

Thesis Prospectus Thucydides and Machiavelli on Necessity

Tentative Title

Thucydides and Machiavelli on Necessity

Project Description

In the famous Melian dialogue in *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, Thucydides has the Athenian envoys tell the Melians that, “the strong do what they can while the weak suffer what they must.” In *The Prince*, Machiavelli believes that princes must, “learn to be able not to be good, and to use this and not use it according to necessity.” These two statements illustrate a central theme in the thought of Thucydides and Machiavelli: necessity. Thucydides and Machiavelli are often considered the founders of realism. That is, they both understand that political life is constrained by necessity. In my thesis, I will examine how Thucydides and Machiavelli understand the concept of necessity and how this relates to their ideas regarding morality and politics.

In *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, besides the Melian dialogue, Thucydides gives numerous examples of how necessity imposes limitations on human life. For example, Thucydides argues that the Peloponnesian War was *inevitable* given the threat that the rise of Athens as an imperial power posed to Sparta, the hegemon of the *status quo*. If the war was inevitable, then both Athens and Sparta were unable to prevent its outbreak. The war was, in other words, necessary. Further, in Pericles’ Funeral Oration, Thucydides’ Pericles portrays Athens as a place where such lofty ideals as freedom are actualized. However, immediately after writing the funeral oration, Thucydides gives an account of the plague that decimated Athens in 430 B.C. Thus, Thucydides suggests that the ability of human beings to achieve their aspirations will always be limited by bodily necessity.

Machiavelli argues in *The Prince* that acquisition is natural to human beings. In other words, human beings, by their very nature, are necessitated to acquire. This stems from the fact that one who does not spend his time acquiring and instead focuses on making “a profession of good in all regards” will “come to ruin among so many who are not good.” For Machiavelli, the influence of necessity means that politics cannot simply operate in accord with Christian moral teaching. Moreover, Machiavelli shows, in his *Discourses on Livy*, that, if a prince wishes to make his subjects act according to his wishes, he must impose necessity on them. In fact, Machiavelli emphasizes the role of necessity to such a degree that he thinks that, by using it, princes can make their people virtuous. Necessity therefore plays an important role in the thought of both Thucydides and Machiavelli.

As stated above, I propose to examine the role that necessity plays in the works of Thucydides and Machiavelli. Some questions that I will consider are the following: How do Thucydides and Machiavelli understand necessity? Why do they believe that an understanding of necessity is vital to an understanding of human affairs? How is necessity similar or different for the two thinkers at the levels of the individual and the political community? How is their realism informed by their views on necessity? What attitude do Thucydides and Machiavelli wish for individuals to cultivate in the face of necessity? These questions have implications for how human beings are motivated to act in the world. As founders of realism, Thucydides and Machiavelli are influential in international relations, which commonly references ideas found in their texts. Indeed, one example of how Thucydides continues to be used today is found in Graham T. Allison’s concept of the “Thucydides trap,” which he uses in an attempt to understand contemporary relations between the United States and China.

Research Plan

My preparations for writing my thesis will begin with my reading the secondary literature that I have listed in my annotated bibliography, which I will begin doing over the summer. I will read over that literature closely, paying particular attention to the following works: *Thucydides & the Pursuit of Freedom* by Mary P. Nichols, *The Humanity of Thucydides* by Clifford Orwin, and *Machiavelli on Liberty and Conflict*, which was edited by David Johnston, Nadia Urbinati, and Camila Vergara. These works specifically deal with the problem of necessity in the thought of Thucydides and Machiavelli, which will help me in my endeavor to both understand their views on this theme individually and, by extension, in comparison with each other. I will also carefully read the three articles that I have included in my annotated bibliography that specifically consider both the thought of Thucydides and the thought of Machiavelli: Steven Forde's "Varieties of Realism: Thucydides and Machiavelli," David James' "The Concept of Practical Necessity from Thucydides to Marx," and Michael Palmer's "Machiavellian virtù and Thucydidean aretē: Traditional Virtue and Political Wisdom in Thucydides." While studying this secondary literature, I will take notes to help me write my thesis. My goal is to have read all of the relevant secondary literature by the beginning of the fall semester.

Following my reading of the important secondary literature that grapples with the views that Thucydides and Machiavelli hold on necessity, I will read and, in some cases, reread Thucydides' *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, Machiavelli's *The Prince*, and relevant passages from the *Discourses on Livy*. I will think about how the material from the secondary literature relates to the primary literature and how I can incorporate the material into my thesis. I desire to have examined all of the relevant primary literature by the end of September.

