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The *Origins of the Peloponnesian War*, the Origins of the Peloponnesian War, and Theories of International Relations

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Abstract

This article investigates the theoretical assumptions and implications of de Ste. Croix's approach to interstate politics in *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War*. It suggests that two approaches can be identified in the work: one which sees a fundamental connection between political systems within a state and that state's conduct of interstate politics, and another, closer to conventional 'Realist' theories, which sees a clear dividing line between domestic and interstate politics, and in which interstate relations need to be understood according to a distinct analytical framework. Although this tension was probably not a particular concern to de Ste. Croix himself, it does have a bearing on ongoing debates in International Theory; the final part of the article briefly explores the possibility that the concept of 'compulsion', important to both Thucydides' and de Ste. Croix's understanding of the causes of the Peloponnesian War, might provide a way of reconciling these two approaches.

Keywords

realism – International Theory – interstate relations – compulsion

It might be thought slightly unfair to look for a Theory (with a capital T) of International Relations in *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War* (*OPW*). The work never claims to be aiming to construct such a theory, nor does it make any explicit statement about being informed by any existing theoretical approaches. On the other hand, it would of course be too simplistic to assume that just because an author does not articulate a specific theoretical agenda or perspective, their work is therefore entirely atheoretical. This principle is very well illustrated by de Ste. Croix's own approach to the ancient author whose work underpins and informs *OPW*, namely Thucydides. De Ste. Croix was clear that his Thucydides was, first and foremost, a historian: 'it is very strange' (he wrote) 'that some modern writers have believed Thucydides to be interested not in historical events but in "laws" or "principles" lying behind the events: for this view there is no valid basis at all'.[1] However, he was also willing to concede that Thucydides' view of historical events was profoundly shaped by his understanding of those general 'laws', and indeed devoted an extended section of *OPW* to exploring what Thucydides' understanding might have been.[2]

My starting point for this discussion is that the same approach – *mutatis mutandis* – can also be applied to *OPW*: it is a work of history, not theory, but seeking to identify and unpack some of its theoretical assumptions is a potentially productive undertaking. More specifically, my aim is to highlight some of the key contributions (and also some of the limitations) of *OPW* to thinking about Greek interstate politics. In the final part of this discussion, I will turn to look at a problem which emerges from *OPW*'s (implied) model of interstate politics – that is, the question of how distinct interstate politics was from politics within the state – and will suggest that exploring the theme of compulsion or necessity (*anankē*) might help, if not resolve, then at least illuminate this problem.

1 G.E.M. de Ste. Croix, *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War* (London: Duckworth, 1972), p. 5. de Ste. Croix singles out Collingwood in particular as the exponent of such views (citing his *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946)), but this approach to Thucydides has remained widespread: for more recent examples and explorations, see (a small selection from a huge bibliography) J. Ober, 'Thucydides Theoretikos/Thucydides Histor: Realist Theory and the Challenge of History', in D.R. McCann and B.S. Strauss (eds.), *War and Democracy* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2001), pp. 273–306; K. Harloe and N. Morley (eds.), *Thucydides and the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); and, for an up-to-date survey of the issue, with further references, J. Schloesser, '"What Really Happened." Varieties of Realism in Thucydides' *History*', in P. Low (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Thucydides* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), pp. 301–316.

2 de Ste. Croix, *Origins*, pp. 5–35, discussed more fully below.

1 *OPW* on the Mechanics of Interstate Relations

Something that pervades *OPW* is a deep interest in the mechanics of foreign policy. That is: who is responsible for making decisions about a state's foreign relations; how are treaties formulated and agreed; what are the practical incentives (and disincentives) to making and breaking a given interstate agreement.[3] This interest is particularly prominent in the extended digressions on decision-making structures in Sparta, and on the history and organisation of the Peloponnesian League.[4] The mechanics of Athenian decision-making get less space (presumably on the grounds that these had already been more fully covered in existing scholarship),[5] but do receive some attention, particularly in scattered observations on the extent to which Pericles was (or, in de Ste. Croix's view, was not) driving Athenian policy,[6] and the invocation, in the conclusion, of the overall explanatory significance of the 'dynamic, explosive, volatile' Athenian democracy.[7]

This observation, though perhaps slightly surprising in its delayed appearance in the work, is in fact consistent with another key element of de Ste. Croix's approach to explaining interstate politics: namely, that his arguments are regularly based on the principle that decisions made in the interstate arena are likely to be profoundly shaped by the domestic systems and ideologies of a given state. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the element of internal organisation which de Ste. Croix saw as most significant falls under the general heading of 'Class Struggle', although a struggle which is manifested in two quite distinct ways. First, and on the Spartan side: de Ste. Croix placed great explanatory weight on the constraining effect of the helots. The existence of the helots, he argued, placed Sparta in a 'uniquely dangerous position',[8] because of the Spartans' constant, and justifiable, fear of a helot rebellion: 'Sparta's uniquely insecure position demanded that she isolate herself completely from outside attack, which might encourage the helots to rise'.[9] The final sentences of *OPW* focus on

3 See, e.g., de Ste. Croix, *Origins*, Apps. I, V, VII, XIII.

4 de Ste. Croix, *Origins*, Ch. IV, Apps. XVII–XX, XXIV.

