

TOMÁS PACHECO BETHENCOURT

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0770-7258>

What Makes a Demagogue? The Figure of the Rhetor in the Closing Years of the Peloponnesian War

ABSTRACT

It is usual to associate the word “demagogue” with bad political leadership. At worst, it is also usual to think about a leader that uses deception and feeds on the more primal emotions of the people to get what he wants. But, in reality, answering the question of what a demagogue was is far from easy. Thus, this paper hypothesizes that there is no substantial difference between a demagogue and a rhetor in Athenian democracy. As its method, the paper analyses the context of use of the term by the different actors as to shed some light on their intentions. First, the paper examines the concept of “demagogue” and how the term appears in the democratic tradition, by focusing on its usage in the works of authors such as Aristophanes, Lysias and Thucydides. Next, it refers to the way in which adversaries of Athenian democracy, especially deriving from philosophy, used the term. As this paper will show, there is a significant difference between the two usages, the former being descriptive and the latter pejorative. Finally, the paper concludes that both in the descriptive and pejorative sense, being a demagogue meant to be a rhetor, a leader of the *demos*.

Key words: Athenian democracy, Peloponnesian War, leadership, political assembly, demagoguery, tyranny, political rhetoric

INTRODUCTION

It is fairly commonplace to associate Athenian democracy with a “reign of demagogues”, especially by the end of the 5th century BC, when the Peloponnesian War was coming to an end. It is not an unreasonable association, given the number of controversial decisions taken by the assembly, which not only would lose the war for Athens but also endanger the survival of democracy itself. These actions, such as the

Sicilian Expedition in 415 BC, would have allegedly been instigated by demagogues. But what did being a demagogue mean?

After all, when we think of a demagogue, the idea of a rabble-rouser comes to mind. A popular leader that uses the people to attain power. As Moses Finley puts it in his classic article *Athenian Demagogues*: “the demagogue is driven by self-interest, by the desire to advance himself in power, and through power, in wealth. To achieve this, he surrenders all principles, all genuine leadership, and he panders to the people in every way” [Finley 1962: 4]. In this account, rather than leading the people, a demagogue misleads the people. But there is more to it than that.

Indeed, the term is problematic given that its pejorative connotations are not at all common in the Greek democratic tradition; on the contrary, neither *demagogos* nor *demegoros* imply a negative sense for “demagogue”. Finley himself recognizes that, understood in a more neutral way, “demagogues were a structural element in the Athenian political system” [Finley 1962: 19]. There is also a positive way of understanding it, or rather of understanding it in opposition to a pejorative version of the concept. This can be found in the conceptualizations of Plato and Aristotle along with the aforementioned pejorative sense, wherein Plato’s “demagogue” serves as the shadow term for “statesman” (*politikos*), the former one being harmful political leadership and the latter virtuous political leadership.

Whereas for Plato all democratic leaders are demagogues, for Aristotle there is a distinction between the democratic leaders of the past and the ones that led Athens by the end of the 5th century, especially those who came after Pericles. In light of this, we can understand why philosophers of that time are characterized as enemies of democracy, given that their work is the main source for the pejorative connotation of the term [Lane 2012: 187]. This is no coincidence, as I will argue.

When we go back to Finley’s remarks about demagogues being a structural part of democracy and understand a demagogue to be a leader of the people that uses the very people he leads to override the laws, we can see then what lies in the background: a profound and old mistrust of democracy and its principles of equality between all citizens and equality in voicing their views in the assembly, this is, *isonomia* and *isegoria*. These principles, they believed, led unequivocally to a form of tyranny and a growing ground for demagogues.

With this in mind, I propose the following hypothesis: There is no substantial difference between a demagogue and a rhetor in Athenian democracy. In any case, the difference lies with the usage of the term, whether it is by a supporter or not of the democratic system. Thus, to demonstrate this point, first, I will explain the view of the democratic partisans, which used the term in a descriptive manner, if they used it at all. Then, I will tackle the view of the “enemies of democracy”, mostly from the philosophical tradition, and how this view was successful and used today, in some contexts. Finally, I will draw some concluding remarks and see if the hypothesis was successfully argued.

