THREE TROPES OF EMPIRE: NECESSITY, SPECTACLE, AFFECTION

ROBERT HARIMAN

Abstract

This essay identifies three recurrent appeals in the discourse of empire. These are presented through explication of Thucydides' last speech to the Athenian demos, a documentary essay by Max Boot, one of the intellectual architects of the invasion of Iraq, and Edmund Burke's speech regarding a colonial insurgency, "On Conciliation with America."

Robert Hariman is Professor of Rhetorical Theory in the Department of Communication Studies, Northwestern University, Chicago; e-mail: r-hariman2@northwestern.edu.

11 the public Vol.12 (2005),4, 11 - 26

"Your empire is now like a tyranny: it may have been wrong to take it; it is certainly dangerous to let it go."
Thucydides

"I felt like the queen of England waving regally at Iraqis as we drove by in our three-Humvee convoy."
Max Boot

"My hold of the colonies is in the close affection which grows from common names, from kindred blood, from similar privileges, and equal protection. ... But let it once be understood, that your Government may be one thing, and their Privileges another; that these two things may exist without any mutual relation; the cement is gone; the cohesion is loosened; and every thing hastens to decay and dissolution."
Edmund Burke

What is new under the sun of Empire? The imperial gaze takes a long view, sees form and repetition amidst the bustle of history, uses nuance for calculation rather than discovery. The discourses of empire reflect this amoral continuity: the same forms recur on behalf of similar hierarchies to recognisable ends. Or so it seems from the perspective of rhetoric, which looks out from a history of discursive forms used for strategic advantage.

Rhetoric differs from the gaze in that it also reveals how power is deeply dependent on mere performance, inevitably ambivalent, and unstable. Likewise, the view of a Grand Inquisitor is shown to be but one face of a more collective and consensual process that is constantly in flux. There is need, then, to identify how imperial power is being reconstituted at any historical period. Despite the differences between historically specific empires, there do seem to be strong continuities at the level of public discourse (Rose 1999, 21-22), and so one might identify major conventions of imperial performance. My focus is on public address in the democratic state undergoing imperial expansion. One can identify persistently available conventions that are used to legitimate imperial policies, and ask how publics are persuaded to sacrifice for the pursuit of empire and how public culture becomes distorted by those appeals.

Empire, like the nation state itself, depends on an imaginary community (Anderson 1991). Other scholars have identified a repertoire of persuasive strategies that, as they coalesce, characterise imperial culture (Said 1993, Spurr 1993, Kaplan and Pease 1993, Kaplan 2002). A related initiative has been to reread texts that were seemingly innocent of imperial motives to identify how empire deeply structures scholarship itself (Said 1978, Bernal 1987). As all this and more has developed within the post-colonial project, it now is clear that both periphery and metropole have been comprehensively influenced by the discursive practices that develop as one of the elements of imperial power.

This essay identifies three tropes that recur in justifications of empire: these are necessity, spectacle, and affection. Each trope is a template for symbolic action that binds audiences to speakers, citizens to the state, and peoples to one another according to specific patterns of interaction. Each has a characteristic appeal to the

audience that communicates a view of the world and an attitude toward those defined as others. All of them operate unconsciously much of the time, although each has been used by highly self-aware persuaders. They are found in many historical periods, and will of course acquire historically specific inflections, but they persist because they are elemental patterns of identification capable of organising political experience across a broad range of social circumstances. Like any figure of speech, their use is not limited to imperialism, but these three have proven to be templates for justifying empire, particularly as they cohere despite their superficial differences across large swaths of public discourse.

Each trope is selected because I believe that it is active and often influential in the U.S. today. The three tropes are demonstrated by the first three epigrams. Necessity addresses both the political problem of reconciling liberty with empire and the rhetorical problem of securing deliberative assent to imperial policies. Spectacle addresses both the political problem of redefining national identity as imperial identity and the rhetorical problem of devising a suitable mode of political performance. Affection addresses both the political problem of managing imperial civil society and the rhetorical problem of defining sustainability. Each of these can have great persuasive power, and each can be a powerful delusion. All of them tend to silence public criticism of empire itself, but they do so distinctively. The first leads to systematic distortion, the second to perversion, the third to collusion. To explicate each trope and its declension, I'll turn to three texts: Thucydides' last speech to the Athenian demos; the text featured above by Max Boot, one of the intellectual architects of the invasion of Iraq; and Edmund Burke's speech regarding a colonial insurgency, "On Conciliation with America."

"Like a Tyranny": The Invention of Necessity

A great deal has been said about the role of necessity in Thucydides' account of the Peloponnesian War. I shall be brief, but everything I say should be heard in the context of the contemporary invasion of Iraq. One irony of the moment is that although the intellectual architects of the current foreign policy include a number of classicists, the policymakers have provided near-perfect replications of the most dangerous, demagogic, morally and intellectually outrageous characters in the *History.* Alcibiades is in the White House.