5 Contrast de Ste. Croix's justification for including the digression on Spartan foreign policy: 'Books on Sparta are numerous and mostly bad' (*Origins*, p. 89, n. 1.).

6 Esp. in de Ste. Croix, *Origins*, App. X, although the issue recurs throughout de Ste. Croix's analysis (e.g., at pp. 65, 73, 79, and extensively in Ch. VII's discussion of the Megarian decree(s)).

7 de Ste. Croix, *Origins*, p. 290.

8 de Ste. Croix, *Origins*, p. 89.

9 de Ste. Croix, *Origins*, p. 93. Already in *OPW* de Ste. Croix characterised the (in his view, inevitable and perpetual) conflict between Spartiates and helots as an instance of 'Class Struggle', a label he was not yet willing to apply to other citizen/slave relationships in the ancient world (*Origins*, p. 90; cf. the acknowledgement of his revision to his position in G.E.M. de Ste. Croix,

this point, arguing that it is the key to understanding Spartan actions, and also (in de Ste. Croix's view) proving Sparta's ultimate culpability in causing the war: Spartan fear of Athenian power was only so intense because of the 'curse that Sparta had brought upon herself',[10] namely, the enslavement of the helots.

The second manifestation of class struggle which, in de Ste. Croix's view, is relevant to understanding the background to the war concerns Athens, and specifically Athens' relationship with the members of its empire. De Ste. Croix's key claim (already developed in his *Historia* article of 1954)[11] is that such exploitation as the Athenian Empire entailed was more than compensated for by the democratic freedom which it offered to some communities within subject states; democratic factions with subject states would (it is argued) have been more inclined to accept Athenian rule because the constraints which this entailed were less exacting than those which they would have suffered under a local, but oligarchic, regime.[12] Assessing the merits of this argument is beyond the scope of this discussion; what is relevant here is that de Ste. Croix's method of assessing the nature of the Athenian Empire again reflects what seems to be a fundamental assumption about the appropriate methodology for understanding interstate politics: that is, that this is not just something which happens between states, but is an arena where internal factors can also play a decisive role.

Although 'class struggle' encompasses a relatively broad range of activities, the range of internal factors which de Ste. Croix thinks might shape policy is nevertheless relatively limited, restricted to what might be labelled socio-political issues. Economic factors of course play a part in *OPW*'s picture of the background to the war, but much of the argument about the nature of the Megarian Decrees, and their triviality as a causal factor depends on a view of economic activity as something marginal to the mainstream life of the Greek city-state. A digression on the causes of war in the Greek world expands this into a more general principle: 'Anyone who believes that "commercial" factors played a part in determining the foreign policies of Greek states will receive a rude shock if he impartially collects the evidence for the origins of inter-state

The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World (London: Duckworth, 1981), p. 65, n. 17, and the useful discussion of the context of this change of view in R. Parker, 'Geoffrey Ernest Maurice de Ste Croix, 1910–2000', *PBA* 111 (2001), pp. 447–478, at pp. 469–470). For a discussion of de Ste. Croix's views on this see D. Lewis' contribution.

10 de Ste. Croix, *Origins*, p. 292.

11 G.E.M. de Ste. Croix, 'The Character of the Athenian Empire', *Historia* 3 (1954), pp. 1–41.

12 de Ste. Croix, *Origins*, p. 44. For the claim that 'class struggle' was key to understanding the Athenian Empire, *Origins*, pp. 34–35. On whether de Ste. Croix's arguments for a 'popular' Athenian Empire can be sustained, see Canevaro and D. Lewis in this volume.

wars'.[13] Religion is allowed a slightly greater role as a causal force, particularly in the discussion of the Megarian Decrees, which (for de Ste. Croix) were genuinely motivated by the Athenians' perception that the Megarians had committed an offence against 'their precious Two Goddesses'.[14] That argument, however, leads de Ste. Croix to the conclusion that this incident was 'something much more limited and very much less important *in itself* than has yet been realised'.[15] Religious issues might, that is, be deeply felt, but were not in themselves enough to direct the wider currents of interstate politics.[16]

To sum up so far: there is much in *OPW* which suggests that de Ste. Croix saw interstate politics as something which could not be understood without also looking at what was going on inside the state. Not all of these things are necessarily significant – economic activity has no real causal force, religion has little – but some things, especially political structures, are. Moreover, there is significant variation between states – notably between Athens and Sparta – and these variations, too, are important in explaining why states behave as they do.