THE RHETOR, LEADER OF THE *DEMOS*

In ancient Greece, a demagogue (*demagogos*) was a leader (*agos*) of the people (*demos*), that is, the many which composed the community of citizens in the city. On the other hand, a *demegoros* was the one who spoke before the assembly. In this sense, the so-called demagogue would most – if not all – of the time be both. But these terms had no pejorative connotations (contrary to tyranny), and “demagogue” seldom appears in democratic tradition, as I will argue.

Indeed, Athenians preferred, following Melissa Lane’s account, more descriptive forms for referring to their political leaders, such as *prostates tou demou* (the person standing before the people), *ho boulomenos* (the one that takes the initiative) or *hoi rhetores kai hoi strategoi* (orators and generals) [Lane 2012: 182]. This view counters the extended trend that claims that *demagogos* and *demegoros* were a common Greek designation for bad political leadership [Finley 1962: 7], at least outside the philosophical tradition.

As stated in the introduction, the core principles of Athenian democracy were *isonomia* (equality between all citizens) and *isegoria* (the possibility for all citizens to address the assembly) which had *isokratia* (equal share of political power) as the result. These principles were embodied in the Athenian assembly, and though naturally not every citizen was expected to speak, those who did were highly respected and competed with one another to gain influence. Both courage and competition were values cherished by Athenian society, not only in sports and war but also in the political arena [Hansen 1991: 84].

In a framework such as this, it would be odd to think that Athenians used the term pejoratively, as being a demagogue was to comply with Athenian standards and values: a man that had the courage to speak before the assembly, that competed with his equals to gain influence and that was seen as a leader by the *demos*. This is not to say that Athenians were unaware of the dangers these rhetors posed for democracy. On the contrary, the institutions of the *polis* were set with these political risks in mind, and several political mechanisms had the goal of preventing them.

I will not dwell overly on what all those mechanisms were, but two of them deserve to be highlighted: ostracism and its successor, the *graphe paranomon*. The former was used to cast out for ten years a citizen that the *demos* feared had accumulated too much power, with his property and assets kept secure until his return. The second mechanism is the less known *graphe paranomon*, which could be invoked if a proposal made in the assembly was considered to be against the law, namely unconstitutional. When this happened, the assembly had to be summoned the next day to submit anew the proposal to a trial. If the citizen who proposed it would lose, then he could face different charges, depending on the gravity of the breach. On the other hand, if he won, then the proposal would pass without a further vote [Lanni, Vermeule 2013: 902–903].

Both mechanisms had little to do with bad political leadership, but rather to what a famed speaker might become, that is, a tyrant. There is an important distinction

to be made here between a demagogue (neutrally speaking, a leader of the *demos*) and a *tyrannos* (a tyrant), at least initially [Patapan 2019: 745]. A tyrant is the one who seeks his own egoistic aspirations by overturning democracy to claim absolute power, which sheds some light on why, for Aristotle, a demagogue and a tyrant become virtually the same, as will be seen later, in the next point.

That tyranny was the main political risk for Athenians can be clearly seen following Aristotle's account in the *Constitution of the Athenians*, where he argues that ostracism was instated by Cleisthenes to prevent Hipparchus from leading the polis back to the Peisistratid tyranny [Rhodes 1993: 267–271]. Tyranny was seen as a crime that needed to be prevented, not punished, and ostracism permitted the expulsion of an individual that was becoming too powerful before he could become a tyrant. On the other hand, the *graphe paranomon* served as a mechanism for rational decision-making in the assembly, providing the opportunity to have a second look at legislation, acting also as a “safeguard against hasty or ill-advised legislation, particularly given the fear that skilled public speakers might mislead or whip the *demos* into a frenzy” [Lanni, Vermeule 2013: 903].

