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FROM APHORISMS TO THEORETICAL ANALYSES: THE BIRTH OF HUMAN SCIENCES IN THE FIFTH CENTURY B.C.

Often it is useful, if one wishes to understand how major transformations in intellectual disciplines came about, to examine the manifestations of these transformations in specific details. But it is necessary that these be facts sufficiently well attested to to constitute probative indicators. This condition is fulfilled with regard to the use of general reflections among the authors of ancient Greece. Their presence is indeed one of the characteristic features of Greek literature, in particular from the Seventh to the Fourth centuries B.C. However, we can observe that their nature clearly changes in the last third of the Fifth century, precisely at the moment when, in an abrupt surge of rationalism, we suddenly see born in Athens a whole series of areas of research on man that

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Western civilization would later take up once more and develop further. This coincidence cannot be accidental; and it is permitted to think that there is an indicator here capable of revealing in greater detail the manner in which this development, so important for the history of thought, occurred.

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Homer always tends to speak universally. He does not attach importance to national differences or individual traits, other than for brief characteristics given for each hero. Nevertheless, he very seldom has recourse to general formulations. In the *Iliad* these occur only in the form of brief maxims, with no broad extension. They are perhaps more numerous in the *Odyssey*; but they are still clumsy there, as is proven by the many criticisms they have provoked.[1]

On the other hand, as soon as the Archaic period begins, general reflections abound. Hesiod opens the series; a poem such as *Works and Days* is made up entirely of rules, moral or practical, presented in a general form ("Let us say no longer that there is but one type of struggle: in this life there are two ..."; "Immoderation is a bad thing for the poor; even the great have difficulty bearing it ..."). These rules are interspersed with brief remarks to his brother, Perses ("For you, Perses, keep this advice in your heart ...[2]") Thus at the beginning, verses 3 to 8, 11 to 26, 30 to 32 and 40 - 41, namely more than half, are all general.

This feature will be found again, strangely, in almost all lyric poetry. This is the era of so-called gnomic poetry, that is, poetry filled with these short general reflections on human life that were called in Greek *gnômai*. This is particularly true of poets who give advice, such as Theognis or Solon; texts from the latter author on wealth or good order in the city were very well known. Solon was also numbered among the Seven Wise Men, who were famous for

[1] See, for example, VII, 181-185; VIII, 167-176; XVIII, 130-132; XIX, 562-563.

[2] The remark is similar in verse 213, after the myth of the sparrowhawk and before the long general tirade against immoderation (214 and ff.); this tirade ends with a counsel to kings (248: "For you, kings ..."), and he only returns to Perses in 274: "For you, Perses ...".

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this type of lessons with universal application.

In a freer and more ample form, this tone also contributed to the grandeur of Pindar who did not hesitate to insert some statement of universal revelation in his odes. The *First Olympian* begins by speaking of water and gold; others celebrate poetry or harmony, still others evoke the fate of mortals in their relationship with the gods. The example of an athlete whose victory is being celebrated becomes the occasion for a lofty meditation extending to human life in general.

Even more remarkably this tendency animates all Greek tragedy and can even be found in its very structure. Dramatic characters, engaged in action, are contrasted with the chorus that cannot participate in the action and that, after each episode, raises questions about its meaning, looking at it from a universal angle. Moreover, in the dialogue itself, and in the very heart of the action, the characters plead their cause, beg and threaten, but they do so with the aid of these *gnômai* that can have from one to ten verses.

If we examine these general reflections in the three great tragedians who succeeded one another in Athens, we notice several remarkable facts.[3]

The first is that these reflections indubitably increase in the course of the century. A simplified diagram of their frequency, showing the number of verses of a general tone in the plays, is indicative:

Aeschylus: *The Persians* (472): 21 general verses out of 1077
The Suppliants (around 463): 94 general verses out of 104
Sophocles: *Trachiniae* (before 440): 63 general verses out of 1278
Euripides: *Medeas* (431): 170 general verses out of 1420
Hippolytus (428): 227 general verses out of 1466

After 420 B.C. the figure for general verses settles at around 100,[4] which is still quite high, around one verse out of ten.

[3] General reflections in tragedy have often been studied; various German dissertations can be cited as well as the work by H. Fr. Johansen, *General Reflection in Tragic Rhesis*, Copenhagen, 1959. Finally see our study entitled "Les réflexions générales d'Euripide: analyse littéraire et critique textuelle", in *Comptes-rendus de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres*, avril-juin 1983, p. 405-418.

