.2) as an urgent matter, the gist of which was a set of austerity measures alleged to promote Athens' financial health under the pretext of military emergency. In 411 those who insisted on it articulated three points, summarized in Peisander's speech to the assembly: adoption of a so-called wiser policy through restricting access to magistracies; attention to salvation rather than to the form of government; and acquiescence in the return of Alcibiades, who would negotiate the King's support (8.53.3; *Ath.Pol.* 29.5). The first point describes the autocratic behavior of the future Four Hundred, which began with the resolution by the ten commissioners "that it should be permitted for any Athenian to propose with impunity whatever motion he wished; and if anyone should indict the proposer for making an unconstitutional (*paranomon*) proposal or should in any other way act to harm him, they would impose heavy penalties on that person" (8.67.2). Depriving anyone of the right to denounce any sort of illegality—the *graphe paranomon*—was the equivalent of paving the way to regime change until then unacceptable.[33] The second point became the abolition of *misthos* for any public service except for the troops already mobilized, as well as the restriction of public business in theory to five thousand citizens, but in practice to four hundred among the richest and allegedly ablest (8.65.3).[34] The conspirators' fear of losing something very important seems to have been the main feeling behind these propositions.

[31] Bearzot, *Come si abbatte una democrazia* 434.

[32] Bearzot, *Come si abbatte una democrazia* 405.

[33] Tuci, *La fragilità della democrazia* 142.

[34] When these Five Thousand actually became reality four months later, *misthos* was completely abolished for any public office (Thuc. 8.97.1); see also

The proposal to abolish the democracy, however, was never made explicitly. Rather, the emphasis was always on continuity with the past expressed in pretentiously reassuring language. Peisander, for instance, smoothed out the proposal by suggesting to the assembly "to keep the democracy but not in the same way (*me ton auton tropon*)" (Thuc. 8.53.1, my translation), that is, seeming to propose only a change of their very same regime. The demos realized the trap and gave in to Peisander only "partly in fear and partly in the hope that things could be changed later" (8.54.1). After the assembly at Colonus, however, reality balked their hopes once again. Slight changes in the meaning of certain leading words were a recurrent clue indicating that a broader concrete change was going on: when narrating what happened in Corcyra and then spread all over Greece, for instance, the first symptom of a major change pinpointed by Thucydides was precisely the changes undergone by some specific words.[35]

Tuci, *La fragilità della democrazia* 77 and 151. On the different perspectives on the Five Thousand by Thucydides and Xenophon see B. J. Dobski, "Athenian Democracy Refounded: Xenophon's Political History in the *Hellenica*," *Polis* 26 (2009) 316–338, at 329.

[35] "Men assumed the right to reverse the usual values in the application of words to actions. Reckless audacity came to be thought of as comradely courage, while far-sighted hesitation became well-disguised cowardice; moderation was a front for unmanliness; and to understand everything was to accomplish nothing. Wild aggression was a mark of manhood, while careful planning for one's future security was a glib excuse for evasion. The troublemaker was always to be trusted, the one who opposed him was to be suspected. The man who devised a successful plot was intelligent, the one who detected it still cleverer; but the man who thought ahead to try and find some different option was a threat to party loyalty and must have been intimidated by his opponents. In short, the way to be praised was to be first in planning an outrage and the cheerleader for others who had never considered it" (3.82.4–5). Analogous strategies were put into practice by opponents of democracy: "Once the democratic meaning of *eleutheria* had firmly established itself, two conceptual strategies were available to opponents of democracy. They could redefine *eleutheria* to exclude the *plethos*, or they could give it—the *eleutheria* of peasants and craftsmen—a pejorative meaning. Both of these strategies were adopted by the great anti-democratic philosophers of classical

Xenophon writes that in the face of Lysander's peace proposal voiced by Theramenes, "Some people spoke in opposition, but many more approved, and in the end they voted to accept the peace" (*Hell.* 2.2.22). The *soteria* slogan against democracy was even more pressing in 404 because of the defeat, and was systematically exploited to undermine popular resistance as had been done in 411.[36] A brief and somewhat vague hint of this can be seen when the defeated Athenians sent Theramenes to negotiate with Lysander and he stayed more than three months with the Spartan admiral "waiting for the moment when the Athenians would agree to any proposal because their entire supply of grain would have been consumed" (2.2.16). Also in Critias' accusatory speech Theramenes is charged with both fomenting *tou demou katalysis* (2.3.28) and being a traitor since 411, the coup he is charged with having planned (2.3.30).