Thus, now we can better understand why a negative connotation for demagogue is nowhere to be found in Athenian democratic tradition. The rising of these “leaders of the *demos*” was not only expected, but encouraged, as proven by the institutional framework of the *polis*, which contemplated as a main political risk that any of these leaders accumulated an amount of influence and power so great that they would become tyrants. Finley himself recognises that “demagogues were a structural element in the Athenian political system” [Finley 1962: 19].

DESCRIPTIVE USAGE OF DEMAGOGUE

At this point, I will review three examples of how the term appears in supporters or sympathizers of democracy. These are Aristophanes, Lysias, and also Thucydides, who we can call both a critic and a supporter of democracy, even if it is not the full democracy ushered in by Pericles.

The term *demagogos*, or at least its family of words, appears for the first time in the works of Aristophanes, although it is not as a noun to designate a person, but rather as a verb: to be a demagogue (*demagogein*). It appears twice in *Knights* and once in *Frogs*. In *Knights*, broadly speaking, two slaves of one *demos* try to bring down another slave, Paphlagon, that dominates the household, by promoting a worse slave, a Sausage-Seller. This way, the term appears two times in an exchange between one of the slaves and the Sausage-Seller: the first time, the slave says that: “A demagogue must be neither an educated nor an honest man; he has to be an ignoramus and a rogue” [Aristoph. *Kn.* 190]. The second time, the same slave says “you possess all the attributes of a demagogue; a screeching, horrible voice, a perverse, crossgrained nature and the language of the market-place” [Aristoph. *Kn.* 215–220].

So, it may look like its being used in a pejorative sense, but the Greek word is actually *demagogia*, and it is descriptive, as we see that it is “not used now or no longer by educated men”. It captures a change of qualities in the political leader which is what brings the pejorative connotation. Plainly speaking, it is not *demagogia* itself that is negative, but rather what it has become. The misunderstanding arises because the figure of Paphlagon is clearly representative of Cleon, who was one of the most infamous of the demagogues.

On the other hand, in *Frogs*, we find the line that says Archedemus is acting demagogically amongst the dead, referring only to the action of practising politics: “[h]e’s a big politician amongst the corpses up above” [Aristoph. *Fr.* 420–423]. So, as we can see, the use of the term merely references the contrast between the polis of the living and the realm of Hades.

It is interesting that Aristophanes chose to use these words, which were new by then, but Lane’s account clarifies this matter. The most interesting reason for the purpose of this research (without going completely into the context of *Knights* and *Frogs* in themselves) has less to do with condemning figures like Cleon and more with making a distinction between *stratego*i and those figures that were starting to arise and dominate in the assembly without serving as generals [Lane 2012: 186]. As can be seen, the term remains to be merely descriptive, and it is used as a verb (to be a demagogue or, by all accounts, to do politics).

In the work of Lysias [Lys. 25.9], as well as in several other authors like Isocrates or Xenophon, what we find is a partisan association of the demagogue family of words to denote those contrary to oligarchy. He uses the term to refer to Peisandros and Phrynichus, for example, who were democratic partisans before joining the oligarchic plot of 411 BC, the latter being one of the most extremist and bloody leaders of the conspiracy. It does not seem that the term, although partisan, is used pejoratively in this case either, designating someone who is for democracy, and changes sides later for the oligarchic faction.

Finally, although there are several others, the third example I would like to address is that of Thucydides. In book IV of the *History of the Peloponnesian War*, we find he uses the term as a noun to describe Cleon, regarding the Pylos debate. He says: “These feelings were chiefly encouraged by Cleon the son of Cleaenetus, a popular leader (*demagogos*) of the day who had the greatest influence over the multitude” [Th. 4.21.3]. But this is the second time he provides a description of Cleon. Earlier, he described him as “the most violent of the citizens, and at that time exercised by far the greatest influence over the people” [Th. 3.36.6]. In both accounts is stated the influence he had over the multitude, but it seems unlikely that “popular leader” could be associated with being the most violent of citizens. It would be more correct only to say that the most violent of citizens had substantial influence over the people. So, the first description seems like the most descriptive.

