CHAPTER 5

Physis *on the Battlefield*

The *Histories*' incorporation of *physis* as a universal measure of the capacities of man has so far suggested a set of limits on human traits and actions. This emphasis plays out rather differently as the narrative moves forward into the Greco-Persian Wars. The startling Hellenic victory over the Persians left behind a politically charged causal lacuna. In the course of the fifth century, competing ideological narratives were drafted in order to justify the successful outcome of the loosely coordinated Greek defensive alliance against the vastly superior Persian force.[1] This under-determined outcome shaped and drove a debate on human nature on the battlefield.[2] In the Hippocratic *Airs, Waters, Places*, for example, the European *physis* was viewed as made of sterner stuff than any eastern counterparts. In this text, *physis* offers an opportunity to naturalize the Greek victory as the inevitable outcome of innate European superiority. Like *Airs*, the *Histories* draws on *physis* as a conceptual category for thinking about martial valor. Various historical actors in the *Histories* appeal to *physis* as a causal paradigm explaining victory. However, the *Histories* has generally been read as espousing the cause of *nomos* – "custom," "law," "convention" – as the proximate, though not exclusive, cause of Greek success.[3] This conclusion often pits Greek *nomos* against Persian *physis*.[4] This chapter will challenge the opposition of *nomos* and *physis* that is so familiar from contemporary sophistic discourse. Rather than opposing human nature to law or custom, the *Histories* explores a rhetoric of transhumanism, or the

[1] Divine causal explanation is hammered home, for example, in Aesch. *Pers.* 344–7; 353–4; 454–5; 472–3; 532–5; 724–5; 739–40; 906–8; 942–3; 1005–7.

[2] Heinimann (1945), 33; Lateiner (1984), 271, 273–4; (1989), 184; Redfield (1985), 115–16.

[3] E.g., Humphreys (1987), 212; Lateiner (1989), 146; Thomas (2000), 68, for the Scythian *nomoi* as the cause of their success; 109, for Greek *nomoi* as the motivating factor behind Greek success.

[4] Heinimann (1945), argued that both *Airs, Waters, Places* and the *Histories* display a similar treatment with regard to *nomos* and *physis* that predates their opposition in later authors such as Antiphon and Hippias. The *locus classicus* of this occurs in the context of Thucydides' Melian Dialogue, 5.105. See pp. 84–5.

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enhancement of nature. However, we shall see that Herodotus represents a counter-discourse to a superior *physis*, and nature's enhancement is ultimately displaced as a causal paradigm for victory on the battlefield.

Surpassing *physis*

What is distinctive to the *Histories* as the narrative turns toward the Greco-Persian Wars is the emphasis it places on transcending or enhancing one's *physis*. This motif focuses on the limitations that *physis* imposes on the human, but only via surpassing them, in a kind of impermanent transhumanism.[5] This human enhancement is entangled with environment, warfare, and victory. The potential to transcend nature is first evident prior to the Persian invasion of Greece, during the Ionian revolt. There, Herodotus explicitly endorses the strategy of going beyond human *physis* in the context of the Carian rebellion against Persia. The Carians' loose confederation of cities and villages allied itself to the rather desperate Ionian forces. After discovering their defection, the Persian general Daurises marched on Caria, leaving conquered poleis along the Hellespont in his wake. Herodotus delays his narrative of the Persian invasion with an assembly of Carian nobles who deliberate their course of action at the White Pillars on the river Marsyas:

> After the Carians gathered there, many different views were expressed, of which the best seems to me to have been that of Pixodarus . . .. This man's opinion was that the Carians should cross the Maeander and join the battle having the river at their back, so that they would be unable to flee and be compelled to stay on the spot and become still better than their *physis* (ἵνα μὴ ἔχοντες ὀπίσω φεύγειν οἱ Κᾶρες αὐτοῦ τε μένειν ἀναγκαζόμενοι γενοίατο ἔτι ἀμείνονες τῆς φύσιος). (5.118.2)

According to How and Wells, Herodotus "as usual, shows complete ignorance of tactics; he really thinks that an army should fight where no retreat is possible."[6] Yet the strategy, explicitly approved as it is by the narrator and the only one given exposure, provides a view to the counterfactual logic of military tactics in the *Histories*. To unpack the narrator's position: the Maeander can act as a mechanism to transcend *physis* by

[5] Herodotus' language of transcending *physis* aligns nicely with the "father" of transhumanism, Julian Huxley, who coined the term in his 1957 book, *New Bottles for New Wine*. He refers to it as, 17, "man remaining man, but transcending himself, by realizing new possibilities of and for his human nature."

[6] How-Wells 5.118.

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compelling those standing with their backs to it to take either absolute victory or suffer total annihilation.[7] The zero-sum scheme enforces conditions for humans to go beyond themselves, and the participle ἀναγκαζόμενοι (*anankazomenoi*) points to the loss of agency that this requires – the enhancement of *physis* overcomes the rational human subject.[8] In the end, the Carians decide against Pixodarus' strategy and instead place the Persians against the river to keep them from fleeing in the event of a Carian victory.

A parallel configuration occurs in the nonhuman world in the context of the description of the Danube. The superlative nature of the Danube, "greatest of all rivers," excepting perhaps the Nile, leads into a description of its current. Unlike other rivers, its stream remains equal in both winter and summer: "during the winter it is as big as it is, and even slightly greater than its *physis*," and this is the result, Herodotus hazards, of the amount of snow that falls in winter in Scythia (4.50.2–3). The summer flow of the river remains steady due to the heavy rains that feed tributary streams and the increased evaporation from the sun, a combination that produces the same current in summer as well as winter. Waters enlarged by rivulets of winter snow outstrip the current of the Danube and make it slightly "greater than its nature."

Like the river, the nature of man can be temporarily enhanced. In this case, it is in light of the compulsion effected by another river, the Maeander. In the final analysis, it is the Persians who are given the advantage of compulsion, as they are positioned against the stream, on the grounds that this would prevent their retreat. It is a strategy that ends in the rout of the Carians – though they fought well, we are

[7] Lattimore (1939), 27, for Pixodarus as a "practical advisor." Surprisingly, the passage is not discussed in the recent treatment of Book 5, Irwin and Greenwood (2007). For crossing rivers and transgression of boundaries more generally, see Lateiner (1985), 88–93; Clark (2018), 93–114; Bosak-Schroeder (2020), chapter 2. The passage evokes another strategic puzzle on the river as a site of strategic manipulation: at 1.206.2–3, Tomyris offers Cyrus the choice of marching three days inland either on the side of the Araxes river marking the district of the Massagetes or on the side delimiting Persia's territory. In this case, the inland march negates the influence of the river itself, but the choice leads Croesus, as wise advisor, to enumerate the risks of Persia facing the Araxes. In the event of a defeat, he perceives that the Massagetes will hardly stop from pressing their advantage and utterly destroying the *entire* empire (1.207.3: πᾶσαν τὴν ἀρχήν) of Persia. In the event of a victory, the river at their backs will offer a clear path to the extension of empire. This zero-sum position of conquer or be conquered resonates with Pixodarus' attempt to weaponize the river to bolster the Carian chances of victory.

[8] One can also be worse than one's *physis*, see 7.16.α1, where Artabanus reworks a fragment from Herodotus' other wise advisor, the historical Solon, F 12 West, and relates the winds' disturbance of the *physis* of the sea to the effects on the King from those who advise him poorly; and Otanes, 3.80.4, suggests that monarchy by nature makes the tyrant hostile to his subjects.

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informed – because of the multitude arrayed against them (5.119.1: τέλος δὲ ἐσσώθησαν διὰ πλῆθος). As is evident from this passage, transcending *physis* is bound up in compulsion and success in warfare. It theoretically encourages a kind of bravery that might render possible the defeat of superior numerical forces.[9] The notion here of the potential boundary of the human that might be transgressed in battle is reprised, significantly, in Xerxes' famous interlude with the exiled Spartan king, Demaratus, on the Spartans, numerical superiority, and victory in battle.[10]

The passage has been much discussed. It is generally interpreted as one of the key causal moments explaining Greek success against the Persians.[11] As we shall see, this set-piece on human nature, fear, compulsion, and bravery places the dialogue in a constellation of ideas that jointly combine to have great explanatory power. After a lengthy catalog of the land forces Xerxes has at his disposal and a general review of his navy, the Persian despot returns to the beach and questions Demaratus.[12] He is particularly interested in the prospect of a lack of opposition to his forces, given their superior number. His question is not an idle one but in fact bears on the later narrative: the Thracians would plead with the Hellenes to guard the pass at Olympus and threaten to medize if military aid were not forthcoming, concluding, "for necessity is never by nature stronger than inability" (7.172.3: οὐδαμὰ γὰρ ἀδυνασίης ἀνάγκη κρέσσων ἔφυ). And during the Greco-Persian Wars, the Greeks, including the Spartans, are often portrayed as on the point of flight – before Artemisium (8.4.1), Salamis (8.74.2), and Plataea (9.51). Xerxes' inquiry prompts Demaratus to reflect on the nature of Hellenic courage.