None of this might seem particularly controversial. Indeed, it might appear fairly obvious that, if one wants to understand foreign policy, one has to understand how that policy is formulated, both in terms of the practicalities of decision-making, and in terms of the domestic pressures which might shape those decisions.[17] The reason why this aspect of *OPW*'s approach is worth

13 de Ste. Croix, *Origins*, p. 218. de Ste. Croix argues in this section that the most warfare in the Greek world arose from border disputes; a minority of conflicts (including the Peloponnesian War), could be categorised as hegemonic wars.

14 de Ste. Croix, *Origins*, p. 255.

15 de Ste. Croix, *Origins*, p. 256 (emphasis original).

16 The same approach is applied to the presence of religious factors in the machinery of relations between states, something which *OPW* acknowledges and explores at various points in the work (e.g. the possibility of appeal to gods and heroes in the 'constitution' of the Peloponnesian League (pp. 118–120), or the brief comments on Thucydides' representation of religious appeals and actions (pp. 19–20)). That is: these actions are an important part of the day-to-day business of interstate politics, but they have limited (or perhaps even no) wider explanatory power.

17 Such an approach would, however, be more controversial in some models of International Theory, particularly those associated with Structural Realism (or 'Neorealism'), which argue that the appropriate level at which to understand interstate relations is that of the state, and the system within which states operate. However, these theories were not fully articulated until the late 1970s (they are most strongly associated with K.N. Waltz's *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1979)), and (as noted already in the introduction to this piece) there is in any case little reason to suppose that de Ste. Croix would have been interested in engaging with them. (Although he does invoke the terms 'realist' and 'realism' to describe Thucydides' view of interstate politics (e.g. at *Origins* pp. 12, 24,

emphasising, however, is because it seems to contrast quite sharply with the position adopted elsewhere in the work, where de Ste. Croix appears to argue for a much stronger dividing line between politics within the state and politics between states.

2 *OPW* on Thucydides, and the (Im)morality of Interstate Relations

This alternative approach is found in the section of the text which engages most explicitly with international politics at a more abstract level – namely, the extended analysis of Thucydides in the book's introductory section.[18] But although this section might promise a more straightforward insight into de Ste. Croix's understanding of the nature of interstate politics, there is a complicating factor: although this part of the work includes some quite personal reflections on the interstate politics of de Ste. Croix's own time, which it seems reasonable to interpret as revealing de Ste. Croix's own understanding of interstate relations, it also contains extended discussions which are focalised through the eyes of Thucydides, and it is not always easy to tell where Thucydides ends and de Ste. Croix begins.

De Ste. Croix's interpretation of Thucydides' view of interstate politics is, however, quite clearly articulated in this section. His focus is on the historian's understanding of the morality of politics between states – and indeed something which is worth emphasising is that de Ste. Croix's Thucydides is not a wholly amoral writer. However, the distinctive quality of his approach to political morality (in de Ste. Croix's eyes) is that moral judgements are only applicable to behaviour within states.[19] The world of interstate politics is one of 'moral bleakness';[20] that is to say, a world in which conventional morality does not apply, and where behaviour is determined only by calculations of self-interest. For de Ste. Croix, it is the distinction between the morality which applies within the state and the moral universe (or rather: amoral universe) of interstate politics which is the key to understanding Thucydides' approach to interstate politics:

25, 26), it seems more likely that he is using them in a non-technical sense, rather than with any formal Realist theory in mind.)

18 de Ste. Croix, *Origins*, pp. 5–34.

19 de Ste. Croix, *Origins*, p. 19.

20 de Ste. Croix, *Origins*, p. 18.

> I believe that in practice he drew a fundamental distinction … between, on the one hand, the relations of *individuals inside the State* … where ordinary ethical considerations can apply, and on the other, the relations *between States*, where it is the strong who decide how they will treat the weak, and moral judgements are virtually inapplicable.[21]

De Ste. Croix notes that this distinction between intra- and interstate morality is not unique to Thucydides: he sees similar lines being drawn by Demosthenes, and in Aristotle's *Politics*. But it is, for de Ste. Croix, critical to understanding the Thucydidean view of interstate politics.

The second, and related, characteristic which de Ste. Croix sees in Thucydides' approach to interstate politics is an absolute impartiality in applying this 'moral bleakness'. The problem with 'morality' is, precisely, that it involves moral judgements, and – worse – subjective moral judgements: 'broadly speaking, what "We" are and do is good and right, what "They" are and do is bad and wrong'.[22] Thucydides' great virtue, according to de Ste. Croix, is that he avoids this subjectivity; the way that he achieves this is by making moral judgements irrelevant to the assessment of interstate politics.