Last, the third kind of initiative was violent intimidation, both physically and psychologically, promoted by the conspirators against the demos and made easier because of the absence of the fleet (then stationed at Samos).[37] The situation destroyed the

times" (Wood, *The Ellen Meiksins Wood Reader* 159).

[36] Bearzot, *Come si abbatte una democrazia* 445.

[37] On the role of violence in both coups see also Simonton, *Classical Greek Oligarchy* 109–120 and chiefly 281: "This is precisely what we see in microcosm in the two different experiences of oligarchic rule in Athens in 411 and 404. The Four Hundred had engaged in selective violence, as other oligarchies were accustomed to do. They had subtly coerced the population through intimidation and clandestine terror, rather than through outward displays of brute force. Even they could not hold onto power, however, largely because of the ruling elite's inexperience with oligarchic cooperation. The lesson for Critias and the Thirty was clear: eliminate any potential opposition in advance via large-scale killings; govern the city like conquered enemy territory, through the use of a garrison; and cultivate an ever-smaller circle of trustworthy followers, whose loyalty can be bought through incrimination if not through genuine allegiance. The Thirty (in fact, the Three Thousand) risked everything on a reign of terror, and it ended in spectacular failure. Other oligarchs watching the debacle might have attempted to draw lessons from the example in the direction of moderation and tolerance, but direct experience would confound their best-laid plans. When faced with life-or-

balance between assembly members and their leadership. No citizen opposed the conspirators, out of fear of both the number of those involved and the frequent murders never investigated. Among the main coup leaders like Antiphon, Phrynichus, Peisander, and Theramenes, the last three former supporters of democracy.[38] Such devious behavior was paradigmatic and recurrent, thus contributing to expanding the ideological confusion and political paralysis of other citizens, and arousing mutual suspicions, which only benefited those directly involved in the plot (Thuc. 8.56.2–5). In such an atmosphere, popular and influential leaders like Androcles (8.65.2) and Hyperbolus (8.73.3) were murdered. "The assembly" therefore "ratified these proposals without a dissenting voice and was immediately dissolved" (8.69.1).

In the *Hellenica* Xenophon discusses the elimination of opponents, either physically or not, by means of the systematic juridical prosecutions to which they were first submitted. Lawfare procedures had one great advantage over simple murder: they co-involved the whole body of citizens by exploiting their thirst for justice prompted by the defeat.[39] Xenophon's narrative is famous for the long antilogy between Critias and Theramenes and the latter's subsequent condemnation to death (2.3.15–56).[40] It is from Lysias, however, that we come to know about

death crises in their conflicts with the demos, they could not restrain themselves from choosing the more tempting path of reliance on violence."

[38] On their profiles see also Ostwald, *From Popular Sovereignty* 358–366.

[39] Bearzot, *Come si abbatte una democrazia* 452–458.

[40] According to Gray, *The Character of Xenophon's Hellenica* 94–99, "Xenophon's approach to the trial is entirely philosophic, for these [*scil.* treachery and loyalty, betrayal and friendship] were the kind of questions that Socrates tried to tackle." See also V. Gray, "Interventions and Citations in Xenophon's *Hellenica* and *Anabasis*," in *Xenophon. Oxford Readings in Classical Studies* (Oxford 2010) 553–572, at 555, on Xenophon's defense of including sayings in history (on Theramenes' jokes when about to die). On the "moral turn of Greek historiography of the fourth century" see Luraghi, in *The Cambridge Companion to Xenophon* 98. T. Rood, "Xenophon's Narrative Style," in *The Cambridge Companion* 263–278, at 269–270, acutely remarks that Xenophon's