[4] They range from 6% to 16% depending on the plays.

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The second fact of note is that these general reflections then quite clearly change their role and nature.

Apart from exceptions, general reflections in the theatre of Aeschylus and of Sophocles all deal with the human condition and moral principles, and these fall in the direct line of meditations on man so dear to earlier poets. In Euripides, on the other hand, although this type of reflection remains frequent, many deal with marriage or wealth, or are about democracy, exile, the place of women, decisive factors in combat. Thus they are no longer moral aphorisms but true reflections that often take place in discussions of ideas, accompanied by arguments and analyses. Even when it is a question of morality and passions, considerations are more precise. We can think of Phaedra analyzing what had led to her downfall (in *Hippolytus*, 380 ff.); "We have the notion and the discernment of honorableness, but we do not put it into practice, some because of laziness, others because they prefer a fleeting pleasure to the good. But many pleasures charm life ...". Even when they are of a moral order, general reflections become precise, psychological, reasoned.

And the same is true elsewhere. In Thucydides, contemporary with Euripides, we can note many of these general reflections. Some of these, as in Euripides, belong to arguments and deal with a variety of areas, touching every form of human activity; or else they deal with human reactions, refined and elaborate in their precision.

What happened to cause such a profound tendency to take on a new form so suddenly? What was the influence? What was the factor for renewal? Everything becomes clear when we remember that at precisely that time in Athens, the Sophists were spreading their new technique, which was rhetoric. Euripides and Thucydides, as we know, were both students of some of these Sophists.[5]

* * *

One can never insist enough on the intellectual effervescence that

[5] For more on this see our book *Les grands sophistes dans l'Athènes de Périclès*, Paris, Éd. B. de Fallois, 1988 (355 pages); some of the ideas presented here have been borrowed from this.

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accompanied the success of these Sophists in the Athens of Pericles. They came from various cities in Greece; and they promised to teach a discipline, or an "art" as was said then, that would make it possible for anyone to speak well, either to the assembly of the people or before the tribunals. It was the means for anyone to ensure for himself a certain power, or at least security, in the city. Some of these Sophists claimed, thanks to rhetoric, to be able to cause any thesis whatever to triumph (by making "stronger" an argument or thesis that was "weaker"). This implied both attractiveness of form (whose magic the Sophist Gorgias celebrated) and skillfulness in reasoning (which was the speciality of the Sophist Protagoras).

But it is evident that our general reflections could be used in this new technique, and even in several ways.

First of all, in the completely external art of seizing the attention of listeners, certain methods of pure form were discovered (that we still willingly employ). One of these was to begin with a thought of general scope; another was to close each part in the same manner. The general reflection is, then, a sort of clausula. In the Fourth century B.C., the *Rhetoric of Alexander* (1439 a) formulated the rule strongly.

But the vogue for rhetoric was manifested by the multiplication of such uses in tragedy; among passages of general scope there can be counted, at the beginning, one out of eight with the *Persians*, almost one out of two in the *Trachiniae* of Sophocles or the *Medea* of Euripides. Then, once again, things settle to a ratio of around one out of three until the *Suppliants* of Euripides, before falling back to around one out of six. In other words, the method was discovered, then applied eagerly, and finally diminished.

If it was diminished, it was in part because, under the influence of the Sophists, another use for general reflections was discovered, that of serving as proof.

They can do this directly; and we need only refer to one of the rare Sophist writings that has been preserved, one that is, in fact, a fictional argument—the *Praise of Helen* from the Sophist Gorgias. Seeking to exonerate Helen, he distinguished the various reasons that led her to leave her husband to follow Paris; and each time he refers to a generally accepted idea, which, in this case, establishes Helen's innocence. Did she obey fate and the gods? It

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is impossible to be a human being and to oppose them, for human nature ... Did she yield to violence? The argument is similar: the fault is always laid with the abductor ... Was it words? Gorgias gives a general analysis of the power of the word. Was it love? He produces another analysis of the manner in which love and other emotions are born. This little treatise, which is a manifesto of the new techniques, shows, then, with no possible mistake, the importance of general ideas as direct means of argumentation.