After having read the primary and the secondary literature, I will outline my thesis, although I will most likely have begun this process while reading the primary literature. I propose to write four chapters for my thesis. The first will be an introduction to the concept of necessity in the thought of Thucydides and Machiavelli and why it is important. The second chapter will be a more thorough analysis of Thucydides' views regarding necessity. The third chapter will do the same except, instead of considering Thucydides' ideas on necessity, I will examine Machiavelli's. The fourth chapter will be a comparison between the positions that Thucydides and Machiavelli hold on necessity. This comparison will shed light on the foundations for the similarities and differences between Thucydides and Machiavelli on the nature of morality and politics. I wish to have completed an outline of my thesis, at the latest, by the end of October.

Next, I will begin drafting my thesis. I will try to finish my rough draft of the first chapter by the middle of November, with the final draft being finished by the end of November. In December, and throughout winter break, I will work on my second and third chapters, hoping to have the final drafts of them completed by the middle of February. I will then work on my fourth chapter, attempting to finish it by late April.

Preparation

I have taken many courses at Holy Cross that have prepared me to write a thesis dealing with the theme of necessity in Thucydides and Machiavelli. I have studied Thucydides' *The History of the Peloponnesian War* in two courses: "Philosophy of History" with Professor Jeffrey Bernstein and "Classical Political Philosophy" with Professor David Schaefer. Further, I am currently taking "Introduction to Greek" with Professor Aaron Seider. My background in ancient Greek will help me gain a better understanding of certain ideas in Thucydides where an English translation of the text will not suffice. I have studied Machiavelli in "Introduction to Political Philosophy" with Professor David Schaefer and in "Machiavelli's Politics" with Professor Faisal Baluch. As a result, I have been exposed to Machiavelli's two most important works: *The Prince* and the *Discourses on Livy*. Therefore, I have been prepared to write a thesis on Thucydides and Machiavelli from the courses that I have taken at Holy Cross.

Moreover, I am motivated to further my studies in Thucydides and Machiavelli, especially with respect to the theme of necessity in their work. This is because their views of necessity question the extent to which moral considerations should be taken into account in politics. As a believer in Catholic natural law, writing a thesis on Thucydides and Machiavelli will prove edifying for me as, in the process, my own moral beliefs will be challenged, enabling me to become a better thinker.

Although I have had some preparation for writing this thesis, there are nonetheless factors that limit my degree of preparation for the task. Indeed, most of my studies of Thucydides have been with respect to the speeches that he writes in *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, and I have not read much of the secondary literature on the two thinkers. I propose to compensate for these gaps in my preparation by scouring the secondary literature that deals with the thought of Thucydides and Machiavelli on the theme of necessity in the summer and, after that, reading all of Thucydides' *magnum opus*.

Annotated Bibliography

Primary Sources:

Machiavelli, Niccolò. *Discourses on Livy*. Translated by Harvey C. Mansfield. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996.

In the *Discourses on Livy*, Machiavelli says that he wishes to introduce “new modes and orders.” Along with *The Prince*, this is one of the two texts that are most important for understanding Machiavelli's political thought, and he often deals with the theme of necessity in the *Discourses*. Hence, it is a text that is fundamental for my thesis.

Machiavelli, Niccolò. *The Prince*. Translated by Harvey C. Mansfield. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Machiavelli's *The Prince* provides advice to aspiring princes with respect to how they can acquire and maintain their principalities. However, it is also a foundational text in political philosophy, and one theme that Machiavelli discusses in it is necessity. As a result, it is a text that I will need to examine for my thesis.

Strassler, Robert B, ed. *The Landmark Thucydides*. Translated by Richard Crawley. New York: Free Press, 1996.

This book contains Thucydides' *The History of the Peloponnesian War* in its entirety. In this text, Thucydides not only chronicles the events of the Peloponnesian War but also gives insight into his own political thought, including his ideas regarding necessity. Therefore, it will be invaluable for my thesis.

Secondary Sources on Thucydides:

Ahrens Dorf, Peter J. “The Fear of Death and the Longing for Immortality: Hobbes and Thucydides on Human Nature and the Problem of Anarchy.” *The American Political Science Review* 94, no. 3 (September 2000): 579-93.

This source examines the relationship between the thought of Thomas Hobbes and Thucydides with respect to their views on the human fear of death and its implications for anarchy. Ahrens Dorf argues that for Thucydides the fear that human beings have of violent death is less powerful than their desire to achieve immortality, which means that anarchy is a permanent human possibility. Ahrens Dorf also deals with the theme of necessity in this article. Therefore, it will prove useful for my thesis.

Connor, Walter Robert. *Thucydides*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984.

