

## Thucydides 1.22

Thucydides' well-known words: ὅσοι δὲ βουλήσονται τῶν τε γενομένων τὸ σαφὲς σκοπεῖν καὶ τῶν μελλόντων ποτὲ ἀδῆς κατὰ τὸ ἀνθρώπινον τοιοῦτων καὶ παραπλησίων ἔσεσθαι have been translated variously.<sup>1</sup> I restrict myself to a discussion of the underlined words. Rex Warner in the Penguin Classics translation renders (in a parenthesis): "human nature being what it is." The classic Crawley translation has: "in the course of human things." C. F. Smith in the Loeb edition has: "in all human probability."<sup>2</sup> S. Hornblower<sup>3</sup> says the phrase "is broader than 'according to human nature'; it means something more like 'the human condition' or 'situation'," in this following H. P. Stahl.<sup>4</sup> G. E. M. de Ste Croix, less correctly according to Hornblower, would interpret the phrase to refer to "the constancy of human nature."<sup>5</sup> M. Cogan refers to "the human thing," "a second human nature, τὸ ἀνθρώπινον a public, not a private principle of action."<sup>6</sup>

Had T meant something like human nature, he would in fact – as he does elsewhere – have used expressions with physis, as in 2.50: κατὰ τὴν ἀνθρωπείαν φύσιν.<sup>7</sup> "The human condition" is better, and probably in essence correct, but not complete, for as it stands the phrase is all but meaningless. How would one best go about delimiting the meaning of the word in this phrase? The natural way to an interpretation is to see what other expressions T might have used, and to what τὸ ἀνθρώπινον might

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<sup>1</sup> The Scholiast (C. Hude, *Scholia in Thucydidem* (Leipzig 1927, repr. NY 1973) comments unhelpfully: ἐπειδὴ ἀδηλα τὰ ἀνθρώπινα.

<sup>2</sup> *Thucydides* (Cambridge 1919).

<sup>3</sup> *A Commentary on Thucydides I* (Oxford 1991) 61.

<sup>4</sup> *Thucydides* (Munich 1966) 33: "das, was den Menschen angeht," "die Bedingungen menschlicher Existenz." Lowell Edmunds, *Chance and Intelligence in Thucydides* (Cambridge 1975) 161 renders: "in accordance with the way of mankind," "in accordance with the human."

<sup>5</sup> *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War* (London 1972) 32.

<sup>6</sup> Marc Cogan, *The Human Thing* (Chicago 1981) 185-196.

<sup>7</sup> ἀνθρώπιος modifies φύσις often (1.76.3, 2.50.1, 3.45.7, 3.84.2, 4.61.5). Elsewhere it modifies τρόπος (1.76.2, 4.116.2), τέχνη (2.48.4), λόγος (5.89.1), παραλόγοι (8.24.5), νόμισις (5.105.1). In later books (5-8) the root is often adverbial (5.103.2) or neuter (5.68.2, 5.015.2, 7.77.4); while ἀνθρώπινος modifies only δύναμις (6.78.2), ἀμαρτία (ἀμαρτεῖν ἀνθρώπινως - 3.40.1).

be contrasted. We of course cannot know what he might have used, but clearly he would have contrasted the word either with τὸ θεῖον or τὸ ζῶον. This latter is of course excluded. I cite several passages in support of the opposition between human and divine, the first from T himself (albeit in the mouth of the Athenian spokesman in the Melian Dialogue - 5.105.1-2): ΑΘ. Τῆς μὲν τοίνυν πρὸς τὸ θεῖον εὐμενείας οὐδ' ἡμεῖς οἰόμεθα λελείπεσθαι· οὐδὲν γὰρ ἔξω τῆς ἀνθρωπείας τῶν μὲν ἐς τὸ θεῖον νομίσεως, τῶν δ' ἐς σφᾶς αὐτοὺς βουλήσεως δικαιοῦμεν ἢ πράσσομεν. ἡγούμεθα γὰρ τὸ τε θεῖον δόξῃ τὸ ἀνθρώπιον τε σαφῶς διὰ παντὸς ὑπὸ φύσεως ἀναγκαίας, οὐδ' ἂν κρατῆ, ἄρχειν· καὶ ἡμεῖς οὔτε θέντες τὸν νόμον οὔτε κειμένῳ πρῶτοι χρησάμενοι, ὄντα δὲ παραλαβόντες καὶ ἐσόμενον ἐς αἰεὶ καταλείποντες χρώμεθα αὐτῷ, εἰδότες καὶ ὑμᾶς ἂν καὶ ἄλλους ἐν τῇ αὐτῇ δυνάμει ἡμῖν γενομένους δρῶντας ἂν ταυτὸ. The word here, to be sure, is not ἀνθρώπινον, but the root is the same and the meaning similar at least. T's wording, which contrasts divine and human, is distinctly reminiscent of the σαφῆς σκοπεῖν...κατὰ τὸ ἀνθρώπινον of 1.22, and in a sense would appear to be a gloss of it.