analogous elimination of democratic leaders like Cleophon, Strombichides, Dionysodorus, and other *strategoi* and taxiarchs who opposed the ratification of the peace with Sparta (*In Agoratum* 8–16). Xenophon also reports the imprisonment of Archestratus because he proposed that the boule should accept the peace conditions offered by the Spartans (like the destruction of ten stadia of the Long Walls), an act whose immediate effect was to inhibit other analogous proposals (2.2.15). Furthermore, lawfare methods of prosecution and juridical intimidation were not new at all: for example, Cimon and the Areopagites had already been prosecuted in the 460's, which paved the way for the reforms of Ephialtes. And the most notorious case was, of course, Arginusae, so close to the coup (406) as to be seen as a rehearsal for similar initiatives a few years later.

The ruthless violence, however, would be the fingerprint of the Thirty who not by chance were dubbed tyrants. Xenophon writes that "Although they were charged with writing up the laws according to which the city would be governed, they continually postponed writing the laws down and publishing them for all to see. Instead, they established a Council and other offices in an arbitrary manner, as it seemed best to them" (*Hell.* 2.3.11), and that they "began to scheme about what steps they might take that would permit them to run the city however they liked" (2.3.13). These measures were taken after the Thirty had disarmed the people and been assured the support of a Spartan fleet under Callybius, who began a new era of terror on the

"increasingly overt ethical concern" made the narratorial voice more overt, which can be seen in the anecdotal conclusion of the Critias-Theramenes episode. On "the peculiar importance of Socrates to Xenophon" see Dobski, *Polis* 26 (2009) 318. On Critias as "the tyrant *par excellence*," in whose mouth Xenophon makes the government of the Thirty equivalent to a tyranny, "thereby naming for the first time the form of government which best fits the arbitrariness of their actions to date," F. Pownall, "Critias in Xenophon's *Hellenica*," *SCI* 31 (2012) 1–17, at 4. On Xenophon's *enargeia* in the Thirty episode see M. A. Flower, "Xenophon as a Historian," in *The Cambridge Companion* 301–322, at 310–311. See also Wolpert, *Remembering Defeat* 18.

democrats.[41] According to the *Ath.Pol.*, the repression promoted by the Thirty killed 1500 persons (35.4; Xen. *Hell.* 2.3.15–16).

Resistance

In 411, however, the sailors sent by Athens to Samos one year before to promote a democratic revolution (Thuc. 8.21.1) revolted under the leadership of Thrasybulus.[42] These men constituted the main democratic contingent of the city and were the opponents most feared by the conspirators, who felt confident to act only because they were absent from the city.[43] The sailors organized an assembly, deposed the officials suspected of collaboration with the coup, and chose new ones, among whom were Thrasybulus and Thrasylus.

In a remarkable passage equivalent to a transcript of the proceedings and decisions then taken, Thucydides reports that "Men stood up in the meeting and offered each other various forms of encouragement, in particular that there was no need to lose heart because the city had revolted from them. This was a case of the smaller number breaking away from the larger; they were the majority, and they were also the better resourced in every respect. After all, they had possession of the whole fleet, and they would force the other cities in the empire to make their contributions just as if they were based at Athens. In Samos they

[41] Bearzot, *Come si abbatte una democrazia* 408–409.

[42] Wolpert, in *The Oxford Handbook to Thucydides* 187.