We know Thucydides did not like Cleon, but few did in posterity. Some have said that it was Cleon’s blind impertinence, bombastic speech, and military incompetence

that led the Athenians into disastrous mistakes in the war against Sparta [Whedbee 2004: 78]. But the grudge Thucydides holds against Cleon is also of a personal nature. After Athens was defeated at Amphipolis in 422 BC where the historian was one of the *strategoí* in charge of its defence, he seems to hold Cleon responsible for his prosecution and exile [Whedbee 2004: 79]. This is relevant inasmuch as it shows that, despite the bad blood between the two, the term “demagogue” is only used in a descriptive manner, to denote a popular leader.

A member of the *demagogos* family words only appears regarding the oligarchic conspiracy of 411 BC [Th. 8.65.2] to describe the execution of Androcles on the account of being a popular leader (*demagogias*). Again, the use is merely descriptive and is also mentioned to refer to both democratic and oligarchic partisans, given that those that led the conspiracy of 411 were commonly regarded as demagogues. Even though Thucydides showed his sympathies for the Five Thousand, stating that “this government during its early days was the best which the Athenians ever enjoyed within my memory” [Th. 8.97.2], his use of any family word of *demagogos* remained with only descriptive capacities. The same patron repeats itself with other authors akin to Athenian democracy.

THE DEMAGOGUE AND THE ADVOCATORS OF DEMOCRACY

In this sense, the core of the matter here is that, from a democratic partisan’s viewpoint, the demagogues or rhetors were a fundamental part of Athenian democracy, and the consequences of their good or bad leadership had as much to do with their power in the assembly and the decisions they had to make while occupying a political office as it had to do with the power of the assembly itself. After all, by the end of the 5th century BC, the Athenian assembly had the power to enact and derogate laws unopposed [Long 1996: 7], and was in charge of designating the *strategoí* and of taking strategic decisions in war. This unrestricted legislative capacity is what would allow the assembly in 411 BC to suppress the *graphe paranomon* and vote in favour of dissolving itself, ending the democratic system throughout all that year.

Indeed, the argument can be made that demagogues Peisandros and Phrynichus were instrumental in convincing the assembly of taking this action, amongst other factors such as the threat of violence and the Persian influence of the satrap Tissaphernes, but the point I want to make here is that it would not be just. They are partly to blame, yes, and we can judge their character and virtue, but there is another aspect that has to be considered. Athenians contemplated that rhetors or speakers would seek to accumulate influence and power, as well as aspire to lead the *polis*. So much so that they instituted the set of mechanisms previously mentioned. But they failed.

They used the *demos* to override the laws, but they did not break the law. Besides, in this regard, it is important to remember the previous distinction between a demagogue and a tyrant. Where one is a popular leader, the other seeks to overthrow

democracy to claim absolute power. Understood pejoratively, as we will see on the next point, for critics of democracy there is a clear transition from being a demagogue into becoming a tyrant.

To see the argument I am trying to make regarding why the actions for which demagogues are judged are those of the assembly and are no more than Athenian democracy in action more clearly, let us review the paradigmatic example of the Mytilenean affair of 427 BC [Th. 3.36–50]. This is interesting, because in the literature Cleon is the one shunned for his proposal – which is not saying he should not be – but he did not actually do anything against the laws of Athens. What happened was that Mytilene had revolted against the Delian League, and the Athenians were convinced by Cleon in the assembly to destroy the city with all its inhabitants. The assembly accepted, but immediately regretted having done so, and thus called for a second assembly in which “cooler heads prevailed” [Lanni, Vermeule 2013: 903].