> τῇ Ἑλλάδι πενίη μὲν αἰεί κοτε σύντροφός ἐστι, ἀρετὴ δὲ ἐπακτός ἐστι, ἀπό τε σοφίης κατεργασμένη καὶ νόμου ἰσχυροῦ· τῇ διαχρεωμένη ἡ Ἑλλὰς τήν τε πενίην ἀπαμύνεται καὶ τὴν δεσποσύνην. (7.102.1)

[9] There are not many treatments specifically devoted to bravery in the *Histories*: Harrell (2003), is a first, though her focus is upon gendering bravery; more generally, see Balot (2014), 81–108. Cf. the Roman destruction of the bridge at Polyb. 2.32.10–11: ἅμα δὲ μίαν ἑαυτοῖς ἀπολείποντες ἐλπίδα τῆς σωτηρίας τὴν ἐν τῷ νικᾶν, διὰ τὸ κατόπιν αὐτοῖς ἄβατον ὄντα παρακεῖσθαι τὸν προειρημένον ποταμόν. ("At the same time, they were leaving themselves with one hope of salvation, namely, victory, since the river mentioned earlier that lay behind them was impassable.")

[10] For Demaratus in the *Histories*, Boedeker (1987), remains essential.

[11] E.g. Gigante (1956), 144ff; Ostwald (1969), 31; Waters (1971), 97; Hartog (1988), 334; Lateiner (1989), 155. For the structure, see Scardino (2007), 200–1.

[12] The way Demaratus is introduced marks the passage out as significant: Macan ad 7.101 notes the formality of Demaratus' patronymic here, despite the fact that he has already played a role in the narrative.

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> Poverty has always been a foster-sister of Hellas, but virtue is imported, attained by wisdom and powerful *nomos*; making use of it, Hellas defends itself against both poverty and despotism.

In these famous lines, Demaratus forecasts the Hellenic success in the Greco-Persian Wars by expounding on their "acquired valour" and resistance to despotism.[13] He assigns greatest import not to a superior *physis* but to wisdom and *nomos*.[14] By valor Hellas keeps its land fertile and free from an externally imposed tyranny.

Demaratus continues his disquisition by turning specifically to Lacedaemonian bravery by explaining to Xerxes that the Spartiates would not come to terms but oppose him with their numbers – whatever numbers those might be, a thousand, or more, or less: ἤν τε ἐλάσσονες τούτων, ἤν τε καὶ πλεῦνες (7.102.3). Xerxes rejects this as an idealized, exaggerated portrait of the Spartans. The idea that a thousand men, or five times that, would take the field against the myriad Persians and their subjects beggared belief.[15] As David Konstan has observed, the Persians generally, and Xerxes in particular, display a fascination with the "reification of value."[16] This passion for quantification and its association with the surveyor's gaze equate size with power. In this way, Xerxes' response mirrors Herodotus' on the *physis* of Heracles in the second book, where the narrator used human *physis* as a corrective to the fantastic myths of the Greeks. Correspondingly, Xerxes opposes the extravagant vaunting of bravery as beyond the Spartans' nature. And in a rejoinder to Demaratus' jab at despotism, he identifies political freedom as a hindrance to success:

[13] Flower-Marincola 9.48.1, "In H. the question of who is best/bravest at war is almost a leitmotif of Books 5–9." Cf. especially Balot (2014), 84–91. Demaratus' claim on Spartan valor expands the usual wrangling of the excellence of a given warrior into an ethnic, rather than individual, question.

[14] Raaflaub (2004), 234, on this as a particularly Spartan notion of freedom.

[15] Numerical superiority can be an ingredient in success in concert either with a monarchy or a democracy: see Hdt. 5.3.1, on the Thracians, who are the "greatest nation in the world," and "if ruled by one man or if they were to make common cause" (εἰ δὲ ὑπ' ἑνὸς ἄρχοιτο ἢ φρονέοι κατὰ τὠυτό), would be irresistible. Alternatively, it represents extremes that are liable to be cut back by the divine, 7.10.ε. Cf. Th. 1.121, where the Corinthians assure the allies they will be victorious over Athens because of (1) their numerical superiority, (2) experience in war, and (3) unity in taking orders: τῇ γε εὐψυχίᾳ δήπου περιεσόμεθα. ὃ γὰρ ἡμεῖς ἔχομεν φύσει ἀγαθόν, ἐκείνοις οὐκ ἂν γένοιτο διδαχῇ: ὃ δ' ἐκεῖνοι ἐπιστήμῃ προύχουσι, καθαιρετὸν ἡμῖν ἐστὶ μελέτῃ. ("We will surely excel in courage. For that which we have is noble by *physis*, nor can it be acquired by them by instruction: what those are superior in by expertise, this can be achieved by us in practice.")

[16] Konstan (1987), 62. Cf. Christ (1994), on Xerxes' investigations. For Herodotus' agonistic use of calculations, see Sergueenkova (2016). Persians also get interested in numbers at, e.g., 1.136.1 (sons); 1.153.1 (Spartan strength).

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> ὑπὸ μὲν γὰρ ἑνὸς ἀρχόμενοι κατὰ τρόπον τὸν ἡμέτερον γενοίατ' ἂν δειμαίνοντες τοῦτον καὶ παρὰ τὴν ἑωυτῶν φύσιν ἀμείνονες, καὶ ἴοιεν ἀναγκαζόμενοι μάστιγι ἐς πλεῦνας ἐλάσσονες ἐόντες· ἀνειμένοι δὲ ἐς τὸ ἐλεύθερον οὐκ ἂν ποιέοιεν τούτων οὐδέτερα. (7.103.4)
>
> For if they were ruled by one man as in our way, fearing this man they would become better than their own nature and would advance by compulsion of the whip into greater numbers, although fewer in number themselves. Given over to freedom they would do neither of these things.

Demaratus' estimation is impossible because of the limits of human nature. Nature follows reasoned mathematical probabilities in warfare and selects for survival. Xerxes identifies a potential exception to this principle in one-man rule, which can compel men to overcome their *physis*.[17] Xerxes sees the monarch as a kind of human engineer who exerts a mastery over nature. But he does so by dehumanizing his subjects. The passive participle – again we see ἀναγκαζόμενοι – along with the detail of the presence of the whip and the prominence of fear that overcomes *physis* explores discursive transhumanism but does so by equating man with the nonhuman, with the animal. The involuntary nature of this phenomenon is again driven home in the final sentence – freedom eliminates the potential for this species of transhumanism. Xerxes' words are remarkably in line with the strategy of Pixodarus on men overcoming their *physis* through their compulsion to stay and fight or drown (5.118.2) – a strategy endorsed by Herodotus.

What precisely is at stake in this passage? Rosalind Thomas has argued that the *nomos-physis* opposition so common in the intellectual circles of the fifth-century sophists is evident here in the Demaratus-Xerxes debate and that "Persian natural instincts, or nature, are counteracted by fear, Spartan nature by *nomos*."[18] In line with her wider thesis, Thomas finds that *nomos* outmaneuvers its antithesis, in this case, *physis*. Let us consider

[17] Herodotus primes the audience for the importance of a single leader in battle during the Ionian revolt by portraying the effectiveness of the Phocaian commander, Dionysius, 6.11–12, and the damage done by not heeding him.

[18] Thomas (2000), 110, notes that the debate at 7.101–9 is partly couched in terms of *nomos* and *physis* but nuances this by stating that these are relative characteristics rather than absolute and so do not commit the narrator to inborn Greek preeminence, *pace* Lateiner (1989), 160. She considers this a tangential opposition and sees the true debate as taking place between *nomos* and environment (125). I would add that *physis* can be conceived of as an "underlying reality" in particular at 7.16.α1, though see also 2.19.1. However, living without *nomos*, as the Androphagoi do, 4.106, in a state of nature is not portrayed as more "real" than living with it. Cf. Lebow (2001), on Thucydides and the civilizing function of *nomoi*.

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this hypothesis by looking to another meditation on excellence in war in relation to *physis* and *nomos*, one that suggests that Xerxes was not making an idle observation in the context of fifth-century intellectual culture.

Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen* attempts to justify the dubious actions of his subject by charting the force of several potential motivations. While justifying the power of erotic feeling to override reason, Gorgias sketches a theory of sight and aesthetics that is relevant to this discussion.[19]

> For the things we see do not have the nature that we want [them to have], but the nature that each one has happened to have (ἃ γὰρ ὁρῶμεν, ἔχει φύσιν οὐχ ἣν ἡμεῖς θέλομεν, ἀλλ' ἣν ἕκαστον ἔτυχε). And through sight the soul is formed even in its habits. For as soon as hostile bodies arm themselves against opponents with hostile equipment made of bronze and iron, the former for defence, the latter for attack, if sight sees them, it gets upset and it upsets the soul, so that they often flee stupefied, as if the imminent danger were already there. For strong though it is, the habit of *nomos* is driven away by the fear of sight, which upon arrival makes one neglect both what is judged fine by *nomos* and whatever nobility comes about through victory. And immediately upon seeing fearful things they depart from their present confidence in the present circumstances. (DK 82 B 11.15–17)

On Gorgias' analysis, the power of sight is such that the *physis* of objects attacks the passive viewer – illustrated here appropriately by the analogy of a group of hoplites standing opposite one another in battle formation. The *physis* of the enemy as revealed by their psychic image overrides acculturated behaviors and ethical norms.[20] In this case, it results in the disturbance of the closely held directive (*nomos*) of displaying courage and valor and remaining in battle. Aesthetic response has the terrifying potential to drive out rational and non-emotional behavior and to manifest itself in action – retreat – on the battlefield.

For Gorgias, or at least for his Helen, *physis* overpowers *nomos*. Xerxes offers an account that differs from this in important respects. He implicitly challenges Demaratus on Greek *nomos* with his own reference to Persia's *tropos*, "custom," of monarchy, which he affirms is alone responsible for battle order against a numerically superior enemy. In contrast to the *Encomium*, *physis* can be overcome in battle by fear of the ruler. Xerxes interprets human nature as feeble and, by extension, as an object of

[19] Cf. Sappho F 16 Lobel-Page. [20] For this passage, Segal (1962), 107–8, 124–5, is excellent.

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imperial mastery.[21] Xerxes' own representation as a transhumanist spectacle supports the ruler's analysis of his ability to amplify the nature of his men: he is regularly described as transcending the category of the human. In an observation made by an anonymous Greek while seeing Xerxes cross the Hellespont, he is identified as Zeus (7.56.2); similarly, the Macedonian ruler, Alexander, explains to the Athenians that they must capitulate to the king after Salamis because of the superhuman force of Xerxes: "Truly, the power of the King is something beyond that of man, ὑπὲρ ἄνθρωπον (*hyper anthropon*), and his arm is long" (8.140.β2). His position as a spectacle supports the ruler's analysis of his ability to amplify the nature of his men. Again, Xerxes' speech sounds suspiciously similar to the earlier narratorial endorsement of the strategy of improving upon man's constitution and defeating superior numerical forces in battle during the Carian revolt through compulsion (ἀναγκαζόμενοι).[22]

Reading the overall message of the dialogue as an endorsement of *nomos*, however, rides on the response of Demaratus that follows. The exiled Spartan king reacts to Xerxes' disbelief that a man would fight against superior numbers without compulsion by affirming that he or any Spartan would go into battle in such circumstances if compelled by some necessity. He continues:

> ἐλεύθεροι γὰρ ἐόντες οὐ πάντα ἐλεύθεροί εἰσι· ἔπεστι γάρ σφι δεσπότης νόμος, τὸν ὑπερδειμαίνουσι πολλῷ ἔτι μᾶλλον ἢ οἱ σοὶ σέ. ποιεῦσι γῶν τὰ ἂν ἐκεῖνος ἀνώγῃ· ἀνώγει δὲ τὠυτὸ αἰεί, οὐκ ἐῶν φεύγειν οὐδὲν πλῆθος ἀνθρώπων ἐκ μάχης, ἀλλὰ μένοντας ἐν τῇ τάξι ἐπικρατέειν ἢ ἀπόλλυσθαι. (7.104.4–5)
>
> For although they are free, they are not free in every way; for a despotic *nomos* is set over them, which they fear even more than your men fear you. At any rate, they do whatever it commands. It always commands the same thing, not allowing them to retreat from battle for any number of men, but by remaining in battle formation, to prevail or be destroyed.

The opposition of Xerxes' appeal to a superior *physis* as leading to victory, on the one hand, and Demaratus' to the Spartan *nomos* of remaining in battle, on the other, has suggested to some that Herodotus is engaging in the famous *nomos-physis* debate. As noted above, he is often interpreted as

[21] A Homeric strategy as well, as we see from Nestor, 4.299–300: κακοὺς δ᾽ ἐς μέσσον ἔλασσεν | ὄφρα καὶ οὐκ ἐθέλων τις ἀναγκαίῃ πολεμίζοι. ("He thrust the cowards into the middle so that, even unwilling, one would fight by compulsion.")

[22] Baragwanath (2008), 109, draws attention to the rationality of Xerxes' prediction.

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weighing in on the side of the former; according to Thomas, "he is making a stand for *nomos*."[23] Yet, this reading of the speeches neglects correspondences in the exchange between the Persian monarch and the exiled Spartan one.

Demaratus' response closely aligns with the sentiments expressed by Xerxes, with a shared stress on compulsion and objectification.[24] He implicitly accepts the limits placed on human nature that are raised by Xerxes. He counteracts these limits, however, with Spartan custom, which he presents as a force of even greater compulsion than the institution of Persian monarchy. For Demaratus, it is *nomos* that masters human nature. In parallel with Xerxes' configuration of this power dynamic, it does so by rejecting autonomy. Like Persia, Sparta is not free on the battlefield. Their custom acts as a despot that is "set over" (ἔπεστι) them. Fear too has significance on the battlefield for Sparta; the ὑπερ in ὑπερδειμαίνω (*hyperdemaino*), accepting Wilson's reading, ratchets up Sparta's dread in a rhetorical outbidding of Xerxes' δειμαίνω.[25] The whip that might thrust Persians into action against a superior force finds an analog in the Spartan *nomos* of conquering or dying in battle formation, where retreat is not an option. Far from setting up a *nomos-physis* antithesis, this characterization reveals the similarity of Spartan and Persian strategies of success in warfare. For both speakers, compulsion and fear motivate exceptional valor. According to Xerxes, it inspires men to go beyond themselves. Demaratus does not disagree; his revision is simply in the fear-inducing agent – Xerxes had identified this with his own person or with one-man rule, Demaratus with despotic *nomos*.

[23] Thomas (2000), 125; Provencal (2015), 53–6, echoes this; Hunter (1982), 266, is similarly optimistic. Millender (2002a) is instructive in that she otherwise finds the *Histories* critical of the Spartan dyarchy, portrayed as the perversion of Athenian democratic policies but in this debate sees the focus shift to a Greek/Persian, good/bad polarity, and that it, 29, "portrays the Spartans as representative of Hellas. Sparta functions as the champion of Greek freedom most explicitly in Herodotus' account of the dialogue between the Persian king Xerxes and the exiled Spartan dyarch Demaratus after the Persians' crossing of the Hellespont."

[24] *Pace* Forsdyke (2001), *passim*, who sees this as an opposition between tyranny and freedom, Persia and Athens. Millender (2002b) and more recently Balot (2014), have both argued against an encomiastic reading of this passage and instead claim that the Spartan system, reliant as it is upon compulsion and fear as the engineer of courage, is subtly critiqued. Spartan courage is questioned by, e.g., Themistocles, who bids the Spartans to stand their ground and be brave, 8.62.1. Forsdyke (2001), Millender (2002b), and Balot (2014) brand this as "Athenian" courage and superior to that of the Spartans.

[25] Van Herwerden adopts the manuscript reading, ὑποδειμαίνω, which is not found elsewhere in the *Histories*, but, loc. cit., he questions "a τὸν ὑπερδειμαίνουσι?" and rightly points to the latter's presence at 5.19.1, where it is used of the Macedonian ruler Amyntas' fear of the Persians. N.b. Democritus' ethical theory reacts negatively to fear as a motivator, cf. DK 68 B 174; B 215.

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The correspondences between these examples are reinforced by a discussion of citizen bravery from the fourth century BCE. In Aristotle's treatment of courage in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he aligns the motivation of fear with compulsion and an inferior variety of bravery on the battlefield (1116a). Generals compel such men to second-rate courageous action, and the examples given are of men marshaled before a ditch or some such obstacle and those beaten by their commanders for moving backwards (1116a–b). Courage, Aristotle declares, cannot be based on compulsion but on nobility. This configuration of military bravery throws into relief the ethical conclusions that could, at least by the fourth century, be drawn from involuntary military action. In the *Histories*, surpassing human nature inspires involuntary courage.

Rather than interpreting this debate as a dialogue on Spartan *nomos* and Persian *physis*, it turns out to concentrate on a different set of preoccupations.[26] Both speakers suggest their respective armies will have fear instilled in them, one by the *nomos* of despotism, the other by the despotism of *nomos*. *Nomos* and *physis* are opposed but only insofar as the force of *nomos* is said to compel the transcendence of *physis* among Persians and Greeks. Demaratus is thus not "right" and Xerxes "wrong." The dialogue encourages a test of the relationship between word and deed. It also establishes an expectation that surpassing *physis* will play a key causal role in the Greco-Persian Wars, but, as we shall see, Xerxes and Demaratus' assertions are undermined by the historical action.

