



Thucydides and the Pursuit of Freedom

Mary P. Nichols

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In *Thucydides and the Pursuit of Freedom*, Mary P. Nichols argues for the centrality of the idea of freedom in Thucydides' thought. Through her close reading of his *History of the Peloponnesian War*, she explores the manifestations of this theme. Cities and individuals in Thucydides' history take freedom as their goal, whether they claim to possess it and want to maintain it or whether they desire to attain it for themselves or others. Freedom is the goal of both antagonists in the Peloponnesian War, Sparta and Athens, although in different ways. One of the fullest expressions of freedom can be seen in the rhetoric of Thucydides' Pericles, especially in his famous funeral oration.

More than simply documenting the struggle for freedom, however, Thucydides himself is taking freedom as his cause. On the one hand, he demonstrates that freedom makes possible human excellence, including courage, self-restraint, deliberation, and judgment, which support freedom in turn. On the other hand, the pursuit of freedom, in one's own regime and in the world at large, clashes with interests and material necessity, and indeed the very passions required for its support. Thucydides' work, which he himself considered a possession for all time, therefore speaks very much to our time, encouraging the defense of freedom while warning of the limits and dangers in doing so. The powerful must defend freedom, Thucydides teaches, but beware that the cost not become freedom itself.

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