Episodes such as this are good to see what prompted the need for Athenians to have a second look at legislation (the aforementioned *graphe paranomon*), in great part to prevent speakers like Cleon of convincing the assembly to take hasty decisions and enacting laws rashly. But same as rhetors were a fundamental part of Athenian democracy, it was too the constant process of revision and adaptations of the *polis*' institutions to face new challenges while protecting its core principles: from ostracism and the *graphe paranomon* to the revision of the laws and the codification of the ancient codes of Solon and Draco that ended by 399 BC, along with the much needed checks on the power of the assembly [Hansen 1991: 164].

THE DEMAGOGUE AND THE STATESMAN

My goal here is to go over the three main sources for the extended conception of what a demagogue was, and what demagoguery was about, namely the pejorative viewpoint. The three authors I will focus on are Plato, and his division between the statesman (or the good political practitioner, *politikos*) and its shadow term, “demagogue”. Then, I will review the account of Aristotle, which is most interesting in its complexity and, finally, Plutarch's, whose works cemented this conception of the term for posterity.

Plato, as said, was the first one that made the famous distinction between statesman and demagogue. In his view, good political leadership consists of elevating the citizenship in virtue, which in turn has to do with knowledge. In one of the passages from *Gorgias*, Socrates says:

Do the orators strike you as speaking always with a view to what is best, with the single aim of making the citizens as good as possible by their speeches, or are they, like the poets, set on gratifying the citizens, and do they, sacrificing the commonweal to their own personal interest, behave to these assemblies as to children, trying merely to gratify them, nor care a jot whether they will be better or worse in consequence? [Plat. *Gorg.* 502e]

In this sense, the good leader, the *politikos*, would have *politikétechné*. Only that man that is prepared to make the people more virtuous, and more knowledgeable, is a statesman. In the conversation Socrates is having in *Gorgias*, it is clear that that is the goal he is aiming at with it, saying that “the speeches that I make from time to time are not aimed at gratification, but at what is best” [Plat. *Gorg.* 521d]. Here we see the connection with the ideal of the philosopher-king.

Only having shown the characteristics that make a leader good, and what is within the idea of true political rhetoric, can Socrates address its contrary: “flattery and a base mob-oratory” [Plat. *Gorg.* 503a], that is, *aischra demegoria*. The pejorative connotation seems to be in *demegoros*, apparently emphasizing the basis for ill speech in the exercise of ill political leadership [Lane 2012: 189].

In the *Sophist*, we too find a clear distinction between demagogue and statesman or *politikos*. Here, the Eleatic visitor proposes a distinction between two kinds of “insincere imitators”. One of those is the one who makes long speeches to mobs. In this context, the visitor asks Theaetetus if that person is a statesman (*politikos*) or a demagogue, a popular orator (*demologikos*), to which he replies that it surely must be the latter [Plat. *Soph.* 268b]. A demagogue is, then, defined by its antithesis, the statesman. It is its shadow term: he deceits people, appeals to their passions for his own gain. But he not only misleads the people on the one hand but on the other, he is misled by the approval of the *demos* into believing he is a true statesman. It is, as it were, a kind of ignorance. For Plato, all democratic leaders are demagogues [Gribble 1999: 236].

This is a new definition, original to Plato who has preference for the *demegoros* family of words. He is talking about a public speaker that deceits the *demos* whether it be knowingly or unknowingly. By defining what is righteous political leadership, he is also defining what is not. As we will see now, Aristotle will follow on this statesman-demagogue distinction but opting for the *demagogos* family of words, much in the sense of Aristophanes or Thucydides but giving it a mainly negative meaning.

Aristotle’s view is most interesting, for it appears to be directly connected with the state of democracy in Athens at the end of the Peloponnesian War. He says in Book IV of his *Politics* that demagogues (*demagogoi*) are those who use the decrees of the people to override the laws. In other words, those who appeal to the people to pursue their own ends despite the laws [Arist. *Pol.* 4.4, 1292a1].