Demaratus' declaration *is* supported by looking immediately ahead to the Spartan stand at Thermopylae.[27] Yet, if we move back in time to Herodotus' first introduction of Demaratus, this statement rings rather oddly coming as it does from a Spartan king who is responsible for the revision of *nomos* in Sparta for abandoning his place in battle.[28] In Book 5, during the allied Peloponnesian campaign against Athens, Sparta and its allies from the Peloponnese marched to battle in western Attica at Eleusis.

[26] *Pace* Thomas (2000), 111, "Certainly *nomos* and an all embracing influence on the whole polis (society) are here given the clinching argument and analysis which are eventually born out by events."

[27] With Scardino (2007), 203–4. For its being specifically related to Sparta, Bowie *Introduction*, 7.

[28] One way to account for this might be to find that Demaratus' character is a disjointed one. For this interpretation and *Quellenforschung*, see Jacoby (1913), 392–5. Millender (2002b), 35–6, draws attention to the irony of the fact that he is a *deposed* king giving a speech on legality, and states, 35, "The *topos* of illegality structures the Demaratus *logos* from beginning to end." She does not note the passage in Book 5, though it supports her argument; she focuses on the circumstances of his dubious birth, the absence of law-abiding Spartans in the context of his exile, and the *topos* of Spartan susceptibility to corruption.

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They intended to fight a pitched battle to install Isagoras as tyrant of Athens (5.74.1). Demaratus is introduced as co-ruler with Cleomenes – who will later contrive his exile (6.61–7) – and as having led out his army in concert with Cleomenes. Up to this point, the Corinthians have acted as the allies of Sparta; however, here they ultimately decide against supporting the assault on Attica and disband their forces. Abruptly, Demaratus too abandons the campaign, "although not at a variance with Cleomenes until then" (5.75.1). This leads to a break in protocol. Up to this point, both kings had gone on campaign together as allies; but as a result of this event, the *nomos* mandating that both kings be present on campaign is changed: "It was as a result of this break between the two kings that the rule was established at Sparta that when the army went on campaign both kings were not allowed to go with it at the same time. For before this they both followed" (5.75.2). Read against this background, Demaratus' professed rigidity in observing Spartan *nomos* on standing in battle sounds rather odd.[29] Placing the former king's speech in its context in Spartan historical action in the narrative complicates the traditional interpretation of the jingoistic superiority of Spartan *nomos*, or, metonymically, for many scholars, Greek *nomos*.[30] This finds corroboration in the famed narratorial intrusion on the critical role of the Athenians in the Greek victory. Had they abandoned the alliance, Herodotus reasons, the Spartans would have been left to stand alone against Persia and either died noble deaths *or* come to terms with Xerxes (7.139.4).[31]

As already observed, Thermopylae stands most obviously in responsion to the Demaratus-Xerxes debate. Sparta's heroic stance against the Persian forces makes Demaratus' words on the despotic *nomos* of standing one's ground a reality. At first, the allied Hellenic force experiences success against the Persians, but if there is a leitmotif on the cause of victory, it is related to *kosmos*, not *physis* or *nomos*: οἱ δὲ Ἕλληνες κατὰ τάξις τε καὶ κατὰ ἔθνεα κεκοσμημένοι ἦσαν, καὶ ἐν μέρεϊ ἕκαστοι ἐμάχοντο (7.212.2: "The Greeks were arrayed by contingent and by nation and each people fought in turn"). Following the discovery of the Persian forces moving around the mountain pass, the Spartan king Leonidas famously dismissed the allies, except the Thebans, his unwilling hostages, and the Thespians,

[29] Anaxandridas too disturbs Spartan *nomos* by keeping two wives, 5.40.2.

[30] This supports an argument of Boedeker (1987), 193, who finds that "the *ambivalence of language* is especially marked in stories which crystallize around Demaratus," and at 194, "in several Demaratus stories, the reliability of speech is brought into question."

[31] The Athenians are said to realize the Spartan penchant for saying one thing and thinking another before Plataea, 9.54.1.

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his most zealous ally. Herodotus explains that he did not want to have the allies leave "in disorder" (7.220.4: ἀκόσμως) after internal division. Initially, the foreigners fall in droves due to the whips of their commanders, which keep the soldiers moving forward unabatedly (7.223.3). This detail, a snapshot of Xerxes' strategy in the dialogue, dramatizes the *nomos* of despotism.[32] As a test case, it fails, and compulsion leads to precisely the opposite of the intended effect – the soldiers are unable to exercise bravery and end up dying en masse. In parallel, Leonidas plays out the role outlined for him by Demaratus in his speech. Knowledge of their imminent deaths pushes Spartan courage to its peak. Faced with extreme numerical inferiority, they are nevertheless able to destroy a number that defies *logos* (7.223.3). The explanatory power for their might is grounded in the geographical and strategic conditions that have pinned them between two hostile forces. Like the Carians, the Spartans have no option of escape. Leonidas has ruled out survival, and Demaratus' projection of the compulsion of standing firm in the face of an enemy does play out as he had predicted.

However, the dialectic between the Demaratus-Xerxes debate and action on the battlefield does not cease here; it continues into the battles of both Salamis and Plataea, confirming the hypothesis that this is a key passage for reflecting on Hellenic victory and success. Just prior to the sea battle at Salamis, Herodotus reports that Themistocles gave the best of the battle orations. He narrates:[33]

> ἠώς τε διέφαινε καὶ οἱ σύλλογον τῶν ἐπιβατέων ποιησάμενοι . . . προηγόρευε εὖ ἔχοντα[34] μὲν ἐκ πάντων Θεμιστοκλέης· τὰ δὲ ἔπεα ἦν πάντα <τὰ> κρέσσω τοῖσι ἥσσοσι ἀντιτιθέμενα, ὅσα δὴ ἐν ἀνθρώπου φύσι καὶ καταστάσι ἐγγίνεται· παραινέσας δὲ τούτων τὰ κρέσσω αἱρέεσθαι καὶ καταπλέξας τὴν ῥῆσιν, ἐσβαίνειν ἐκέλευσε ἐς τὰς νέας. (8.83.1–2)
>
> Dawn was breaking and they made an assembly of the marines . . . out of all, Themistocles was proclaiming splendidly: his words were opposing all of that which is stronger to the weaker, as many things as are innate in the constitution and condition of man. After exhorting them to choose the stronger of these, he concluded his speech and ordered the men to embark on their ships.

[32] Forsdyke (2001), 351–2.

[33] On the rhetorical prowess of Themistocles in general, Baragwanath (2008), 279–322, is essential reading. Cf. too Evans (1991), 24.

[34] I follow Stein's translation ad loc. "Treffliches." Wilson (2015), 162, defines εὖ ἔχοντα as "well balanced" or "coherent"; he interprets Themistocles' speech as "a measured assessment of the pros and cons of giving battle."

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In a valuable article, Vasiliki Zali draws attention to the oddness of the inclusion of this brief, indirect exhortation.[35] Its placement is perfectly primed for a long speech rousing the Greeks to action in the face of innumerable odds, and Herodotus inexplicably misses the opportunity for a rhetorical display piece by Themistocles, architect of the naval victory. How and Wells are typical in their summation, stating that Herodotus, "spares us the well-worn antitheses, victory and defeat, freedom and slavery."[36] According to Zali, narrative gapping invites the reader to supply the material herself and creates a dialogue between the narrator and the implied reader.[37] Filling the gap has relied upon the timeworn *topoi* of battle exhortations: "In all probability, it involved the most common harangue antitheses, such as victory vs. defeat, freedom vs. slavery, bravery/glorious death/honour vs. cowardice/shameful death/disgrace."[38] This finding corresponds well to Thucydides' Nicias, whose speech rousing the trierarchs before the battle at the harbor in Syracuse is in *oratio obliqua*. Nicias' reaction to the situation is put in generic terms as "the sort of thing men experience" (7.69.2: ὅπερ πάσχουσιν) in great danger. Fittingly, his harangue is also boiler plate, as he exhorts the Athenians by saying "what men in such a critical moment would say, not guarding against seeming to someone to recite the old commonplaces" (7.69.2: ὅσα ἐν τῷ τοιούτῳ ἤδη τοῦ καιροῦ ὄντες ἄνθρωποι οὐ πρὸς τὸ δοκεῖν τινὶ ἀρχαιολογεῖν φυλαξάμενοι εἴποιεν ἄν) – with the specification that such commonplaces include referring to wives, children, and the ancestral gods.

However, the early date of the composition of the *Histories* and the vigorous *Nachleben* of pre-battle speeches in ancient historiography should caution against an early exhaustion in the genre, particularly considering the reputation for eloquence that Herodotus enjoyed throughout antiquity. More to the point, the *idées reçues* on the content of the speech have obscured the actual significance of the language used to describe it. Themistocles is said to have opposed the stronger to the weaker;

[35] Zali (2013), also found in (2015), 81–3, 252–3. Scardino (2007), 265–6 n. 506, states that its summary form is to hasten the narrative momentum toward the battle.