De Ste. Croix finds support for this reading of Thucydides not just in the historian's narrative, but also (and perhaps especially) in things said in the speeches.[23] But he is committed to the position that these are not just ideas

21 de Ste. Croix, *Origins*, p. 16. In this, de Ste. Croix's view of Thucydides' morality differs from that of Moses Finley (sketched out in 'Thucydides the Moralist', in *Aspects of Antiquity* (New York: Viking, 1968), pp. 44–57): for Finley, Thucydides' moralism is more generally applied, and consists most importantly of the view that 'power is dangerous and corrupting'. de Ste. Croix does not engage directly with this view, but does object to Finley's characterisation (in the same piece) of Thucydides as 'not an original thinker' (de Ste. Croix, *Origins*, p. 22, n. 48); elsewhere in this section he rejects Finley's reading of the Melian Dialogue as an analysis concerned with justice in interstate politics (*Origins*, p. 15, n. 30).

22 de Ste. Croix, *Origins*, p. 24. de Ste. Croix here offers a contemporary parallel from Cold War politics, complaining that this partisan approach to defining morality (or the lack of it.) 'has imposed itself to an extent which scarcely anyone has altogether escaped, however much he may fancy himself to be unaffected' (*ibid.*): this can help to explain why de Ste. Croix was so keen to locate, and admire, a more impartial approach in Thucydides.

23 This methodology is explicitly defended by de Ste. Croix, *Origins*, p. 15: we find this view of interstate politics not just in Thucydides' narrative, but also in speeches given by characters of whom (de Ste. Croix thought) Thucydides approved (e.g. Hermocrates of Syracuse); de Ste. Croix also interprets the things said by the Athenians in the Melian Dialogue as a reflection of Thucydides' own views ('Thucydides has made the Athenians speak here … in his own peculiar terms' (*Origins*, p. 14)). For a more cautious approach to reconstructing Thucydides' moral views from the speeches, see now P. Woodruff, 'Justice and Morality in Thucydides', in P. Low (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Thucydides*

which Thucydides wished to explore (or wanted his readers to explore), but views which the historian himself fully endorsed, something that comes out most clearly in the quite remarkable passage of Thucydidean ventriloquism embedded in this section. 'If one had been able to corner Thucydides and press him to give an explicit summary of his views about the behaviour of states, he would have answered roughly as follows …'; and what follows is a two page 'speech', summarising what de Ste. Croix sees as the essence of Thucydidean theory: states are motivated by self-interest, and by a desire for security; they rule wherever they can; morality exists within a state, but has no place in dealings between states.[24] Thucydides is allowed to have (perhaps) felt 'unhappy and uncertain' about some of the atrocities which are associated with this view of interstate amorality,[25] but that unhappiness was not enough to prevent him from setting out what he saw as the truth.

This brings us to the problem I raised at the start of this section: is this view of interstate politics just a Thucydidean one, or is it also a Croixian one? De Ste. Croix – rather like Thucydides – gives us no explicit guidance on this. But – also like Thucydides – he provides some tantalising clues. The strongest of these, I would suggest, are the various comparanda with contemporary and recent history which de Ste. Croix deploys in this section: the question of whether Thucydides applied an objective standard to judging wartime atrocities is illustrated with parallels from World War II (a period to which, de Ste. Croix suggests, this objectivity is not routinely applied);[26] the subjective moral judgements which are generated by the polarities of the Cold War are contrasted – again unfavourably – with Thucydides' avoidance of such judgements.[27] Such parallels, together with a tendency in these pages to describe the amoral behaviour of states in terms of human nature or human universals,[28] combine to give the strong impression that de Ste Croix thinks that the Thucydidean approach to removing moral judgements from interstate politics could usefully be applied to his own times, and – more importantly for the argument here – that it was an appropriate mode of analysis to apply to

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 215–230, at pp. 216–218, with references to earlier explorations of the problem.

24 de Ste. Croix, *Origins*, pp. 22–23 (the quotation is from p. 22).

25 de Ste. Croix, *Origins*, p. 21; cf. (from the speech of 'Thucydides'), 'Of course the situation is deplorable …' (*Origins*, p. 23).

26 de Ste. Croix, *Origins*, p. 21.

27 de Ste. Croix, *Origins*, p. 24.

28 E.g., de Ste. Croix, *Origins*, p. 23, n. 50 (quoting Woodhead, with approval): 'that is … what people do'; cf. also the approving discussion of Thucydides' views of the consistency of human nature at pp. 32–33.

the interstate politics of any period, including (but not limited to) the Classical Greek world.[29] He does concede that 'this attitude of Thucydides is quite foreign to *most of us* today';[30] but the caveat is, I think, important: I suspect that 'most of us' was not intended to include de Ste. Croix himself. In other words: the Thucydidean view of Greek interstate politics (or, more precisely, de Ste. Croix's interpretation of the Thucydidean view of Greek interstate politics) was one which de Ste. Croix too would endorse.