This source analyzes each book from Thucydides' *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, with attention paid to Thucydides' political teaching. It will be useful for me by providing me with views regarding the broader significance of Thucydides' passages as a whole.

MacLeod, C. W. "Reason and Necessity: Thucydides III 9-14, 37-48." *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 98, no. 1 (1978): 64-78.

In this article, C. W. MacLeod argues that three speeches concerning the fate of Mytilene in Thucydides' *The History of the Peloponnesian War* illustrate the limits as well as the possibilities that human beings have to listen to reason given the reality of human nature. Since the limits of human nature are an example of necessity, this source will give me useful ideas with respect to the power of necessity in Thucydides' thought.

Nichols, Mary P. *Thucydides & the Pursuit of Freedom*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015.

Nichols' work discusses Thucydides' *magnum opus* from the standpoint of the theme of freedom. Thus, it will be useful for my thesis as it will provide me with an interpretation of Thucydides that argues that he was primarily concerned with the idea of freedom, rather than its contrary, necessity.

Orwin, Clifford. "Piety, Justice, and the Necessities of War: Thucydides' Delian Debate." *The American Political Science Review* 83, no. 1 (March 1989): 233-39.

Orwin considers how the necessities of human life caused Greek thinkers to contemplate whether the demands placed upon them by the Greek gods were as important as the demands placed upon them by worldly things. This, Orwin argues, led to the question as to whether the world of the *polis* was determined by the workings of the gods or of necessity. Since it deals with the question of necessity in Thucydides, this source will be useful in assisting me in developing ideas for my thesis.

Orwin, Clifford. *The Humanity of Thucydides*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.

Orwin's *The Humanity of Thucydides* aims at showing how Thucydides' humanity stems from his thought, despite his understanding of the world as a harsh place. Indeed, Orwin believes that the foundation for Thucydides' humanity lies in his beliefs regarding compulsion and right. Thus, it discusses the theme that necessity plays in the thought of Thucydides and so will be a useful resource for me in my efforts to understand Thucydides' views on this theme.

Ostwald, Martin. *ANANKH in Thucydides*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988.

Ostwald's book provides an analysis of Thucydides' understanding of *anankē*, which is the Greek word for "necessity." As a result, this work will prove fruitful in helping me develop my own ideas concerning Thucydides' understanding of necessity in *The History of the Peloponnesian War*.

Strauss, Leo. *The City and Man*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978.

In this book, Leo Strauss provides essays on Aristotle, Plato, and Thucydides. Strauss portrays Thucydides as a thinker who was concerned, not only with chronicling historical events, but with ethical questions as well. Since questions of necessity are inseparable from questions of ethics, this source will be useful for my thesis.

Secondary Sources on Machiavelli:

Howes, Dustin Ells. "Creating Necessity: Well-Used Violence in the Thought of Machiavelli." *symplokē* 20, nos. 1-2 (2012): 183-207.

In this article, Howes provides an interpretation of Machiavelli's understanding of necessity. Howes says that, "Since one person's freedom of action is another person's necessity, his [Machiavelli's] analysis undermines the idea that violence is necessary after all. Machiavelli shows us that 'necessity' in politics, military and otherwise, is usually made by us." This source will be useful for me as it provides an interpretation with which I disagree. Indeed, I think that, for Machiavelli, necessity arises from the very nature of human beings and the limits that are imposed on them by their environments. Therefore, it will serve as a position that I wish to refute in my thesis.

Johnston, David, Nadia Urbinati, and Camila Vergara. *Machiavelli on Liberty and Conflict*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017.

This book consists of numerous essays written by many different scholars of Machiavelli. Of particular interest to me for my thesis are the essays entitled "Machiavelli on Necessity" by Harvey C. Mansfield, "Machiavelli and the Misunderstanding of Princely Virtù" by Quentin Skinner, "The Necessity to Be Not-Good: Machiavelli's Two Realisms" by Erica Brenner, "Loyalty in Adversity" by Stephen Holmes, and "Machiavelli and the Modern Tyrant" by Paul A. Rahe. These essays will prove useful for me as they will provide me with numerous perspectives on Machiavelli's idea of necessity.

Mansfield, Harvey C. *Machiavelli's New Modes and Orders: A Study of the Discourses on Livy*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001.

This book is a commentary on the *Discourses on Livy* written by Machiavelli scholar Harvey Mansfield. Mansfield's interpretation is guided by his understanding that Machiavelli wants to propose "new modes and orders" in the *Discourses*. This work will provide me with a useful resource that will guide me in my study of the *Discourses*.

Mansfield, Harvey C. *Machiavelli's Virtue*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998.