The context of this analysis is the consideration of different types of democracies by the Stagirite, specifically the fifth type, where “the multitude is sovereign and not the law, and this comes about when the decrees of the assembly over-ride the law. This state of things is brought about by the demagogues; for in the states under democratic government guided by law a demagogue does not arise” [Arist. *Pol.* 4.4, 1292a1]. Here he alludes to a distinction between a *demokratia*, which would be analogous to Athens where, as explained before, the assembly had unrestricted legislative power, and a *politeia*, where the law is above the decrees of the *demos*.

Now it can be better understood why here the line between a demagogue and a tyrant disappears, as claimed in the previous point. The demagogue would draw

the people to a frenzy and, by overriding the laws, would overthrow democracy. It is, in this sense, a type of democracy doomed to fail or to become despotic. Indeed, the people turn into a composite monarch, where the many rule collectively and not individually. Aristotle argues then that “a democracy of this nature is comparable to the tyrannical form of monarchy, because their spirit is the same”, and continues to say that “such a democracy is not a constitution at all; for where the laws do not govern there is no constitution” [Arist. *Pol.* 4.4, 1292a1]. With this in mind, it is clear that although it is a pejorative use of *demagogos*, the emphasis is not on the demagogues themselves but rather on this form of democracy. The appearance of demagogues is epiphenomenal, because they are a consequence of Athenian institutional framework, as I have been arguing in this paper.

Finally, I want to briefly mention Plutarch, given that his account popularized the pejorative use of the term. He too distinguishes between statesman and demagogue, following especially Plato, although preferring Aristotle’s predilection for *demagogos*. In his opinion, good examples of demagogues are Cleon, the Roman Clodius, and Alcibiades, the famous, or infamous, young Athenian *strategos*. Whereas for Thucydides, Alcibiades was a potential tyrant, Plutarch considered him to be a typical demagogue, in the Platonic sense.

According to David Gribble, Plutarch uses the statesman–demagogue distinction as a model for Greek politics, falling into an oversimplification of political dynamics that become little more than a dichotomized tension between the individual and the *polis*, and the ensuing conflict [Gribble 1999: 278–279].

A statesman is a quasi-monarchical source of virtue and good judgment, with a value independent from the value of the people. Indeed, we can see Plutarch’s predilection for monarchy, as he states in *Moralia*, quoted by Lane: if he (the statesman) could choose a form of government, he would choose monarchy, like Plato, for it is the only system where his virtue can shine, as in any other system, especially a democracy, he would not lead but be led instead by inferior people [Lane 2012: 196].

And this is, in fact, what a demagogue is for Plutarch: that man who lets himself be led by the whims of the people, seeing that his power derives from them. The statesman–demagogue distinction works as a combination of Aristotle’s preference for the *demagogos* word family along with Plato’s new concept of *politikos*, including an inclination for favouring monarchy.

WHAT MAKES A DEMAGOGUE?

As it has been shown, there are many underlying threads that tie together all three conceptions of the pejorative sense for demagogue, other than the clear influence that Plato has on Aristotle and that both of them have on Plutarch. This is a clear distrust in democracy. In the case of Aristotle, in the type of democracy Athens had.

Then again, Athens was the paradigmatic example of democracy, although there's a clear institutional difference between Athens by the end of the 5th century and in the fourth, after undergoing all the judicial reforms in the years following the war. With those reforms, it became closer to a *politeia* than a *demokratia*.

Also, in all three cases, the institutional framework had to be set in a way that would allow a public speaker to undermine it, which was the case in Athens where the political-legislative power was accumulated by the assembly. This allows the demagogue to use, as Aristotle said, the decrees of the people to override the laws. Athenian democracy by 406 BC, around the time of the trial of the Arginusae generals was, by Aristotelian standards, a democracy with no constitution. It makes, then, the perfect setting for a charismatic leader to emerge and, using rhetoric, do as he pleases, leading and being led by the *demos*.