But, as I suggested at the end of the previous section, this conclusion creates a problem. What we seem to be confronted with is, at best, a lack of fit, at worst, a straightforward contradiction between two models of interstate politics visible in *OPW*. On the one hand, there is the model outlined in the first section, in which the boundary between domestic and interstate politics is porous; in which, in fact, domestic politics (or socio-politics) might be the crucial determiner in shaping interstate policy. On the other, there is the Thucydides-inspired (but de Ste. Croix endorsed) model, in which the dividing line between politics inside and outside the state is both absolute and necessary. Can this apparent contradiction be resolved?

One answer to that question might simply be: no. *OPW* is a compendious, one might even say sprawling, work, and this might not be the only inconsistency in it. An early reviewer noted that one of the most striking disconnects in the book can be found in its treatment of Thucydides: the historian of the introduction (the focus of this section) is, as we have seen, particularly praised for his cold-eyed objectivity; the historian of the latter part of the book seems to be more of an Athenian partisan.[31] The lack of uniformity in the treatment of interstate relations, and specifically the factors shaping decisions made in the interstate arena, would then be another – related though distinct – example of such inconsistency.

One reason, though, why the shift in approach to interstate politics might have attracted less attention is because it correlates with a shift in perspective on the particular aspect of interstate politics, which is being analysed. The model identified in the first section (which required a connection between domestic and external politics) is one which focuses on the creation of policy;

29 Note also the discussion of Hobbes' reading of Thucydides (de Ste. Croix, *Origins*, pp. 26–27): Hobbes (for de Ste. Croix) correctly identifies commonalities between the interstate politics of Thucydides' and Hobbes' times (but misapplies or misreads Thucydides' analysis of domestic politics, mistakenly arguing that this too was relevant to Hobbes' age).

30 de Ste. Croix, *Origins*, p. 24 (emphasis added).

31 W.R. Connor, 'Review of *Origins of the Peloponnesian War*', *Phoenix* 27 (1973), pp. 399–403, at p. 400.

the one discussed in this section (which insists on a distinction between domestic and external politics) is about morality of those policies, and to an extent also about the wider structural or systematic factors which determine the place (or the lack of place) of morality in interstate politics. It might then be argued that the difference in approach simply reflects a different level of analysis. In that respect, de Ste. Croix's approach would not be completely out of step with some contemporary (to him) theorists of international politics;[32] the difference would simply be that he was less explicit in articulating this movement between analytical positions.

That said, the fact that we can give this discrepancy a label does not, I think, make it completely disappear. But its existence might ultimately be helpful, because it draws attention to some key methodological problems, which apply not so much (or certainly, not only) to *OPW*'s explanation of the causes of the Peloponnesian War, but to our broader understanding of the interstate politics of this period. Which of these levels of analysis – the internal or the structural – has greater explanatory power? Or, if they both need to form part of any explanation, how do they interact?

3 Bridging the Divide? The Contingency of Inevitability

In this final section, I want to suggest that *OPW* might offer a way of bridging this divide between the conduct of politics within and between states, even if it does not quite do so explicitly, or perhaps even deliberately. There are various ways that this problem could be explored, and I make absolutely no claim to be comprehensive in what follows. Instead, I will focus on one aspect of interstate behaviour, and particularly the morality of interstate behaviour, chosen because it is especially important to the overall argument of *OPW*: that is, the question of necessity or compulsion (*anankē*, and cognates). As we shall see, this is central to both Thucydides' and de Ste. Croix's explanations for the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War. But the issue of 'compulsion', considered more broadly, also has wider implications for a fundamental question of interstate politics: to what extent are actors (whether individuals or states) in interstate politics more or less free agents, able to make their own choices,

32 The classic exploration of this, again in the Realist (and proto Neo-Realist) tradition is K.N. Waltz, *Man, the State and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959): Waltz set out his exploration in terms of 'images' of international politics (one focussed on 'human nature' and individual action, a second on structures of states, and the third on the anarchic nature of the state system).

to what extent are they fundamentally constrained by wider forces, whether of 'human nature' or of the international system in which they are operating? That is, it has a bearing on precisely that 'level of analysis' problem which, I have suggested, lurks within *OPW* and looms more visibly over theoretical debates in International Relations.[33] Moreover, it is also relevant to another of de Ste. Croix's central contentions: that moral considerations have no place in shaping interstate politics.

The starting point for thinking about this problem is, of course, Thucydides' famous summation of the 'truest cause' of the war, which he offers at 1.23.6:

> In my view the real reason (*alethestatē prophasis*), true but unacknowledged, which forced the war (*anagkasai es to polemein*) was the growth of Athenian power and Spartan fear of it.[34]

Of the many potential problems in this sentence, I want to focus on just one: how should we understand *anagkasai* ('force', 'compel') here? How compelling is this compulsion; how inevitable, therefore, the inevitability of war? This question is one to which *OPW* devoted some attention,[35] and in doing so highlighted a crucial point: namely, that *anankē* in Thucydides is not, or not always, an absolute or objective force; rather, it is something which is, or can be, subjectively experienced. The use of the language of compulsion (de Ste. Croix argues) 'do[es] not by any means exclude a large measure of choice by the person under constraint'.[36] In other words: Thucydides is not here making a claim about the absolute inevitability of the war, but is instead describing a sort of constructed inevitability: with things being as they were, war was felt to be the only possible outcome, and therefore became the only possible outcome.