[36] How-Wells 8.83. Cf. the exhortation heard by the Persians, Aes. *Pers.* 401–5: ὦ παῖδες Ἑλλήνων ἴτε | ἐλευθεροῦτε πατρίδ', ἐλευθεροῦτε δὲ | παῖδας, γυναῖκας, θεῶν τέ πατρῴων ἕδη | θήκας τε προγόνων: νῦν ὑπὲρ πάντων ἀγών ("Children of the Greeks, advance! Free the fatherland, free your children, wives, the seats of the ancestral gods and the tombs of your ancestors! Now the struggle is on behalf of all!"). For the sentiment, see Immerwahr (1966), 282 n. 127.

[37] See Zali (2013), 471 n. 34, with bibliography on the *topos* of the dialogic Herodotean narrative.

[38] Zali (2013), 470. For a similar assessment, see Stein 8.83.5; and Macan 8.83. Alternatively, Thomas (2000), 266, nicely suggests a connection between Themistocles' speech and Protagoras' philosophy of making the weaker argument stronger.

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specifically, those things that are inborn stronger and weaker in the *physis* and *katastasis* of man. He advises the hoplites to choose the stronger of these and concludes with an order to board.[39] The substance of the exhortation then is the nature of man, his strengths and weaknesses. This language rules out the possibility that this was an opposition between, for example, victory and defeat, or freedom and slavery. These are not referents for either *physis* or *katastasis*.[40] Instead, Themistocles spurs the hoplite soldiers to choose the "strong" within their own natures.

Particularly interesting is the collocation φύσι καὶ καταστάσι – as striking as it is rare.[41] Prior to the Hellenistic period, the two are seldom used in conjunction. In addition to the *Histories*, only Hippocratic and philosophical treatises, tellingly, connect the terms.[42] *Airs, Waters, Places* describes the deficiencies of the climate of Scythia as leading to the flabbiness of the bodies of their men, which cannot dry and become firm "in such a land, with their *physis* and climate" (19: ἐν τοιαύτῃ χώρῃ καὶ φύσει καὶ ὥρης καταστάσει). The treatise differentiates between human *physis* and the condition of the seasons in order to make a larger point on the necessity of bearing in mind the human constitution, geological conditions, and climatological considerations as a doctor. Closer to the language in the speech of Themistocles is Herodotus' near contemporary, Democritus.[43] In a surviving fragment, the philosopher from Abdera meditates on the acquisition of children: "people suppose that having children is one of the necessities from *physis* and from some ancient condition" (DK 68 B 278: ἀνθρώποισι τῶν ἀναγκαίων δοκεῖ εἶναι παῖδας κτήσασθαι ἀπὸ φύσιος καὶ καταστάσιός τινος ἀρχαίης).[44] Democritus' collocation rationalizes the human drive to produce children as a product of *physis* and *katastasis*, the internal and instinctive drives

[39] Cf. 6.109.2, where Miltiades persuades Callimachus to stay and avoid the "weaker" plan of retreat.

[40] Nor is *nomos*, *pace* Evans (1991), 24, "Thus, though men might not alter their *physis*, within the limits it set, they could make choices, and their *nomoi* were based on a choice, or a series of choices that they or their ancestors had made."

[41] Powell, s.v. κατάστασις, which he identifies as meaning "nature" twice; here and at 2.173 in the context of Amasis' understanding of the human constitution as being like that of a bow, needing both rest and exercise alike.

[42] The collocation is found in Pl. *Resp*. 497b1, 547b5; *Phlb*. 42d4; and the Hippocratic *de Morb*. 3.15.19.

[43] The fragment is noted at Evans (1991), 24, *en passant*; he then concludes unpersuasively, "What Themistocles wanted his men to choose was the quality that would drive them forward into battle, and that quality might be expressed as *nomos*." Without the language of *nomos* it is hasty to assume its presence, but this illustrates the lengths scholars go to get Demaratus' speech to apply following his dialogue with Xerxes.

[44] Humphreys (1987), 219, notes the similarities between Democritus and Herodotus in terms of their organization of data through sequence and connection.

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within man. He goes on to argue that these drives are analogously present in the animal kingdom. The philosopher's use of the terms in the context of man points to the unique inflection of this language in Themistocles' speech and tells against the interpretation that these terms stand in for *topoi* common to the battle exhortation. Their association with the milieu of the Presocratic intellectual should not be discounted.

Surpassing *physis* is a concern among Presocratic thinkers and does not refer to hackneyed oppositions typical of exhortations before battle. In Palamedes' defense speech in the eponymous treatise by Gorgias, the hero exonerated himself from the suspicion that he might have been motivated to commit treason to enrich himself by appealing to his self-mastery:

> For those spending a great deal need an abundance of wealth, not those stronger than the pleasures of *physis* (οὐχ οἱ κρείττονες τῶν τῆς φύσεως ἡδονῶν), but those enslaved by pleasures and seeking to acquire honours from riches and magnificence. (DK 82 B 11.15)

Here, *physis* takes on an appetitive quality familiar from Thucydides, and Palamedes reveals the negative elements associated with *physis* – its acquisitive tendencies. In contrast to the many who attempt to gain honor, Palamedes is free from this psychological enslavement.[45]

A fragment of Democritus warns against man's exceeding his *physis*:[46]

> The cheerful individual must not undertake many things, not in a private capacity or public one, and in what he does undertake he should not choose to do what is beyond his power and his *physis* (ὑπέρ τε δύναμιν αἱρεῖσθαι τὴν ἑωυτοῦ καὶ φύσιν). (DK 68 B 3)

Viewing the self as an obstacle to be overcome is not uncommon. It is frequently found in Plato, who turns to the ethical implications of rising above oneself by interiorizing the battle. In the *Republic*'s discussion of soundness of mind as a kind of order, Socrates refers to "mastery over certain pleasures and desires, as they say that someone is stronger than himself" (430e: καὶ ἡδονῶν τινων καὶ ἐπιθυμιῶν ἐγκράτεια, ὥς φασι κρείττω δὴ αὑτοῦ). He draws out the oddity of the expression κρείττω

[45] Similar is Thucydides at 1.76.3.

[46] The text is accepted as authentic by D-K; however, Laks-Most D 228 print this in italics, an admission that Democritus' fragments can be extremely difficult to distinguish from the rich tradition of pseudepigraphy that collected under his name. It is tempting to see this, in line with the association of surpassing *physis* with emotional disturbance, as a breach of the aesthetic disposition of the "cheerful" individual. For Democritus, human *physis* is in fact weaker than fortune, but its stability gives it greater strength, e.g., DK 68 B 176.

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αὑτοῦ, which implies that the same individual can be both superior and inferior to himself. This is explained as follows:

> "But," I said, "this phrase seems to me to want to say that something better and something worse in man himself exists as concerns his soul, and whenever that which is better by nature (τὸ βέλτιον φύσει) is in control of the worse element, that this communicates 'better than himself' (τὸ κρείττω αὑτοῦ), at any rate, it is praise. And when the better (being smaller) is ruled by the quantity of the worse – by poor upbringing or some association – this is to find fault with as an insult and to call someone 'worse than himself' (ἥττω ἑαυτοῦ) and as one depraved." (431a)

The paradoxical suitability of the phrase "greater than oneself" gives Socrates the opportunity to refer to the subdivision of the soul. Man's struggle for power between better and worse elements, with the triumph of the former, is carefully connected to Socrates' conception of the stable workings of the soul. The superior element within it is a regular constituent (φύσει). Socrates expands the application of the phrase from the individual to Kallipolis, assuring his interlocutors that the worse elements within the citizenry will be ruled by the select minority who are "best in their nature" (431c: βέλτιστα μὲν φῦσιν) or in education. The connection made between becoming "greater than oneself" and *physis* in Plato supports reading the phrase as commenting on human nature.[47] Like the *Republic*, the *Laws* highlights the presence of a superior and inferior within man, "each one of us is greater than himself and worse than himself" (626e–7a: εἷς ἕκαστος ἡμῶν ὁ μὲν κρείττων αὑτοῦ, ὁ δὲ ἥττων ἐστί).[48] Cleinias declares that there is a war within the human, in which victory over the self is the greatest victory and defeat of the self the worst possible outcome (626e). While the term φύσις is not present in this passage, this discourse draws on the same conception of the internal constitution of man as a site of contestation, a sphere for conquest or defeat.

Themistocles' speech too opposes the strong in man to its opposite, the weak, stressing the presence of both elements in the constitution and condition of man. The reference is strengthened by the use of ἀντιτιθέμενα (*antitithemena*), the verbal term for "making an antilogy," an argumentative strategy famously associated with Protagoras.[49]

[47] The passage is discussed in connection to the doubled *physis* of man at Plut. *De virt. mor.* 450d–e. The connection between being "greater than oneself" and *physis* is also explicit at Isoc. *Antid.* 191.