[43] Bearzot, *Come si abbatte una democrazia* 192. Teergarden's inference that "fear felt by the leaders of the regime for the Athenian naval forces stationed at Samos was the ultimate cause for the collapse of the regime of the Four Hundred" (*Death to Tyrants!* 26) does not precisely correspond to what Thuc. 8.72.2 writes: "So with these and other instructions on what it was appropriate to say, the Four Hundred dispatched the men immediately after establishing themselves in office. Their fear—a justified one as it turned out—was that a mob of sailors would not want to remain under an oligarchical system, and that if trouble started there at Samos it would lead to their own removal" (ἄλλα τ' ἐπιστείλαντες τὰ πρέποντα εἰπεῖν ἀπέπεμψαν αὐτοὺς εὐθὺς μετὰ τὴν ἑαυτῶν κατάστασιν, δείσαντες μή, ὅπερ ἐγένετο, ναυτικὸς ὄχλος οὔτ' αὐτὸς μένειν ἐν τῷ ὀλιγαρχικῷ κόσμῳ ἐθέλῃ, σφᾶς τε μὴ ἐκεῖθεν ἀρξαμένου τοῦ κακοῦ μεταστήσωσιν).

also had a city that was by no means weak, but one that had come very close to taking control of the sea from the Athenians when it had fought a war with them. (…) Indeed, in that respect the Athenians were actually at fault in abolishing the ancestral laws, while they were the ones preserving them and they would try to make the others do the same" (8.76.3–4 and 6).

The sailors were absolutely aware of democracy's golden rule —the majority principle—of its material fundaments and of the legality of their own action. At the same time, the quick, effective, and democratically acquired leadership of Thrasybulus and Thrasylus enabled a calm, rational, and unified management of their own situation. Thrasybulus then called Alcibiades back to Samos, and he promised the soldiers help from Tissafernes (8.81–82).

When the embassy sent by the Four Hundred to Samos (8.72.1) came back to Athens and reported the promises of Alcibiades to restore the democracy through the Five Thousand (8.86), some of the conspirators felt encouraged to overtly criticize the situation. Theramenes and Aristocrates were among the most afraid of Alcibiades and the sailors. The proposition of a moderate government effectively in the hands of five thousand citizens is harshly criticized by Thucydides as a mere pretext by which the conspirators aimed at leading the demos without caring for democracy: "this form of words was just their political pretense. Most of them were drawn through personal ambition into a mode of behavior that is sure to end up destroying any oligarchy that emerges from a democracy. Right from the first day they not only all fail to consider themselves equals, but each thinks he deserves the very first place himself. Whereas under a democracy an election is held and a person can bear the result more easily, telling himself that he was not defeated by his peers. What most clearly spurred these men on was the strength of Alcibiades' position at Samos and their own belief that the oligarchy would not be an enduring one. Each of them was therefore contending to establish himself as the foremost champion of the people" (8.89.3–4).

Those among the Four Hundred who most fiercely opposed

this conduct, like Antiphon, Phrynichus, Peisander, and Aristarchus, did not hesitate in negotiating surrender with the Spartans (8.90). "But then Phrynichus, after his return from the mission to Sparta, was struck down in a planned move by one of the border-guards in the market-place, at a time when it was very crowded" (8.92.2). Foreseeing the pretext and quickly realizing how fragile the coup was, Theramenes once again changed sides. Once encouraged to act, he incited the hoplites in the Piraeus to demolish the fortress which the oligarchs had built both to protect themselves from the people and to be used by the Spartans when they vanquished the city (8.92–93).

Thrasybulus and Theramenes are central characters for both Thucydides and Xenophon. In the latter's narrative, Thrasybulus commands the resistance in the Peiraeus (403) and struggles with Pausanias (*Hell.* 2.4.34), then manages to reconcile the rebels with the city inhabitants by restoring and preserving the ancestral laws (*tois arkhaiois tois nomois*, 2.4.42). This was the turning point from which the city could reorganize itself. As in Thucydides, so in Xenophon Thrasybulus is the main articulator of a genuinely democratically inspired resistance. Theramenes, on the other hand, is the man who in both contexts seems to have striven to moderate the conspirators' growing violence. On both occasions, however, the suspicion of having acted for his own benefit persisted; and in the last one, it seems to have been behind his condemnation to death (2.3.15–56).[44]