This work consists of a collection of essays by Mansfield. The chapters that are most important for my thesis are entitled "Machiavelli's Virtue," "Necessity in the Beginnings of Cities," and "Strauss' Machiavelli." The first of the two listed essays grapple with the theme of necessity in Machiavelli and, hence, will be useful to help me come to an understanding of Machiavelli's conception of necessity. Further, "Strauss' Machiavelli" will help me in my effort to understand Leo Strauss' *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, an important work of Machiavelli scholarship that is nonetheless infamously hard to interpret.

Pocock, J.G.A. *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016.

One of the most influential books in Machiavelli studies, Pocock examines the influence that Machiavelli's thought, which he interprets as presenting a revival of classical republicanism, had on the modern world. Pocock offers an interpretation of Machiavelli which emphasizes what he calls the "Machiavellian Moment." This is when a republic comes to an understanding of and takes steps to mitigate its vulnerability. Since this text deals with Machiavelli's understanding of what a republic ought to do when it is at its most vulnerable (i.e., when it is constrained by necessity), it will be useful for my thesis.

Skinner, Quentin. *Machiavelli: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

In this source, Quentin Skinner, one of the most influential members of the Cambridge School, grapples with key Machiavellian ideas such as virtue, fortune, liberty, and necessity. I will use this text as a means to inform myself on Skinner's interpretation of necessity and its counterpart, liberty, in Machiavelli's thought.

Strauss, Leo. *Thoughts on Machiavelli*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995.

Strauss' *Thoughts on Machiavelli* offers a famous, albeit extremely perplexing, interpretation of Machiavelli's intention and teaching in *The Prince* and the *Discourses on Livy*. Strauss says, at the beginning of his work, that he is, "inclined to the old-fashioned and simple opinion according to which Machiavelli was a teacher of evil" and that Machiavelli, "is more concerned with the salvation of his fatherland than with the salvation of his soul." I will use this work to educate myself on one of the most influential interpretations of Machiavelli, which will have implications for his views on necessity.

Zuckert, Catherine. *Machiavelli's Politics*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017.

This source is a study of all of Machiavelli's works. It will be useful for me as a reference work that provides a systematic treatment of Machiavelli's thought. Hence, when I need to understand how an idea in Machiavelli relates to the rest of his thought, this book will be beneficial for me to consult.

Secondary Sources on Thucydides and Machiavelli:

Ahrens Dorf, Peter and Thomas Pangle. *Justice Among Nations: On the Moral Basis of Power and Peace*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999.

This book contains chapters entitled "Classical Realism: Thucydides" and "Modern Realism: Machiavelli and His Successors." Since my thesis deals with Thucydides and Machiavelli on the concept of necessity, a key component in realist thought, this book will be useful for my project.

Cropsey, Joseph and Leo Strauss, ed. *History of Political Philosophy*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987.

This source is a collection of articles written by scholars on numerous figures in the tradition of political philosophy. It contains an article on Thucydides by David Bolotin and an article on Machiavelli by Leo Strauss. I will use these two articles to inform myself on important interpretations of Thucydides and Machiavelli, which will assist me in coming to my own views on the positions that they hold on necessity.

Forde, Steven. "Varieties of Realism: Thucydides and Machiavelli." *The Journal of Politics* 54, no. 2 (May 1992): 372-393.

This article compares and contrasts Thucydides and Machiavelli with respect to how they understand the relation of realism to ethics. Forde argues that Thucydides holds a tragic understanding of the relationship between the two while Machiavelli's realism stems from his "ethical skepticism." This work will be useful for me as it will help me think through the ways in which the thought of Thucydides and Machiavelli is similar and different.

James, David. "The Concept of Practical Necessity from Thucydides to Marx." *Theoria: A Journal of Social & Political Theory* 61, no. 1 (March 2014): 1-17.

James delineates an understanding of necessity in Thucydides and Machiavelli. He presents two forms of necessity, objective and subjective, and how they relate to the views of necessity found in Thucydides and

Machiavelli. Therefore, it will be useful for my understanding of how the concept of necessity found in Thucydides compares to the understanding of necessity found in Machiavelli.

Palmer, Michael. "Machiavellian virtù and Thucydidean aretē: Traditional Virtue and Political Wisdom in Thucydides." *The Review of Politics* 51, no. 3 (Summer 1989): 365-385.

This article juxtaposes the ideas regarding "virtue" in the thought of Thucydides and Machiavelli. However, Palmer argues that Thucydides' concept of virtue differs from that of Machiavelli. This source will be useful for me because it, rather than noting the similarities between Thucydides and Machiavelli, illustrates the differences between them.