[48] Pl. *Leg.* 626e–7d, for a discussion on self-mastery.

[49] On the better and worse arguments, see Ar. *Nub.* 882–4: ὅπως δ' ἐκείνω τὼ λόγω μαθήσεται | τὸν κρείττον', ὅστις ἐστί, καὶ τὸν ἥττονα | ὃς τἄδικα λέγων ἀνατρέπει τὸν κρείττονα. ("See to it that he learns those two *logoi*, the stronger, whatever that is, and the weaker, which overturns the stronger by speaking what is contrary to justice.") Aristotle echoes this at *Rhet.* 1402a24 = DK 80 A 21,

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Themistocles, then, suggests that one may select the stronger impulse within nature and, in doing so, go beyond the normal workings of *physis*, in which these elements commingle. Themistocles thus inscribes within his exhortation the terms that Xerxes and Demaratus had – he endeavors to better the constitution of the Greeks – but does so in a way that de-emphasizes external compulsion and instead draws attention to the individual capacity to choose (αἱρέεσθαι) betterment, in a manner evocative of Plato's Socrates. This de-emphasis of external compulsion is, however, tempered by his speech to Aristides, just prior to his battle speech. Aristides had reported to Themistocles that the Greek navy was encircled by the Persians, a fact that Themistocles then took credit for as a necessary stratagem to get the disunited Greek forces to fight at Salamis. He explains, "for it was necessary when the Greeks were not willing to begin, to bring them over even unwilling" (8.80.1: ἔδεε γάρ, ὅτε οὐκ ἑκόντες ἤθελον ἐς μάχην κατίστασθαι οἱ Ἕλληνες, ἀέκοντας παραστήσασθαι). So, though reported in indirect speech and only in brief, the substance of this oration returns to a key debate staged within the *Histories*, namely, valor's relationship to *physis*. Themistocles couches this in the language of the weak versus the strong within the individual and sets the first clash within man, as Gorgias, Democritus, and Plato do, and only after this in relation to the war between the Greeks and Persians. Of course, he has stage-managed the clash from the beginning, compelling the Greeks to fight as Xerxes did with the allied Persian forces.

Yet the narrative of the battle itself plays out unexpectedly. Paradoxically, it is the Persians who are singled out as becoming "braver than themselves," rather than the Greek forces Themistocles has just addressed, or the Spartans, as Demaratus implied: καίτοι ἦσάν γε <ἄνδρες ἀγαθοὶ> καὶ ἐγένοντο ταύτην τὴν ἡμέρην μακρῷ ἀμείνονες αὐτοὶ ἑωυτῶν ἢ πρὸς Εὐβοίῃ, πᾶς τις προθυμεόμενος καὶ δειμαίνων Ξέρξην, ἐδόκεέ τε ἕκαστος ἑωυτὸν θεήσεσθαι βασιλέα (8.86).[50] Fear is

where he reports of Protagoras' method, καὶ τὸ τὸν ἥττω δὲ λόγον κρείττω ποιεῖν τοῦτ' ἔστιν. Provencal (2015), 39, rightly sees Themistocles as "practiced in the Protagorean art of antilogic" and cites this passage but does not observe its connection to the tradition that states that Protagoras opposed the "better" and "worse" arguments, instead noting simply that: "His argument thus makes rhetorical use of the Protagorean art of constructing two sides to every argument"; in fact, Protagoras' tendency to oppose better and worse is being alluded to by Themistocles.

[50] "And yet they were and they became noble men on that day, far better than themselves – or than at Euboea – everyone showing himself eager and fearing Xerxes, each seeming to think that the king himself was watching." For translation of this passage, Stein ad. loc., compares it with 2.25.5: αὐτὸς ἑωυτοῦ ῥέει πολλῷ ὑποδεέστερος ἢ τοῦ θέρεος; I follow more closely Macan 8.86, who holds that Hdt. is compressing two thoughts into a single sentence.

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highlighted, (δειμαίνων) and its effectiveness is confirmed by the fact that the Persian navy is ἀμείνονες ἑωυτῶν, language that readily evokes Xerxes' words, γενοίατ' ἂν δειμαίνοντες τοῦτον καὶ παρὰ τὴν ἑωυτῶν φύσιν ἀμείνονες. Salamis showcases the success of Xerxes' stratagem – his fleet does appear to display a superior valor under the gaze of its despot.[51] This is an endorsement of the sentiments expressed by Xerxes to Demaratus – the *nomos* of despotism affects *physis* in battle. The Persian navy's ignominious defeat at Artemisium may well be partly attributed to the absence of its leader overseeing the event, as Xerxes himself concludes (8.69).

Yet the triumph over nature compelled by *nomos* through the gaze of the despot is highly qualified. It is immediately preceded by the aetiology of Greek victory: Herodotus narrates that this was accomplished by fighting just as the allied Greeks had at Thermopylae, with *kosmos*,[52] "in an orderly arrangement," and *kata taxin*, in the "order of battle," and he contrasts this with the invaders who were not drawn up in battle order nor acting with "intention," *nous*.[53] The denouement of the battle illustrates the limits of transhumanism as a causal factor and ultimately validates other elements as explaining success. Certainly, Greece and Persia diverge, but their opposition is not one of Greek *nomos* versus Persian *physis*. There is greater nuance, pitting *kosmos* and intention over the *nomos* of monarchy and an army momentarily superior to itself.[54]

Chris Pelling has convincingly shown that *kosmos* is a "keyword" in the Plataea narrative.[55] Salamis has perhaps set up the expectation of an "orderly arrangement" on the Greek defensive, but this is partially deflated through the allied forces' continued quarrelling and indecision.[56] On the other side of the battle lines, Mardonius is amazed by the Lacedaemonians' lack of order. Although he has arrayed the Persian troops against the Spartans – forces explicitly said to be by far superior in number (9.31.2), in a return to Xerxes' claim – they exchange positions with the Athenians. Later, the Spartans retreat from the battlefield with the rest of the Greek

[51] With Bowie *Introduction*, 7, "the improved Persian performance under Xerxes' gaze at Salamis supports his argument." *Pace* Immerwahr (1966), 282, "Seated on the shore with a full view of the participants, he expects his troops to fight much better at Salamis than at Artemisium . . .. But his supervision is futile."

[52] Bowie 8.86, "Aesch. *Pers*. 399–400, also stresses the order of the Greeks."

[53] As predicted by Themistocles, 8.60.γ. Macan 9.59: "κόσμος is the general expression or the whole result of νοῦς: τάξις is the particular position in the battle-array, cf. 8.86." Cf. Anaxagoras, who ties *nous* to resulting *kosmos* and *taxis*, DK 59 A 58.

[54] Provencal (2015), 179–85, unpersuasively reads a polar opposition between Greeks and Persians, with the prior embodying the principle of *nomos basileus* and the former the acquisitive *nomos physeos* throughout the text.

[55] Pelling (2019), 171. [56] Pelling (2019), 171, 183–4.

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forces, an act that compels Mardonius to cross the Asopus and assume the weaker position to launch his attack.[57] When he finally leads the Persians against their enemies, his foreign armaments break into a run to follow them into battle "drawn up in battle formation without an orderly arrangement or battle line" (9.59.2: οὔτε κόσμῳ οὐδενὶ κοσμηθέντες οὔτε τάξι). In contempt of the Spartans, the Persian force rushes into action and finds itself entirely unprepared for hoplite warfare. In particular, they are hampered by inferior gear.[58] The *Histories* tells against assertions to the contrary and states that the Persians possessed equal courage and strength, even if they were poorly armed and lacking in cunning (9.62.3: λήματι μέν νυν καὶ ῥώμῃ οὐκ ἥσσονες ἦσαν οἱ Πέρσαι, ἄνοπλοι δὲ ἐόντες καὶ πρὸς ἀνεπιστήμονες ἦσαν καὶ οὐκ ὅμοιοι τοῖσι ἐναντίοισι σοφίην).[59] Greek victory is attributed to Persian weaponry and disorganization, not to exceptionalism in Hellenic *nomos* or *physis*.

The retreat of the Persians is likewise described as confused: "The Persians . . . fled utterly disordered to their own camp" (9.65.1: ἔφευγον οὐδένα κόσμον).[60] The general Artabazus, after seeing the Persian forces withdrawing, deserts the battle "without the same order" (9.66.3: οὕτω δὴ οὐκέτι τὸν αὐτὸν κόσμον κατηγέετο).[61] To drive the point home further, Herodotus inverts the paradigm by describing the movements of the Hellenic center after the victory of the Greeks at Plataea. The right center flank has taken up its position at the Heraion, and following the news of

[57] For Mardonius' disastrously incorrect assessment of the scenario, Flower-Marincola ad 9.48–49.1.

[58] This argument is valid even though these are the Persian *allies*. It remains that *physis* is demoted and *kosmos* elevated. The passage at 9.65 continues the *topos* of Persia's lack of order. See Bowie *Introduction*, 7.

