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Heidegger on Thucydides: Beginning to Reveal a Connection

The thought of Martin Heidegger, despite his own keen interest and voluminous writings on Classical texts, has not had much direct influence on Classicists or Ancient historians. This paper will aim to make the following two points in relation to Heidegger and Thucydides: First, a deep understanding of Heidegger allows one to glean new insights from even the most overworked passages (in this case from Thucydides). Second, it turns out that Heidegger's methodology is not truly "alien"; it is actually *mandated* by Thucydides's text itself. To this end, I will analyze three short passages from the opening chapters of Thucydides's work.

The first passage to be discussed is Thucydides's analysis of the name "Hellas." Whether or not this analysis has historical merit, we must note that this passage presupposes that names *matter*, that names are related to *power*, and that one can only uncover the workings of words through a methodology of close reading - so close it borders on "violent." Second, there is the emphasis upon *clarity*, especially as that which it is assumed the reader of this text is searching for. What does it mean for Thucydides to "gather events into a clarity" (this is Lowell Edmunds's phrase, not Heidegger's)? Finally, understanding the importance of clarity will help illuminate 1.23.6, Thucydides's notorious sentence about the causes of the war. This passage is full of references to arguing and to appearance, and if we accept Heidegger's contention that the word *aletheia* retains at least traces of its etymology as that which is not concealed, then we can say the following: what is generally interpreted as the "truest cause" is actually the more revealing argument, the argument that goes farthest toward gathering events *as* events amidst numerous other meritorious contentions. This is why Thucydides emphasizes this argument with his "own voice" even as he allows this claim to be just one of many in the mouths of those arguing about the war.

Working with Thucydides at a greater critical distance is not only sound intellectual history, but may well provide clues about "actual" events and is even a means of questioning our own historiographic and metaphysical assumptions. I am proposing that the work of Heidegger creates and cultivates such a distance.