Besides Thrasybulus and Theramenes, another voice in Xenophon's narrative important in striving to conciliate the disputing parties in the city was Cleocritus. Immediately after the battle of Munychia, in which the Thirty had been beaten and Critias died, he made an appeal to salvation (*soteria*), liberty (*eleutheria*), and peace (*eirene*) (2.4.20–22), even though the result was not exactly what he had in mind: "This was his speech, and the re-

[44] On the complexities of Theramenes' portrait by Xenophon see Wolpert, *Remembering Defeat* 10.

maining leaders of the Thirty, affected by his words, led those who had marched out with them back to the city" (2.4.22).[45]

Parallels

Trying to fill Thucydides' and Xenophon's shoes, this brief survey may suggest some broader parallels between both coups as well as their relevance to understanding the conservative turns they usually emblematize. The sketch on coup techniques summarizes some scaffoldings of any attempt to abate a democracy. These attempts are grounded in three similarities with deep roots in economic issues. First, they show how decisive economic power can be in relation to both political and juridical affairs. In a moment when the virtual balance between the rich and the rest of the Athenian free manpower seemed to be at stake, the former acted openly and directly to preserve their own position.[46] To them, the democratic system seemed exhausted and based on exactions whose main target was they themselves only. People with much to lose invariably take advantage of a situation perceived as economically threatening or critical, in order to trigger changes to their own benefit. Second, these attempts show how ideological pressure promoted by this economic power avails itself of a critical economic situation precisely because it controls propaganda channels. Economic power backs

[45] Bearzot, *Come si abbatte una democrazia* 505 and 522–523. On the religious aspects of Cleocritus' discourse: Gray, *The Character of Xenophon's Hellenica* 101–103. On how the oath of Demophantus "helped facilitate the large-scale mobilization against the Thirty Tyrants" see Teergarden, *Death to Tyrants!* 43–44.

[46] On the relative economic equality in classical Athens as a condition for direct democracy see Patriquin, *Economic Equality and Direct Democracy*. His book echoes what was virtually implied in Wood's thoughts, e.g. "As long as direct producers remained free of purely 'economic' imperatives, politically-constituted property would remain a lucrative resource, as an instrument of private appropriation or, conversely, a protection against exploitation; and, in that context, the civic status of the Athenian citizen was a valuable asset which had direct economic implications. Political equality not only coexisted with, but substantially modified socio-economic inequality, and democracy was more substantive than 'formal'" (*The Ellen Meiksins Wood Reader* 184).

itself up by core ideological notions carefully promoted and whose preservation it is quick to assure through legal or forcible coercion, depending on its necessity rather than on ethical considerations toward those who would be targeted by these constraints. By fomenting fear and suspicion, probably of the same kind as that which its own members feel towards their fellow citizens, this power tried to enforce what actually benefited almost exclusively its very same sharers. And third, they show also how systematic violence, either overtly physical or in its several lawfare forms, is always at hand when that economic power realizes itself to be under threat, even if an apparently minimal threat. In both 411 and 404 the conspirators took advantage of extremely fragile moments for the city and exploited the vulnerability of direct democratic practices to accomplish manipulation.[47] It was not by chance that they began by quickly restricting the right to free expression and controlling what could be publicly voiced or not. Once at the head of the city, they governed so as to preserve in few hands the ever-fewer resources still available. Thus, they deliberately shuffled the notions of political practice and management, employing the former merely to mask the controlling intentions of the latter. Instead of dialogue and balance between demands and concessions, violent intimidation and restriction of the public sphere to a few were made the rule, in circumstances of growing scarcity of money for manpower and of pressure on the citizens who possessed it.[48]

Accordingly, conservative turns seem to display a recurrent pattern readable in both narratives. They are organized with the same and only aim: controlling politics to make higher the wall between the rich and the rest, so preserving, if not even reinforcing, the formers' previous situation. The more they try to somehow disguise it, the more one will suspect what is really at stake—how to drain anything off from the majority into the hands of the few, and to preserve the latter from the necessary

[47] Tuci, *La fragilità della democrazia* 215–216.