[59] "Now the Persians were in no way inferior in courage or strength, but they were not well armed and in addition not properly trained and not equal in cunning to those who they opposed." For Persia's fatal lack of order during the retreat after Salamis, 8.117.2. The importance of *kosmos* as a rhetorical strategy in addition to a military one is evident at the assembly during which the Spartans reproach the Athenians for a putative treaty with the Persians on the grounds that it is, "in no way just nor orderly" (8.142.2: οὔτε γὰρ δίκαιον οὐδαμῶς οὔτε κόσμον). Plut. *Malice* 873f–874a, finds fault with the fact that the Spartans are not victorious because of their superior bravery but because of the dress of the Persians and observes that Herodotus awards the Persians in Plataea a competence they did not possess at Thermopylae. Flower-Marincola ad 9.62.3 must also be right in thinking that the glorification of the opponent leads to greater prestige for the victor.

[60] Cf. the attitude of the Persians and their allies after the capture of the palisade by the Lacedaemonians and Athenians, 9.70.4: οὐδὲν ἔτι στῖφος ἐποιήσαντο. This contrasts with Amompharetus' orderly retreat at 9.57.1.

[61] Redfield (1985), 116, in a standard interpretation of the battle of Plataea, offers: "The Greeks thus displayed the danger and also the power of their characteristic *nomos*. They are sometimes bad subordinates because each thinks himself entitled to his own ideas; they are not loyal to an overlord, but to an idea. But since each has made this idea his own, each is ready to die for it; they do not require an overlord to keep them in the ranks."

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the Greek victory, their exhilaration leads to a disastrous lack of order, οἱ δὲ ἀκούσαντες ταῦτα, οὐδένα κόσμον ταχθέντες (9.69.1: "those who heard this were drawn up in no order"). This is spied by the Theban cavalry fighting in support of Persia (9.69.2: ἀπιδόντές σφεας οἱ Θηβαίων ἱππόται ἐπειγομένους οὐδένα κόσμον) and leads to the annihilation of the Greeks, who Herodotus concludes are destroyed "without any reason."[62]

In the conversation between Xerxes and Demaratus that prepares for the battles of Thermopylae, Salamis, and Plataea, Herodotus raises an expectation that overriding the limits of *physis* will play a key role in the unfolding of events. By surveying the potential of *physis* to act as a cause of success and defeat, the narrator taps into a prevalent strand of interpretation for the Hellenic victory over the Persians, as is clear from *Airs, Waters, Places*. In Salamis, the success of the Greeks is attributed to *kosmos*. At the battle of Plataea, it is the absence of *kosmos* among the Persians that contributes to their defeat.

Kosmos and related terms appear regularly in Homeric epic. There, they signal appropriate speech, ornamentation, and regulated action on the battlefield. This latter category is noteworthy for contextualizing Herodotus' integration of *kosmos*-language in the narration of the Greco-Persian Wars. In the *Iliad*, the sons of Atreus are "marshallers of armies" (1.16, 1.375); the rulers of the Greek forces at Troy "array" their soldiers to enter battle with the skill of goatherds who separate out their combined flocks (2.475–7); warriors order their charioteers to maintain "good order" (11.48, 12.85). When leaders are fallen or absent, such as Protesilaus and Philoctetes, others quickly take their places to arrange the soldiers (2.703–7, 2.726–7). Even when wounded, kings including Ajax, Odysseus, and Agamemnon supervise the organization of their warriors for battle (14.379–80). Alternatively, the absence of what is *kosmos* forbodes defeat and destruction. For example, Polydamas advises Hector against attacking the Achaean ships after seeing a portent, since it foreshadows a Trojan retreat from the ships "without order" and with many of their own left behind (12.225). And before Hector's death, Zeus laments how the Trojan despoiled Achilles' armor from the body of Patroclus "contrary to order" (17.205). In her work on the *kosmos*-polis analogy, Carol Atack has highlighted the intentionality of *kosmos*, as an order brought about by the effort of an individual ruler.[63] Applying this insight to the *Histories* suggests that by activating the *kosmos* motif at

[62] N.b. at Hdt. 3.13.1 the defeated Egyptians flee the Persians without *kosmos*, with negative results.
[63] Atack (2019), 170.

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Thermopylae, Salamis, and Plataea, Herodotus relies upon the portrait of the Homeric warrior-ruler who both maintains order and brings victory on the battlefield.

Physis and the Stronger

A question, then, remains: why does the *Histories* invest in priming the reader for the importance of an enhanced *physis* only to eclipse it in the end? The answer to this question will take us beyond Plataea, into postwar success narratives. Hellenic victory in the Greco-Persian Wars spawned various impassioned explanations of the triumph. One of the most influential theses explained Greek victory by pointing to the superior European *physis*. As noted in Chapter 4, *Airs, Waters, Places* takes a position of soft biological determinism regarding European and Asian habitats, which naturalizes victory and defeat. Reading Hellenic victory in terms of *physis* holds that the Hellenic constitution is harder, braver, stronger, and renders comprehensible its domination of inferior *physeis*. Freedom is achieved, according to this model, due to the particularly doughty *physis* of the Europeans and slavery from the weak Asiatic one. This naturalization of domination and subjection in terms of *physis* became a commonplace – though a contested one – during the fifth and fourth centuries. If it is *physis* that the strong rule the weak, and the *physis* of the Hellenes is by nature heartier and braver than that of their opponents, then the Greek victory against Persia becomes all but preordained. This gestures to a debate on empire much discussed among philosophers on the right of the stronger to rule, a philosophy underwritten by an appeal to *physis*.

Democritus, for example, affirmed that "by *physis* ruling is natural for the stronger" (DK 68 B 267: φύσει τὸ ἄρχειν οἰκήιον τῷ κρέσσονι).[64] Thucydides too includes a theory of natural domination by which the Athenians argue that they possess a mandate to act upon their impulses to acquire more due to their power, while inferior states have a similar mandate to accept their enslavement.[65] Of course, it is Plato's *Gorgias* that

[64] Potentially to be read in connection with DK 68 B 34.

[65] Thucydides exhibits a pessimistic take on *physis* and its drive for more: see 1.76.3; 5.89; 5.91.2; 5.105.1–3. For this, Hunter (1982), 266–7, remains influential. The Athenians are not the only supporters of *physis* as the *sine qua non* of success: the Corinthians speaking at a war assembly just prior to the Peloponnesian War maintain that the League's bravery would enable them to survive, which they possessed by *physis*, something that could not be acquired by the Athenians by instruction, Th. 1.121 and Chapter 5 n. 15. For superior human *physis* in battle and the dangers associated with praising it, see Th. 2.35.2.

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offers the most famous enunciation of this principle, through the mouthpiece of the young sophistic orator, Callicles.

> I suppose that nature itself proclaims it, that it is just that the better have more than the worse and the stronger more than the weaker. Nature shows that these things are so in many places, both among the other animals and all the cities and races of men, that justice has been judged in this way, that the stronger rule the weaker and have more (ὅτι οὕτω τὸ δίκαιον κέκριται, τὸν κρείττω τοῦ ἥττονος ἄρχειν καὶ πλέον ἔχειν). Since it was on which notion of justice that Xerxes campaigned against Greece and his father against the Scythians? But one could adduce thousands of similar cases. But I believe that these people act according to the *physis* of justice, and, yes by Zeus, even according to the *nomos* of *physis*, but perhaps not according to that *nomos* that we legislate. By moulding the best and strongest among ourselves, taking them from their youth, as we do with lions, enchanting and bewitching them we turn them into slaves, by telling them that they must have equality and that this is both good and just. (483d–4a)

In this response to Socrates, Callicles asserts the primacy of the "law of nature," whereby the strong rule the weak. As he continues, he expands on this to endorse a philosophy whereby the stronger *physis* rules over the weaker one, which is precisely the phenomenon that is found in *Airs, Waters, Places* and in the *Histories*:

> I suppose that if there were a man who had a sufficient *physis* (φύσιν ἱκανὴν), upon shaking off all these things and breaking through and escaping, after having trodden underfoot our written rules, magic spells, chants, and all our *nomoi* that are against *physis* (καὶ νόμους τοὺς παρὰ φύσιν ἅπαντας), that slave would rise up and show himself to be our master, and therein the justice of *physis* would blaze forth (ἐπαναστὰς ἀνεφάνη δεσπότης ἡμέτερος ὁ δοῦλος, καὶ ἐνταῦθα ἐξέλαμψεν τὸ τῆς φύσεως δίκαιον). (484a–b)

Callicles blurs the distinction between *physis* as the law of nature that prescribes the stronger rule the weaker and the principle that a stronger *physis* should rule the weaker. The scenario is one that was clearly current in the fifth century, as the *Anonymous Iamblichi* attempts to rebut a similar argument by stating that even if an individual were to emerge with a transcendent *physis*, invulnerable, unaffected by disease, without emotion, enormous, with an adamantine body and soul (6.2: εἰ μὲν δὴ γένοιτό τις ἐξ ἀρχῆς φύσιν τοιάνδε ἔχων, ἄτρωτος τὸν χρῶτα ἄνοσός τε καὶ ἀπαθὴς καὶ ὑπερφυὴς καὶ ἀδαμάντινος τό τε σῶμα καὶ τὴν ψυχήν), to whom it might be considered fitting to rule for gain, still, the author argues, he would not survive unless he allied himself to the people's *nomoi*.