Although de Ste. Croix's observation about the potential subjectivity of necessity is both persuasive and important, I am less convinced by the way he applies that observation to this specific passage. His reading of 1.23.6 makes the Spartans the implied object of the verb of compulsion, so that the drive to war is being felt by (and therefore also implemented by) them alone. In parsing the Greek this way, de Ste. Croix follows Jowett's translation, but other readings are

33 On 'levels of analysis' as a fundamental methodological issue in International Theory, see the useful discussion of M. Hollis and S. Smith, *Explaining and Understanding International Relations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), esp. the summary of the problem at pp. 7–9.

34 The translation of M. Hammond, *The Peloponnesian War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

35 de Ste. Croix, *Origins*, pp. 60–62, 94–95.

36 de Ste. Croix, *Origins*, p. 61.

also possible: the more common solution is to follow Thucydides in leaving the object of the verb unspecified (so that it could, for example, include 'the Greeks' as a whole).[37] De Ste. Croix also wants the force of 'compulsion' to be very subjective indeed; in fact, so subjective that it almost ends up being equivalent to a choice. And, because it is a choice, it is a decision for which the Spartans can be criticised.[38] Finally, his reading very much downplays the role of the Athenians in creating this constrained situation. De Ste. Croix's concluding gloss of 1.23.6 takes the form of an (approving) quotation from Pearson: that the Spartans are compelled by 'fear of a worse alternative to war'.[39] Such a reading is notably less exact than the Thucydidean original, which is very clear on the point that it was the growth of Athenian power, and the fear that this provoked in the Spartans, that created the *anankē*. This matters not just because de Ste. Croix's gloss takes the Athenians out of the equation, but because it removes a key explanation for why the Spartans' sense of compulsion, though subjective, might still have been (or have reasonably been thought by them to have been) inescapable.

Might there be a better way of building on *OPW*'s insight on the subjectivity of *anankē*? A very helpful starting point is offered by Jaffe, in his recent study of the first book of the *History*.[40] Jaffe's interpretation of *anankē* is, in essence, quite similar to that of de Ste. Croix, in that he also sees this compulsion as something subjective, or perhaps rather, socially constructed: 'when Thucydidean speakers … speak of necessity they reveal their deepest

37 Jowett translates the line as: '… terrified the Lacedaemonians and forced them into war'. N.G.L. Hammond, 'Review of *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War*', *English Historical Review* 88 (1973), p. 870, is critical of this reading, suggesting that 'the Greeks' or 'the Athenians and Peloponnesians' would be a more logical supplement. Other English translators tend to allow the ambiguity to remain, as e.g. Hammond (quoted above); Crawley: 'made the war inevitable'.

38 For criticism of this reading, and the parallels de Ste. Croix adduces to support it, see W. den Boer, Review of *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War*, *Mnemosyne* 27 (1974), pp. 430–438, at pp. 434–436. de Ste. Croix's position is similar to, but more extreme than, that outlined by K.J. Dover, 'Some Neglected Aspects of Agamemnon's Dilemma', *JHS* 93 (1973), pp. 58–69, at pp. 65–66: framing a decision in terms of *anankē* does not mean that the agent has no choice, but does mean that they cannot be held fully responsible for their choice. The question of subjective *vs.* objective necessity in political theory more broadly is explored by D. James, 'The Concept of Practical Necessity from Thucydides to Marx', *Theoria* 61 (2014), pp. 1–17.

39 de Ste. Croix, *Origins*, p. 61, quoting L. Pearson, '*Prophasis* and *Aitia*', *TAPhA* 83 (1952), pp. 205–223, at p. 220. (Pearson, however, goes on to argue that Thucydides is clear that the 'worse alternative' is unchecked Athenian power.)

40 S. Jaffe, *Thucydides on the Outbreak of War: Character and Contest* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

beliefs'.[41] Jaffe also shares de Ste Croix's view that Spartan and Athenian beliefs are fundamentally different, and therefore their assessments of what counts as necessity are also profoundly different. Where Jaffe departs from the *OPW* assessment, though, is in his analysis of what those respective definitions of necessity are, and how (or where) we can locate them in Thucydides' text.