The second passage (4.116.2) is in T's own words: ὁ δὲ Βρασίδης (ἔστι γὰρ ἐν τῇ Ληκύθῳ Ἀθηναῖς ἱερὸν, καὶ ἔτυχε κηρύξας, ὅτε ἔμελλε προσβαλεῖν, τῷ ἐπιβάντι πρῶτῳ τοῦ τείχους τριάκοντα μνᾶς ἀργυρίου δώσειν) νομίσας ἄλλῳ τινὶ τρόπῳ ἢ ἀνθρωπείῳ τὴν ἄλωσιν γενέσθαι, τὰς τε τριάκοντα μνᾶς τῇ θεῷ ἀπέδωκεν ἐς τὸ ἱερὸν καὶ τὴν Λήκυθον καθελὼν καὶ ἀνασκευάσας τέμενος ἀνήκεν ἅπαν. It is to be noted here as well that divinity is mentioned in the near vicinity.

The third passage comes from the opening of Gorgias' Epitaphios (82 B 6 DK), where the two words are directly contrasted, as one might expect: τί γὰρ ἀπὴν τοῖς ἀνδράσι τούτοις ὦν δεῖ ἀνδράσι προσεῖναι· τί δὲ καὶ προσῆν ὦν οὐ δεῖ προσεῖναι; εἰπεῖν δυναίμην ἃ βούλομαι, βουλοίμην δ' ἃ δεῖ, λαθὼν μὲν τὴν θεῖαν νέμεσιν, φυγῶν δὲ τὸν ἀνθρώπινον φθόνον.

From these passages it would appear that there was in the later fifth century (not surprisingly) a contrast between human and divine, and that T appeals to it in 1.22. The opposition between divine and human is of course commonplace in Greek, and goes back (at least) to Homer and his phrase πατὴρ ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε, and can be seen as well (e.g.) in Plato's Cratylus 416 C: θεῶν ἢ ἀνθρώπων, as well as from T himself (2.53.4, in connection with the plague): θεῶν φόβος ἢ ἀνθρώπων νόμος οὐδεὶς ἀπεῖργε. The question is: would a reader of T in seeing κατὰ τὸ ἀνθρώπινον immediately infer that a contrast with divine agency was intended? If so, then T is making a different claim about his history than is

sometimes assumed, and a different claim about the limits of human endeavor. He means that things can be expected to turn out as they have provided that the divine does not interfere, as it did with the plague. Far from neglecting the gods' existence and activity, T recognizes that his history is accurate, valid and predictive only of human actions not influenced or thwarted by divine intervention or by chance events. In this, then, he would be like the author of *On the Sacred Disease* who maintains: Περὶ δὲ τῆς ἱερῆς νόσου καλεομένης ᾧδ' ἔχει. οὐδέν τι μοι δοκεῖ τῶν ἄλλων θειότερη εἶναι νόσων οὐδὲ ἱερωτέρη. No more, but probably no less: one notes that T used the adjective ἀνθρώπεια in his description of the plague, as well as in the Melian Dialogue, a plague of a different sort. The divine has a role, and one cannot count on human actions and desires coming to fruition because of the possibility of gods' activities. T is modest in his claims, and he maintains that his history is valid and predictive only of human actions and plans unaffected by natural or supernatural interference. He does not deny that the divine may intervene. Translate: "subject to human limitations" or more clumsily, "insofar as matters are under human control."

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