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In his address to Socrates, Callicles unpacks a thesis of inverted moralism, with the assertion that what is just (τὸ δίκαιον) exists by nature (φύσει) but that its justice contradicts the mandates of *nomos*.[66] Notably, the historical exempla deployed in order to justify this position are invasions perpetrated by Darius and Xerxes.[67] However, Callicles' historical exempla have been interpreted as ironic – his evidence consists of two dramatically unsuccessful campaigns – apparently undercutting his thesis.[68] Yet he may prove a more sensitive reader of Herodotus' Persian monarchs than has previously been realized; his exemplum recalls Darius' words in Book 4 during his disastrous invasion into the Scythian hinterland. In response to the offensive, the Scythians took to their customary nomadic lifestyle and successfully avoided fighting a pitched battle with the Persians in order to defeat their opponents through a war of attrition. Finally disenchanted with his wandering, Darius sent a message to the king of the Scythians, Idanthyrsus, bidding him enter into battle or capitulate, "and you, if you admit that you are inferior, after ceasing your run come to an audience with your master, bringing earth and water" (4.126: εἰ δὲ συγγινώσκεαι εἶναι ἥσσων, σὺ δὲ καὶ οὕτω παυσάμενος τοῦ δρόμου δεσπότῃ τῷ σῷ δῶρα φέρων γῆν τε καὶ ὕδωρ ἐλθὲ ἐς λόγους). Surrender is envisioned as proceeding from an awareness (συγγινώσκεαι) of one's own subordination (ἥσσων).[69] Darius' negotiations with the Scythian king are underwritten by a social order founded on the basis of strength and weakness. On this view, the weakness of Darius' subjects legitimates his despotism. Opposition is warranted only if there is a question of strength. This ethical system in international affairs informs the norms championed by Darius and brings the debate on whether the strongest *physis* should be victorious straight into the *Histories*. Xerxes too displays a high opinion of his own power and even wonders whether his inferior opponents will bother fighting or immediately surrender. The same logic operates subtly in the rhetorical address of Themistocles.[70] Herodotus continually stresses this statesman's understanding of human nature and recounts his ability to manipulate those around him.[71]

[66] For this, see Irwin (1995), 102–3.
[67] Dodds (1959), ad 483e2, for Callicles these two are, "not only natural but just."
[68] Dodds (1959), ad loc. Widely disseminated as a view, however, e.g., see Rutherford (1995), 163.
[69] A similar argument underpins Periander's statement to his son Lycophron at 3.52.5.
[70] Cf. Blösel (2001), 190, 195–7, for his assessment of Themistocles' egoism and *pleonexia* following the Greco-Persian Wars.
[71] See Baragwanath (2008), 306 n. 40, "Herodotus' Themistocles frequently displays sensitivity to the men's psychology when he addresses them"; for his rhetorical prowess generally, see 304–14.

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His battle exhortation prior to Salamis revisits an understanding of *physis* in its positive and negative valences. Like Darius, Themistocles realizes that the weaker fall to the stronger and, to this end, encourages the hoplite force to embrace "the stronger," τὰ κρέσσω, in their *physis*. Still, in opposition to the rhetorical acrobatics of Callicles, to the speeches of Darius and Xerxes in the *Histories*, and even the presumption of Themistocles, the narrative itself does not treat *physis* as a variable of success in battle. When it is noted, as in the battle of Salamis, it is outmaneuvered by Hellenic order. The *Histories*' unwillingness to align transcending *physis* with victory in the battle at Salamis points to a counter-discourse – one that undermines the association of superior human nature with the path to rule. In this way, historical action participates in an ethical discourse that undercuts the mandate for domination that becomes increasingly common in the later fifth century, as is clear from Herodotus' successor, Thucydides.

In fact, alternatives to *physis* can be found in the fragments of several of the Presocratic intellectuals. In addition to the more familiar opposition of *physis* to *nomos*, the constitution of man was also paired and contrasted with "practice" in the context of virtue.[72] A fragment of Epicharmus first juxtaposes the two: "practice offers more gifts to friends than a good *physis*" (DK 23 B 33: ἁ δὲ μελέτα φύσιος ἀγαθᾶς πλέονα δωρεῖται φίλοις). Critias repeats the sentiment almost verbatim: ἐκ μελέτης πλείους ἢ φύσεως ἀγαθοί (DK 88 B 9). Democritus, a later contemporary, affirms the continued relevance of virtue and its maximization, using the same collocation, πλέονες ἐξ ἀσκήσιος ἀγαθοὶ γίνονται ἢ ἀπὸ φύσιος (DK 68 B 242: "more men become good from practice than *physis*"). The relationship between *physis* and *praxis* bleeds into a general discussion of instruction; Protagoras states that instruction cannot rely on human nature alone, φύσεως καὶ ἀσκήσεως διδασκαλία δεῖται (DK 80 B 3).[73] Democritus' *physis* is shaped and harmonized by instruction, ἡ φύσις καὶ ἡ διδαχὴ παραπλήσιόν ἐστι. καὶ γὰρ ἡ διδαχὴ μεταρυσμοῖ τὸν ἄνθρωπον, μεταρυσμοῦσα δὲ φυσιοποιεῖ (DK 68 B 33: "*physis* and instruction

[72] For the earliest opposition of *physis* to instruction, see Pind. *Ol.* 9.100–3, τὸ δὲ φυᾷ κράτιστον ἅπαν: πολλοὶ δὲ διδακταῖς | ἀνθρώπων ἀρεταῖς κλέος | ὥρουσαν ἀρέσθαι ("That which is by *physis* is altogether strongest: but many men rush to seize repute with virtue that is coached").

[73] See Pl. *Prt.* 351a–b, where Protagoras holds that bravery arises from *physis* and the nurture of the soul.

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are alike, for instruction harmonizes man, and by harmonizing, shapes *physis*"). Even more elaborate is Socrates' response in Xenophon to an interlocutor's question on whether courage is acquired by natural disposition or by instruction:

> Next, when asked if courage is teachable or innate (εἴη διδακτὸν ἢ φυσικόν), he said, "I suppose that just as a body grows (φύεται) stronger than another body as regards pains, similarly a soul becomes by *physis* more powerful than another soul as regards suffering. For I see that people who have been brought up within the same system of laws and customs differ substantially from each other in daring. I think, however, that every *physis* grows stronger in courage through learning and practice (νομίζω μέντοι πᾶσαν φύσιν μαθήσει καὶ μελέτῃ πρὸς ἀνδρείαν αὔξεσθαι). For it is clear that if Scythians and Thracians were to receive shields and spears they wouldn't dare fight against Lacedaemonians; and it is obvious that the Lacedaemonians wouldn't be willing to contend with Thracians with small wicker shields and javelins or with Scythians with bows. Certainly, I see that men differ equally from each other by *physis* in everything else and that they improve a lot by means of diligence. It is clear from these things that all, both those who are more naturally gifted and those who are duller by nature (τοὺς εὐφυεστέρους καὶ τοὺς ἀμβλυτέρους τὴν φύσιν), should learn and practice the things in which they wish to become distinguished." (Xen. *Mem*. 3.9.1–3)

These responses should help to contextualize Herodotus' insistence on the import of *physis* as a category of analysis to be debated and tested in the *Histories*. Equally, they situate his rejection of this as an overarching explanatory paradigm. In the end, the text shows that bravery and military success are not exhausted by the *nomos-physis* dichotomy; analogously, Epicharmus, Critias, Democritus, Protagoras, and Xenophon's Socrates all give weight to elements in addition or in contradiction to the supremacy of *physis*.

Conclusion

Intellectual culture in the fifth century was gripped by a heated debate on the relationship of human nature to rule. Presocratic thinkers grappled with human *physis* in the context of conquest and domination, both internally and externally. Like these texts, Herodotus is preoccupied with *physis* as a conceptual framework, and he too explores the notion of human enhancement in the speeches of Pixodarus and Xerxes. Yet transhumanism is a fundamentally ambivalent motif, associated as it is with compulsion and despotism. Themistocles' speech, with its reorientation toward human agency, offers a different perspective from which to examine transcending

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nature. Through these examples, the motif appears set to explain the success of the numerically inferior force of the Greeks against the Persians. But, on the battlefield it is the Persians and not the Greeks who transcend their natures, via the gaze of the monarch. As I have argued, this narrative bait and switch destabilizes the logic of the rule of the stronger, according to which the superior nature was the natural victor.

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