In summary, Jaffe argues for a much closer connection between Thucydides' presentation of *anankē* and his argument about the *prophasis* for the war. His suggestion is that Thucydides offers us two distinct *prophaseis*, and that these map onto, and derive from, two distinct understandings of what constitutes necessity. The 'truest *prophasis*' of 1.23.6 is, Jaffe suggests, a specifically Athenian *prophasis* (albeit one which Thucydides also endorsed), based on an Athenian understanding of what is necessary: the maintenance of their own power, based on fear of the consequences of losing it, as well as on the honour and profit accrued by keeping it.[42] All of this, in the Athenians' eyes, is a product of *anankē*, as we see in the Athenian ambassadors' speech later in Book 1: the Spartans (unlike the Athenians), they claim, have never had to face the *anankē* of choosing between ruling (*archein*) and being in danger (*kindunein*) (1.76.1). The Spartans, by contrast, understand the causes of the war in a parallel but different way: their 'greatest *prophasis*' (1.126) is shaped by an understanding of necessity which is based in justice, religion, and respect for treaties.[43] In other words: one of the (perhaps *the*) determining factors in shaping a state's view of necessity are precisely those sorts of domestic socio-political and cultural factors which seem to be so important to the *OPW*'s understanding of the operation of foreign policy.[44] A factor which, at first sight, seems to belong in the structural level of analysis – a constant, over which individuals or individual states have no influence – turns out to have its roots in the level of intra-state structures and beliefs. If that reading is accepted, then it might become easier to see how those two levels, often treated as distinct, might in practice overlap.

Focussing on the concept of *anankē* might also allow for progress on a specific aspect of the domestic/external distinction: that is, the question of where (if at all) moral considerations fit into the world of interstate politics. Appeals

41 Jaffe, *Thucydides*, p. 209.

42 Jaffe, *Thucydides*, p. 206; the argument for this position is elaborated esp. in ch. 3. R. Munson ('*Ananke* in Herodotus', *JHS* 121 (2001), pp. 30–50, at pp. 39–40) notes that this approach to *anankē*, in which moral considerations are less likely to be a compelling force (but internal, 'psychological' ones – fear, anger, etc – are) is distinctively Thucydidean: for Herodotus, moral considerations can also be a source of *anankē*.

43 Jaffe, *Thucydides*, ch. 4.

44 Jaffe, *Thucydides*, p. 12: 'Thucydidean necessity … has an internal as well as an external component'.

to necessity in Thucydides' work (especially those made by actors in the history) often surface in contexts where questions of justice and morality are under discussion, because necessity can be invoked as a defence against an allegation of injustice or immorality.[45] Ostwald, in his comprehensive study of the language of *anankē* in Thucydides, draws on this observation to argue that we can often (although not always) read invocations of *anankē* as an implied invitation to think about precisely these questions of justice and morality: 'by trying to discover … how man would have acted had there been no constraint to prevent them acting freely … we can get a glimpse of the moral values Thucydides' contemporaries regarded as desirable'.[46]

Invocations of *anankē* are also especially likely to be found in contexts of inequality or of disruption, and – particularly in Thucydides – in contexts associated with the exercise of imperial power and its consequences.[47] In their speech to the Spartans in Book 1, for example, the Athenians equate violent suppression (of the sort they, implausibly, claim their empire is not, yet, indulging in) with compulsion (1.77.4: ἀπὸ τοῦ κρείσσονος καταναγκάζεσθαι, 'being compelled by the stronger'). Pericles in the Funeral Oration talks of the Athenians 'compelling every sea and land to become accessible to our daring' (2.41.4: πᾶσαν μὲν θάλασσαν καὶ γῆν ἐσβατὸν τῇ ἡμετέρᾳ τόλμῃ καταναγκάσαντες γενέσθαι). In the Melian Dialogue, *archē* is characterised as a form of *anankē* (5.99: the Melians are 'provoked by the compulsion of empire', τῆς ἀρχῆς τῷ ἀναγκαίῳ παροξυνομένους).[48] Justice, by contrast, can only become a relevant factor if *anankē* has become moot (that is, in a situation where both sides of a

45 As, for example, by the Athenian ambassadors at Corinth (1.76.1, cited above), or by Pericles in characterising Athenian suffering in the plague (1.64.2), or by Cleon as a factor to be considered when deciding whether revolt from the Empire deserves punishment (3.39.7); for discussion and further examples, see M. Ostwald, *ΑΝΑΓΚΗ in Thucydides* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), pp. 53–61.

46 Ostwald, *ΑΝΑΓΚΗ*, p. 57.

47 Emphasised by Munson, '*Ananke*', p. 41, as a distinctive feature of Thucydides' usage; Herodotus, she observes, never applies *anankē* language to this context.