But it must be added that they also furnish the basis for what was the major type of argument for rhetoric initially, namely the establishment of verisimilitude (*eikos*). To say, "in my situation, it was not plausible for me to act in that manner" refers to an idea of the manner in which men usually act when they are in the said situation. We can appreciate this trait in the other treatise from the same Gorgias, which is a fictional plea for Palamedes, a hero whom Ulysses has accused of treason. Why had he betrayed, asks the author,[6] who then states that one does not do something like this without strong reasons. He then examines what these reasons might be, among them money, and then declares that one needs money only if one has large expenses, which was not his case. All these phrases beginning with "one" are general reflections, made part of an argument.

And so a change in their use came about. Obviously the principle of this usage was not absolutely new; it had already been applied in the past. How could there be reasoning otherwise? But one did it without knowing it, like Monsieur Jourdain speaking in prose. On the contrary, in the period that is of interest to us here, the process suddenly became codified, analyzed and made popular.

And yet it represented merely a technique. But this technique was going to be especially stimulating for knowledge of man.

Indeed, as soon as agile arguments of all sorts must be found, arguments capable of buttressing the most varied theses, then every reflection, every observation, every analysis becomes a welcome aid. In fact the Sophists wrote a number of treatises (on the

[6] The plea, in its principal argument, does not say that his treason is implausible, but that it is impossible. Nevertheless, verisimilitude appears in the secondary arguments (see also the word in § 9).

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constitution, on ambition, on virtues[7]), and it is highly possible that one of the values of these treatises was to have furnished models for reflections that supplemented their rhetorical teaching. It should not be forgotten that Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is, for the most part, a manual of psychology on passions and temperaments.

Then one discovers that along with rhetoric, a whole series of different kinds of knowledge about man was about to blossom and develop. In this sense one can say that word and thought went together and were joined. One can also understand that the Sophist Protagoras, master of the art of speaking well, was able to define the result promised by his teaching in terms that seem to point solely toward wisdom. "The object of my teaching is prudence for each one in the administration of his house, and, for matters of the city, the talent to conduct them to perfection in deeds and in words" (Plato, *Protagoras*, 318 e - 319 a). The art of thinking well developed in the wake of the art of the word.

In the midst of this suddenly liberated activity, general reflections employed in speeches could only take on a new character. In fact, it can be easily seen, in the case of an author like Thucydides, how they were able, from then on, to become an integral part of scientific analysis relative to human behavior.

* * *

This scientific value derives first of all from an organization of arguments within a demonstration. And all of the speeches of Thucydides are examples of this.

Certainly recourse to generality is one of the tendencies of his mind. He loves to see, in the particular war that he recounts, aspects that can be found in other circumstances, "by virtue of the human character that is theirs". And when he himself intervenes in his history in order to express his own judgements, these often take the form of general analyses or are supported by general reflections.[8]

[7] These three examples correspond to titles from Protagoras.

[8] For example II, 8, 1 on zeal at the beginning of a war (the reflection confirms the remark that a reaction of this type is "normal"). But Thucydides especially loved to refer to a common rule in parenthetical remarks saying, "like a mob, or an army,

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Nevertheless—and this is a confirmation of the role played by rhetoric—these reflections are much more numerous in his speeches.[9]

In these speeches general reflections are multiplied. Some appear in the place required by the rules of the art: at the beginning or the end of a development; and they often take the same form as in Gorgias or Euripides (with expressions like "human nature requires ..."). But in the analyses that he provides for his orators, the most striking feature is that general reflections make their entrance in superbly complex logical armatures.

We can look at a simple example, that of the speech of the Lacedaemonian ambassadors who came to advise the Athenians to take advantage of their success to achieve peace (IV, 17-20). They begin by saying to the Athenians that they should avoid acting like men who are not accustomed to enjoying good fortune; the warning is given through reference to a general example. But this general example is not only stated, it is explained in psychological terms ("Hope always makes them aspire to more, because fortune has already smiled on them once in this unexpected fashion"). The explanation renders the remark reasonable and convincing. Moreover, this explanation is confirmed by invoking a specific precedent ("Only see our present misfortune, we who ...[10]). And it is only after this particular proof that there is a return to a rule, in turn general ("It is wise to bring good fortune, by basing oneself on the uncertain or a surely calculated means ..."). In other words, in these few lines there are two theoretical reflections, one describing a too-frequently adopted form of behavior, the other establishing a rule to be observed. But each are embedded in an analysis, comprising explanation and application and thus constituting an attempt at demonstration.

The result we find is the alternation of the general and the particular that was seen in Hesiod. The first reflection is followed by a return to a particular example, clearly marked (17,4: "For your city, just as our own, has every reason for being in this case particularly"). The example of Sparta is followed by a similar

the fact in general"; see also II, 65, 4; III, 81, 5; IV, 125, 1; V, 70.