[48] Forsdyke, in *The Greek Polis and the Invention of Democracy* 238; Tritle, in *The Greek Polis* 300–308.

demands of the former—a road which leads to isolation and mutual destruction, whether at the beginning or the end of a warlike period. Yet if the relative economic equality presupposed as a foundation of direct democracy is overtly upset by the rich when they feel under pressure, it is only the conscious political action of the rest of the population that could restore the original balance—exactly what the sailors promoted. Striving for democracy and its necessary commitment to collective and cooperative efforts is still the only path leading to justice and peace—quite the opposite of the Athenian situation right after each coup. When conservative turns and post-truths combine—they actually have never been separate—it is time to ask whom inequality benefits and how to stop the *kakotropia* (lit. "evil-turn," the word Thucydides employed to describe the situation in Greece after a long series of coups, 3.83.1). L. Patriquin's chief conclusion addresses the main problem underlying both coups: "[i]f Athenian democracy teaches anything it is that struggle for relative equality on the 'material plane' is essential if we are to move beyond forms of public decision-making that disproportionately benefit society's elite. In short, economic democracy is a necessary prerequisite of political democracy. Without the former, the latter cannot exist."[49] In other words, in ancient Athens democracy was a plea for economic justice assured by political participation grounded in social equality, features abhorred by oligarchic-aristocratic classes.[50]

From the sketch on resistance, two points deserve to be highlighted. First, fragility and generalized mutual suspicions are inherent to a coup such as those analyzed and also contribute to its ruin from within. Second, and by far the more important, the

[49] Patriquin, *Economic Equality and Direct Democracy* 82.

[50] On differences between ancient and modern democracies see Wood's reflections, *The Ellen Meiksins Wood Reader* 185 and chiefly 192–220; P. Liddel, "Democracy Ancient and Modern," in R. K. Balot, *A Companion to Greek and Roman Political Thought* (Malden 2009) 133–148, at 143–147; P. Wagner, "Transformations of Democracy: Towards a History of Political Thought and Practice in Long-Term Perspective," in *The Greek Polis* 47–68.

resistance was organized from its beginnings in a cooperative way by men who quickly realized that they had everything to lose with the extinction of democracy.[51] This independent class of free producers—now chiefly formed by sailors, the backbone of Athens' imperialistic free manpower—were the most affected by the non-laboring oligarchic-aristocratic classes which favored both coups.[52] They knew that the end of the war in such an oligarchic turn would exclude them not only from public office but chiefly from the livings they made through that very war. And they also quickly realized how to find their own democratic ways to counteract those authoritarian, violent, and excluding impositions: collective organization and responsive action. Only a clear-cut counter-project, a narrative informed by genuine democratic ideals with the same strong persuasive appeal, can counterbalance initiatives like those that led to the coups;[53] merely denouncing their noxious effects had not been enough.

[51] In opposition to the myth that slaves and metics constituted the labour-force of Athens, Wood remarked that "the distinctive characteristic of Athenian democracy was not the degree to which it was based on dependent labour, the labour of slaves, but on the contrary, the extent to which it *excluded* dependence from the sphere of production, that is, the extent to which production rested on free, independent labour, to the exclusion of labour in varying forms and degrees of juridical dependence or political subjection. Athenian slavery, then, must be explained in relation to other forms of labour which were *ruled out* by the democracy. It should be treated not as the productive base of the democracy, but rather as a form of dependence permitted and encouraged by a system of production dominated by free and independent producers, and growing, as it were, in the interstices of that system" (*The Ellen Meiksins Wood Reader* 88–89).

[52] "[A] conflict which expressed itself particularly in a political opposition between, on the one hand, rich citizens, who felt victimized by the democratic *polis*, the role it gave banausics, its redistributive function extracting funds from the rich and conferring public payments on the poor; and, on the other hand, poorer citizens who stood to gain from the institutions of the democracy, its checks on the rich and its diversion of surplus-product to subsidize the political and judicial activities of the poor" (Wood, *The Ellen Meiksins Wood Reader* 103).