48 As noted above, the Athenians also represent their own imperial behaviour as a consequence of *anankē*: as well as the speech of the ambassadors in Book 1, Thucydides makes them express this view in the Melian Dialogue (5.105.2) and in the speech of Euphemus at Camarina (6.87.2.). For the use of the concept by non-Athenian speakers in Thucydides, see Jaffe, *Thucydides*, pp. 27–51 (focussing on the differential approaches of the Corcyreans and Corinthians in Book 1). It is notable that these observations are made primarily in speeches, which of course means that they should not necessarily be seen as views which Thucydides himself endorsed; but the frequency with which the idea surfaces, along with the fact that a similar perspective does appear in the narrative (as, for example, in the Corcyrean *stasis*: see below) suggests that it is not unreasonable to see this as an idea which Thucydides himself was interested in exploring.

dispute are subject to an equal level of constraint: 5.89); this is, of course, never the case in an imperial relationship.

It is, however, also important to note that *anankē* can also be a characteristic of domestic disruption or *stasis*. In this context, too, the compulsion can take a more literal form (forcing people to undertake certain actions or agree to certain decisions),[49] but a comment in the Corcyrean *stasis* suggests that Thucydides saw a more fundamental connection between the disruption of *stasis*, the side-lining of justice, and the growth of *anankē*: at 3.82.2, he observes that 'in peace and prosperous times, both states and individuals observe a higher morality, when there is no forced descent into hardship' (διὰ τὸ μὴ ἐς ἀκουσίους ἀνάγκας πίπτειν: 3.82.2). Significant here, too, is the wider context of this comment: people might be quite misguided about how constrained they actually are (3.82.4–5), but this does not matter because it is perceptions, not objective reality, which are driving their behaviour.

In other words: *anankē*, as a force which closes off conventionally moral courses of action, is most likely to operate in contexts where there is an imbalance of power, or where there is extreme turbulence or uncertainty. Such situations might arise within states, as the example of Corcyra shows; but in the period which Thucydides is describing (and the events on which his work focuses) they are particularly visible in relations between states; indeed, stark imbalances of power are, for Thucydides, one of the distinctive features of the post-Persian War world (as he emphasises at 1.99.3). The reason that morality seems to play so marginal a role in Thucydides' picture of interstate decision-making is not because morality has no place in interstate politics. Rather, it is because morality cannot function (or, at least, cannot properly function) in the specific context of the extremely unequal and turbulent interstate system of the mid-fifth century. The amorality of interstate politics is context-specific, not absolute. And if that is the case, then this would again suggest that the divide between domestic politics and interstate politics is less absolute than de Ste. Croix (at points) wanted to claim that it was; or rather, that what was true for the period which Thucydides described (and with which de Ste. Croix, in *OPW*, was most concerned) need not necessarily be true for the interstate politics of the entirety of Classical Greece, still less of other times and places.

49 E.g. 3.71.1 (Corcyra); 4.74.3 (Pegae); 8.38.3 (Chios); 8.76.6 (Athens); see Munson, '*Ananke*', p. 37, n. 39.

4 Conclusion

'Necessity', as de Ste. Croix correctly observed, is not, in Thucydides' world, an absolute. Rather, it is something determined by context, and by perception (or even misperception). For de Ste. Croix, this fact provided useful ammunition for his main battle in *OPW*: namely, the attempt to show that the Spartans were primarily culpable for the war, because what they believed to be compulsion was in fact something they might have avoided. I have argued here, however, that recognising the subjectivity of 'necessity' might actually be more important, or more useful, in trying to tease out (or even resolve) the contradictions in *OPW*'s wider picture of interstate politics. First, it can add a new perspective on the apparent amorality of the interstate world described by Thucydides: the marginalisation of morality and justice from this sphere is not an inevitability, but a consequence of the specific nature of foreign politics in this period, and in particular the highly unequal nature of the type of foreign politics practised by the Athenians. The divide between politics inside and outside the *polis* might, therefore, be less necessary and less inevitable than de Ste. Croix thought that Thucydides thought it was, and than the de Ste. Croix of the early sections of *OPW* also seems to have thought it was.

Second: it might provide a way of connecting internal structures and ideologies (which, as we have seen, *OPW* surely did think were relevant to understanding interstate relations) with external policies; that is, of finding a sort of middle way between a world of interstate politics in which *poleis* are free to shape their own destinies and one in which they are wholly constrained by the system in which they operate. Compulsion is a constraint, but it is not an absolute. Moreover, it is something which might be shaped by what happens within the state as much as by what happens between states.

I should be clear that I am not claiming that either of these views are ones which *OPW* endorses, or even which it would have been particularly interested in investigating. As I emphasised at the start, constructing a theory of interstate politics is certainly not an explicit aim of the book, even if it is clear from some sections of the work that de Ste. Croix did think that the events of the Peloponnesian War might be comparable, in some respects, to the interstate politics of other times and place. However, as I hope to have shown, *OPW* does include important ideas, and important assumptions, about both the practice and the ideology of interstate politics. At the very least, being more aware of those assumptions is a useful step is we want to properly assess the book's overall arguments about the origin of the war. And it might also help us make some small progress in understanding wider complexities of Greek interstate politics in the fifth century.