Still, the issue remains the same: not the orator but the democratic system. And the key here is to understand that every speaker in the Athenian assembly that would use rhetoric to convince others (the people) of his position, that would try to gain favour for implementing his politics and seek, finally, to lead the city, would be regarded by members of this tradition as a demagogue, pejoratively speaking. What makes, then a demagogue? To be a democratic leader, a rhetor in the assembly, a leader of the *demos*.

But now, this was not always the case, especially when it comes down to Pericles. Even though Plato did not have kind words for him, stating that implementing public payments made Athenians lazy and greedy [Plat. *Gorg.* 515e], Aristotle and Plutarch had a different opinion. Aristotle, besides recognizing different kinds of democracy, recognizes a "proper democracy", a *politeia*, opening the door to democratic leaders who are not demagogues.

The association between the mentioned degeneration of democracy and recent events in Athens in times of Aristotle comes with the implication – which also appears in Thucydides – that there is a divide between the great leaders of the past, explicitly Pericles in Thucydides account, and the bad leaders that followed. Plutarch also continues this trend, with a profound admiration for Pericles. Further, for him, Pericles' figure resembles that of a king, for he was not the same man he was before anymore, nor was he submitted to the people or subject to be driven by their whims [Pl. *Per.* XV].

But, why Pericles? Besides the obvious reasons, it is interesting to ask this question seriously. Why is Pericles so different from his nephew, Alcibiades? After all, he had an outstanding military record before gaining prominence in the public arena, he was extraordinarily good looking, sought by men and women alike [Xen. *Mem.* 1.2.24], and an excellent speaker, instructed by the best rhetoricians of his time and praised by Demosthenes himself. Moreover, he was exceptionally intelligent, as attested by the philosopher Theophrastus, and even had a speaking disorder than far from being a hindrance made him charming [Kagan 1996: 63].

To explore this disparity between the admired Pericles and the renowned demagogue, Alcibiades, the debate prior to the disastrous Sicilian Expedition (415 BC) is

most illuminating. The main players in this debate were Alcibiades, followed by the Athenian youth, and the experienced Nicias, who took a more conservative approach. The debate starts after an embassy from the Sicilian cities of Segesta and Leontini requested assistance [Kagan 1996: 165], and the subject is, broadly speaking, about whether Athens should attack Sicily or not. Alcibiades is for attacking and Nicias is against.

I want to focus here on some of the points Alcibiades makes in his arguments. Nicias' position was clear and was almost the same in every session of the assembly: Athens could not afford to attack Sicily. If the Carthaginians could not conquer it, how could Athens? Also, the war with Sparta would soon begin anew, if it had been over at all, and the territories of Athens were not secure. Nicias also attacked Alcibiades on accounts of his age and his lavish lifestyle.

Alcibiades' speech was a direct response: he rebutted the personal attack and asked to be judged by his public deeds and not his private life, exalting his role in obtaining victory at the battle of Mantinea. He also was conciliatory, asking the leadership of the expedition for Nicias (who did not want to go) and himself. There are several other points in the discussion, but the argument I want to emphasize is the one that stated the obligation Athens had to its allies, both on a moral ground (it was a dishonour and there was no excuse for shrinking back) and on the ground of interest (the Sicilian allies were the first line of defense). Additionally, Alcibiades maintained that the very nature of the empire required an active policy on behalf of allies, whether Greek or barbarian.

The emphasis is here because it is from this point on that Alcibiades mirrored Pericles. First, when speaking of aiding Athens' allies we can see the similarities with the last Periclean speech: "You are bound to maintain the imperial dignity of your city in which you all take pride [...] or inaction is secure only when arrayed by the side of activity; nor is it expedient or safe for a sovereign, but only for a subject state, to be a servant" [Th. 2.63].

Then, Alcibiades revealed his plans for a Sicilian annexation, exclaiming that if the expedition succeeded, "as seemed likely", the Athenians might gain control of all Hellas since their power would be reinforced by the addition of Sicily [Kagan 1996: 184]. Here we can also see a Periclean influence. When Pericles was challenged by men who advocated, in his time, for a more inactive policy, the *apragmones*, he famously told the Athenians: "You are the absolute masters of the entire sea, not only as much of it as you now rule but however much more you wish" [quoted in Kagan 1996: 184].