[9] The ratio is around 1 to 20.

[10] The Greek employs a characteristic expression with the indefinite relative: "we, people who ...".

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remark (18,3: "It is normal only for you ..."). Finally the rule of conduct solicits the same type of remark (18,4: "And this you, Athenians, have a good opportunity to do"). It is the same back-and-forth process in a renewed structure of thinking.

In this example it can be grasped how, organized logically and explaining one another, these elements of general analysis become an instrument of reflection. But it must also be added that they are, in the history of Thucydides, confronted with reality, in an objective and precise manner. The Lacedaemonians had established the danger constituted by an unexpected success that goes to one's head. Athens did not allow itself to be convinced, and Thucydides later took up the same terms of the speech to describe their blindness. "They aspired to more" (41,4); and he continues, "The fault lay in the unexpected successes they had known in so many cases and that gave strength to their hopes" (65,4). There was reasoned analysis; and through a comparison of the speech with the narrative, there is confirmation of this analysis. Without himself going beyond the limits, and without stating a general rule, Thucydides thus taught how to read a rule of political psychology behind a simple narration.

But this is still not all. It is not even the main thing. For most often rhetoric and its risks are judged by examining a single speech, necessarily oriented and consequently misleading. This is to forget that the one who speaks has an adversary. In politics, as in justice, one speech is set against another; and the people, who vote in both cases, listen to each. But if each of the two pleas is oriented and misleading, a juxtaposition of the two of them becomes the best possible approach to the truth. For in practice two theses are set in opposition, and in this way the arguments of each can be closely scrutinized. And this is still true in our modern usage: the judge and the jury listen to the two pleas and compare them. Likewise, the art of dissertation, practiced in teaching, consists in weighing arguments in favor of two contrary theses before siding with one of them or tracing a careful middle path.

This art of setting two theses in opposition was the great discovery of the Sophists in the Athens of Pericles. The Sophist Protagoras had composed models for "antilogies"; and we have schematic examples that have been preserved in the *Tetralogies* of his contemporary Antiphon, in which the prosecution and the

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defence each speak twice on a given case.

But the art of opposing speeches two by two was practiced by all at that time. It occurs constantly in the tragedies of Euripides, and it can also be found in the works of Thucydides. Unconcerned for verisimilitude, as often as possible the latter offers us antithetical speeches that not only respond to and oppose one another but in which the arguments are turned around and become more detailed from one speech to another.[11]

At the same time can we not see that each thesis, with its array of general reflections, arguments and proofs, is first of all measured against the adverse thesis before being measured against the facts? In the parallel encouragements given by the Peloponnesian leaders and the Athenian leader, in book II, before the battle of Naupactus, both speeches discuss the relation between courage and experience, above all a general question, but here treated in a less general form. Theoretically the discussion can only remain open, but the narrative shows exactly the element of truth contained in each analysis. To the extent that the first surprise finds the valor of the Peloponnesians failing, allowing Athenian experience to win out, the argument is settled in favor of experience. But the beginning of the battle was unfavorable because, as the Athenian leader had foreseen, Athenian experience could not be deployed in such a limited space. The conclusion thus brings out not only the manner in which experience played a role, but also the conditions required for this. Both speeches, in their very opposition, contribute nuances and details to the lesson contained in the event.

Moreover, it will be noted that Thucydides never says, "This one is right and the other wrong". He simply chooses the themes of the narrative in such a manner that comparison is instructive, and in this way at least the important factors involved can be brought out: probabilities that must be considered and practical methods

[11] Without mentioning more subtle schemas, we thus find pairs of speeches in I, 32-43 (Corinthians against Corcyreans); I, 120-124 and 140-144 (Corinthians and Pericles, beyond the difference of time and place); II, 87-89 (Cnemos and Phormion); III, 37-48 (Cleon against Diodotes); III, 53-67 (Plateans against Thebans); VI, 9-23 (Alcibiades against Nicias); VI, 33-40 (Hermocrates against Athenagoras); VI, 76-87 (Hermocrates against Euphemos); VII, 61-68 (parallel exhortations of Nicias and the leaders commanding the Syracusan troops). We have studied the use of these "antilogies" in Thucydides in a book entitled *Histoire et raison chez Thucydide*, Paris, Les Belles-Lettres, 1967, 314 pages.