[53] On alternatives, clarification of important questions, and in general much food for thought, see Wood, *The Ellen Meiksins Wood Reader* 286–310.

Both in 411 and 404 the democratic leaders insisted on the recovery of the *patrioi nomoi*, the Athenian ancestral constitution. It was not a brand new project, but at least it had the advantage of making clear who would be harmed if oligarchies triumphed.

Such projects and actions, however, would not be known if men like Thucydides and Xenophon had not decided to register them. To choose to narrate, instead of simply observing and remaining silent, is in itself one necessary first step toward solutions for problems currently experienced. Today, to choose to remain alert and narrate observable phenomena, that is, deciding to instill meaning into situations which otherwise would remain whimsical, then be forgotten, in order that others may be able to reflect upon them and thus improve their own lives as in a continuous chain of creative solidarity, is also a way to resist collectively. Realizing what was meant by living in ancient democracy amid its inextricable social, economic, and political constituents, how different it was from its alleged modern homonym, and how valid and possible it is to strive for an analogous contemporary way of life, is perhaps the major example one can extract from reading these narratives.

Beyond the socio-historical parallels, one can extract from Thucydides' and Xenophon's narratives a broader historiographical one that pinpoints the very reason underwriting the kind of analysis this paper intends to convey. The perception that narratives are forms of attributing and conveying meaning to experiences is a recent one, but at the same time it would be difficult to disprove that historians so deeply imbued with their tasks as were Thucydides and Xenophon have not caught at least a glimpse of this idea.[54] To attain this seems to require a

[54] Further discussion and references (specifically concerning Thucydides and Polybius) in B. B. Sebastiani, *Fracasso e verdade na recepção de Políbio e Tucídides* (Coimbra/São Paulo 2017). While methodological and/or authorial declarations from Xenophon are particularly rare and inconclusive, one recalls almost immediately the famous Thucydidean paragraphs 1.22 and 5.26 where the historian employs systematically the first person to discuss limits and potentialities of what today we know as his methodology.

peculiar expertise, which the Greek historians meditated upon for a long time and which still remains as promising as it was then. Despite the procedural differences that one can highlight in both narratives,[55] as historians Thucydides and Xenophon put into practice the synoptic vision afforded by *historia*, part of the Ionian method of inquiring into men and their actions so as to be able to recognize intentions behind them and their connexions.[56] Their narratives are still a plea for intellectuals to engage in deep criticism against any kinds of mystification and to always strive for the most of independent thinking they can safeguard for themselves and others. No post-truth is uninterested and every one of them should be quickly tackled. To this, both Thucydides and Xenophon are paradigms of ethical as well as intellectual postures. From their narratives, one learns not only the main traits of a coup but also—and this is probably their most important point—how to identify the usual pathways they take to come about.[57]

September, 2018

Universidade de São Paulo
sebastiani@usp.br

[55] J. Marincola, *Authority and Tradition in Ancient Historiography* (Cambridge 1997), remains the fundamental starting point about them.

[56] Among the Greek historians it was Polybius who emphasized this point most clearly in several paragraphs, but chiefly at 1.4. Meditating on the role of Fortune in the creation of the Roman empire and how only a universal history would be able to make sense of such a development, he writes that a "historian, then, should use his work to bring under a single conspectus (*synopsin*) for his readers the means by which Fortune has brought everything to this point. (…) it is only by connecting and comparing all the parts with one another, by seeing their similarities and differences—it is only such an overview that puts one in a position to derive benefit and pleasure from history" (1.4.1 and 1.4.10–11; text T. Büttner-Wobst [BT], transl. R. Waterfield [Oxford 2010]).

[57] This research was supported by CNPq (Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico), Brazil. I am very grateful to Cinzia Susanna Bearzot, Lucia Sano, Larry Patriquin, Rodrigo Illarraga, and the anonymous reviewer for helpful remarks and suggestions. All shortcomings and mistakes are of my own responsibility.