It appears that, at least in a rhetorical capacity and, up to that point, a military capacity as well, Alcibiades and Pericles were not so different from each other. Alcibiades though had a reputation for being outrageous, and that very reputation is what prompted the assembly to accuse him and his followers of mutilating the herms (*hermai*), and desecrating the Eleusinian Mysteries, thus removing him from command in the expedition and provoking his defection to Sparta.

We can only speculate about what would have happened if Alcibiades led the expedition to Sicily, but hopefully, with this digression, some light has been shed on why there is a line between Pericles and those that followed, like Alcibiades. It can be safely said that one great reason for that line existing is fortune: Pericles was successful and could deliver on his promises, Alcibiades could not.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper began with the research question: What did being a demagogue mean? In order to tackle this question, I brought forth a research hypothesis that claimed that there is no substantial difference between a demagogue and a rhetor in Athenian democracy. In any case, the difference lies with the usage of the term, whether it is by a supporter or an opponent of the democratic system.

Thus, the paper followed an argument distributed in four points. It started examining the terms *demagogue* and *demegoros* from an etymological perspective, as well as exploring the figure of the demagogue or popular leader not only as something Athenians expected, but also as something they encouraged, in line with their values about courage and competition, and with their core principles of *isonomia* and *isegoria*. This led to an analysis of two Athenian constitutional mechanisms – ostracism, and the *graphe paranomon*, which had the objective of preventing a popular leader from becoming a tyrant. This, in turn, permitted to attend to the distinction between demagogue and tyrant.

Then, the paper focused on reviewing some of the ways democratic partisans used the terms *demagogos*, *demegoros* or any of their word families. The three examples were Aristophanes, specifically *Knights* and *Frogs*, Lysias in his *Speeches* and Thucydides in the *History of the Peloponnesian War*. This review confirmed that those terms were not common, and when they appeared, they did in a descriptive capacity.

Next, it followed the examination of the philosophical tradition, characterized – to varying degrees – by the opposition to democracy, namely the Athenian. The three authors selected were Plato, with his *Gorgias* and *Sophist*, Aristotle's *Politics* and the *Constitution of the Athenians* and, finally, a brief recount of Plutarch. With this in mind, the hypothesis could be confirmed: being a demagogue means, both in the pejorative sense (for the distrust in democracy) and the descriptive sense, to be a democratic leader, a rhetor in the assembly, a leader of the *demos*. Finally, the paper dealt with the question of why even the critics of democracy drew a line between Pericles and the ones who came after, for which the example of Nicias and Alcibiades' debate prior to the Sicilian Expedition was explored.

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BIOGRAPHY

Tomás Elías Pacheco Bethencourt is a PhD candidate at the University of Málaga, in the Doctoral Programme Estudios Avanzados en Humanidades since November 2019, and a recipient of an FPU Spanish research fellowship as of November 2020. He is also a member of research project "Civic Constellation III: Democracy, Constitutionalism, and Anti-Liberalism" (Spain's National Research Fund). With a background in philosophy, and a special focus on political philosophy, some of his research interests are conceptual history, history of political ideas, history of constitutionalism

and theory of populism. Those interests are reflected in publications, workshops and seminars, such as his presentation at the 2019 edition of the RECAST Training School in the Humanities & the Social Sciences, at the Norwegian Institute at Athens: “Revising the Laws of Athenian Democracy: A Milestone in Constitutional History” or his paper on the constitutional checks on political power in Athenian democracy (*La limitación constitucional del poder: un estudio sobre la asamblea democrática ateniense en la Guerra del Peloponeso*, “Res Pública”, vol. 23(1), pp. 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.5209/rpub.64991>). E-mail: tpbethencourt@uma.es