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observed most often. The ambitions of reasoned science are thus harmonized with scrupulous objectivity.

It can be seen, therefore, that general reflections here are no longer simplistic formulations drawn from popular wisdom. Even when, externally, they seem to be nothing more than this, they now are elements of a system, constructed with the aid of rhetoric, in which scientific knowledge of man was developed through contact with experience.

* * *

The rigor of the argumentation, then, was ultimately placed at the service of this knowledge of man. And it can be noted, in this respect also, that the stylistic usage of Thucydides is situated in the midst of a much vaster development. Confidence in the possibility of understanding human behavior and causing it to be understood is the paradigm of this period in Athens.

Then was seen the birth of sectors of knowledge about human life that were called *technai*.

The word *technai* itself is untranslatable adequately and, for this reason, indicative. In our modern languages it has given us the word "technique"; it is translated by "art" or by "science". This very ambiguity reminds us that, born of a quite simple search for practical efficacy, these forms of activity were codified in practical formulas, if possible reasoned and coordinated. But in the attempt to coordinate and to reason them, they became what we call sciences. All the modern words ending in "-ics" come from Greek adjectives related to the word *techne*. Some of these words designate practical arts (maieutics or ballistics), others undisputed sciences (arithmetics, physics). There is an unbroken connecting thread leading from technique to science.

Now all of these activities, or almost all, were born at the end of the Fifth century B.C.

The model was medicine. It too became scientific in the course of this century, at the same time that the nature of our general reflections was changing. Soon a number of arts were formed and recognized: the art of the pilot of ships, of the architect, of the painter, without mentioning the art of cooking or other practical arts.

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Rhetoric was born at the same time, but it rapidly achieved fundamental importance. Indeed, unlike the other arts, it was addressed to everyone and did not aim at the acquisition of a profession, particularly in the form given to it by the Sophists. Moreover, it was meant to be applied to every subject and to everything that men might be led to discuss.

The result was that as soon as the practice of rhetoric became widespread in Athens, and with remarkable success, it encouraged the birth of research into a wide variety of branches of knowledge. Rhetoric needed their contribution; but it encouraged efforts in this direction also because it invited reflection and offered a model of codification. It was a stimulant and model as well as an opportunity for research.

The quest for discovery was then launched in every domain.

We know from ancient testimony that the Sophists, in order to teach proper use of words, were led to ask themselves questions about words themselves. It seems they sought to define the nature and origin of languages. They also—and this was new—raised questions about grammar. They looked into genders and numbers, distinctions between synonyms or near synonyms; they also commented on certain Homeric uses from the viewpoint of expression. And one can say that from this arose grammar and philology.

Moreover, by teaching how to confront arguments, how to turn them around and to combine them, they laid the foundations for logic. Aristotle, in fact, admitted this. And what he says confirms the rather pragmatic origin of these sciences, for he declares in *Refutations of Sophist Arguments* (183-184) that in this realm the Sophists had provided not science but what flows from it, applications. The necessity for this clarification clearly illuminates their role in what was to become logic.

But the same tendency was also apparent in the various domains that rhetoric could treat, which is to say in every domain. And the testimony of general reflections indicates that here a whole series of perspectives was formed. We have already seen this in Euripides, and we noted how his analyses paved the way for a psychology of individuals. Before then living figures, or sometimes moral problems, were presented, but never analyses of a divided soul, with explanations. But when Medea seeks to justify herself,

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she creates a theory of wrong-doing, formulated in doctrinal terms. Likewise, we have seen general reflections in Euripides that deal with all the problems of society: marriage, slaves, wealth. In *Electra* more than a third of the general reflections deal with wealth.[12] Yet we know that the play supposes Electra is married to a very poor peasant. A contrast is created between the poor man's house and the palace of princes, which shows that reflections on wealth are hardly simple decorative elements; they are the indication of a reflection that preoccupied Euripides at that time, as it would later preoccupy Aristophanes in his *Plutus*. To call this social sciences or studies of society would certainly be an exaggeration; but the outline and the idea for these are already apparent.

These nascent ideas become more developed, for other areas, in the work of Thucydides where they now acquire a rigor and newness that already points to scientific knowledge.

General reflections found in his work, for example, deal with chances in politics, different kinds of regimes and their dangers, or difficulties linked to external dominance: in other words political science. And it is this topic that Thucydides pursued above all others, just as this same topic was favored by political discourse of that period. And scientific aspirations in this domain can be confirmed by the numerous references to medicine. In Thucydides a parallelism is drawn between the manner of describing the plague, in book II, and the manner of describing moral disorder, in book III. Moreover, political advisors lay claim to a medical model and offer a therapy based on knowledge.[13] This can be seen when Nicias asks the military to become the physician of the city (VI,14). Similarly Protagoras presented the role of the Sophist in politics as being comparable to that of the physician. Speaking of the passage from one condition to another, better, one, he says, "The physician produces this result with his remedies, the Sophist with his speeches" (Plato, *Theaetetus*, 167 a).

[12] See, among others, 371-374; 394-395; 426-431; 553-558; 940-944; 1097-1099; 1131. Interest in this topic is not unique to this play; it can often be found in Euripides (particularly in *The Phoenicians*). Only the number of reflections noted here is remarkable.

[13] On the relationship between the two see, among others, J. Jouanna, in *Hippocratica* (Actes du colloque de Paris), Paris 1980, pp. 298-318.

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Nevertheless, this political science must be understood in the broad sense; other political reflections in Thucydides are focused, for example, on chances in war, the spirit of people at war, the respective role of money and the navy, good and bad conditions for alliances, combat methods of the barbarians and the Greeks, of the infantry and cavalry, in other words, polemology. They also deal with the manner of taking this information into account, as well as considerations of terrain and circumstances, how in certain cases to employ ruses or manoeuvers intended to mislead, how to know, for example, the problems posed by an invasion of an enemy country: in other words, strategy.

Still here are cited only those disciplines that are evident in general reflections scattered throughout the speeches. But it should also be remembered that, in book I, Thucydides presented the evolution of forms of life and power in the early ages of Greece, which is already a form of sociology, and that by bringing out in these chapters the role of reserves of money, he sketched a rudimentary economic theory. At the same time brief general reflections come to light that might have gone unnoticed and that, in the speeches, recall the importance of reserves of money and revenues, more important than taxes.[14]

These examples are sufficient to demonstrate that rhetoric, which is sometimes considered simply a formal and vain activity, served as the complete model and source for all human sciences, which the Greeks then hastened to invent, to test and to place their hopes in.

* * *

The use of these general reflections and their tone thus make it possible to detect the first apparition of what was to become

[14] See, among others, the declaration of Pericles in I, 141, 5: "For the reserves sustain wars better than taxes extracted forcefully." Conversely, it can be noted that Thucydides prepared the path for archaeology (I, 8, where he uses the testimony of tombs for ancient tribes, and I, 10, where he speaks of destroyed cities and their ruins); but he limits himself to initiating the method, with no commentary or general reflection. He also used the medical method in his description of the plague, and he suggests its possible recurrence. But the only general reflections in the passage relate to moral effects.

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human sciences. There is, however, one corrective admonition necessary. Namely, that these were not yet sciences in the sense that we might understand this word, even in the realm of human sciences. And what Aristotle noted with regard to the art of reasoning is here even truer still. These were points of departure, orientations, attempts. But the particular link between general reflections and these attempts that it has seemed possible to establish here is itself revealing. It shows that at the beginning it was thought possible to arrive at general rules immediately. Even with all the rigorous precautions that can be encountered in the work of Thucydides, the very idea of laws and theoretical formulations has an ambitious aspect that disconcerts our modern sensitivity. In their zeal for discovery, men of the Fifth century B.C. were seized by overwhelming confidence, from which it was later necessary to draw back. And the example of rhetoric, there too, furnishes the best model; for the Sophists, by disseminating this new art, believed they were teaching everything, including politics, the art of thinking and the art of living. And they also thought they were able to teach it to everyone. But it was noticed that innate qualities were, after all, necessary. And soon rhetoric became a less ambitious discipline. Isocrates, in the Fourth century, still called it "philosophy" because he thought, but with less assurance, that one could not speak well without having first thought well. But the accent was shifted, and the masters of rhetoric were soon to become, primarily, technicians of expression.

The birth of all forms of knowledge about man took place in the light of rhetoric. But they could not become more specific without first becoming autonomous, liberating themselves from rhetoric's tutelage. It is good to meditate on this lesson in modesty. But it is perhaps equally important to return to the memory of this time when there was not yet a need to imagine bridges, so difficult to construct, between disciplines that know nothing of one another's existence. In Fifth century Athens, everything was born together, beginning with a single and identical impetus, which then stirred the enthusiasm of an entire city.

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