The argument from necessity cannot be dismissed as nothing more than demagoguery, however, as it is featured by Pericles. In his last speech in the *History* (2.60-64), Thucydides convenes and addresses an assembly to stop a peace movement that is gaining influence among the people. The speech is of course complex, but the bottom line is not: "Your empire is now like a tyranny: it may have been wrong to take it; it is certainly dangerous to let it go." He spells it out: although the empire has provided great wealth and glory, it has produced great hatred among the subject peoples. Any withdrawal now will be both a sign of weakness and a material opportunity for organised blowback. The security of the democratic state now requires continued sacrifice on behalf of its empire.

This argument is repeated throughout the *History* by various Athenians. As Robert Connor notes, it assumes progressively vulgar forms, but too much can be made of Thucydides' continued defense of his model leader (Connor 1984). Thucydides was charting a decline in Athenian democracy, but he also was not a

disinterested observer, and as Josiah Ober notes, the conclusion that it was all downhill from the death of the great leader is "altogether too pat" (Ober 1998, 94). Later claims that conquest is a law of nature and that state action is therefore amoral, while rightly salient as political arguments, are implicit in Pericles' speech. More tellingly, Pericles' "imperial" arguments are vulgar on their own terms and given on behalf of a policy that proved to be disastrous and likely to be so for reasons that Pericles himself recognised.

The first reference to compulsion in the speech appears as the first statement about the nature of the war: "If one has a free choice and can live undisturbed, it is sheer folly to go to war. But suppose the choice was forced upon one – submission and immediate slavery or danger with the hope of survival: then I prefer the man who stands up to danger rather than one who runs away from it." This is not the eloquence of the Funeral Oration. The speaker has shifted into the mood of supposition, which then is treated subsequently as if it were the actual situation facing the audience. And what was the compulsion? The Athenian decision to go to war, contrary to the advice of much of the Greek world? The peace offer, now seen as a great danger? The referent is not clear, but the hailing of the audience is clear: They are either men or cowards. Indeed, they are in a second form of compulsion: either facing no choice at all (freedom or slavery) or suffering the inner compulsion of their cowardice. Pericles' description of his hypothetical yet actual audience is thoroughly self-serving, as it also provides an explanation of their anger toward him that is grounded in their desires rather than any reasonable assessment of the very high cost of his policies.

Thus, the argument from necessity articulates a systematic distortion of reality. Choices are redefined as compulsions, with the only rational option being the decision to stay the course. That decision, of course, is an abrogation of choice, a formula for supporting the leader without regard to policy. Likewise, dissent is recast as cowardice, power as weakness, weakness as power, peace as war. Each of these claims can be true, but all of them together become a cohesive fiction.

One indication of this distortion is that the argument from necessity is consistently used by those who are the most powerful agents in the *History*. Not only is Pericles the "first citizen" and supreme commander in Athens, but he also describes Athens as the lone superpower of the world. Due to their mastery of sea power, "there is no power on earth – not the King of Persia nor any people under the sun – which can stop you from sailing where you wish." The result of this and their willingness to sacrifice for empire has resulted in "the greatest power that has ever existed in history, such a power that will be remembered for ever by posterity." (The figure replicates perfectly through the many statements that the U.S. is the "lone superpower" or the "hyperpower" of the current historical moment.) Of course, Athens is not remembered for her great power, in part because the weapons gap with Sparta evaporated during the course of the war. What is curious is that such pronouncements of overwhelming power can co-exist with the argument that the greatest state has no choice but to pursue war. The irony is most acute at Melos, where the Athenian generals argue that their empire hangs on conquest of a small, insignificant, neutral city, but it is there from the beginning.

Why is it sensible to argue that great power is the source of great insecurity? More to the point, why argue that such a dangerous situation should be perpetu-

ated? The answer, I think, is complex. First, it is grounded in fact: conquest breeds hatred. That is not much of a fact, however, as those conquered rarely have the ability to project power, and, as Pericles himself says, "Hatred does not last long." Second, power that is a response to compulsion is amoral power, and amorality becomes more valuable as one's power increases. The appeal to necessity works to ward off ethical reflection while justifying ever greater conditions of inequality and of suffering. This dynamic is evident in the two remaining elements I wish to feature: the moral tenor of the appeal to necessity, and its explicit and implicit relationship to democracy.

What is striking, particularly given the ultimately amoral character of the argument, is that the speakers using it in the *History* see themselves as the epitome of moral probity. Pericles warns his audience against betraying the sacrifice of their own "greatest generation," and against disgrace and cowardice and self-interest and sloth. Supporting the empire is a matter of maintaining the dignity of Athens and of accepting the most basic reciprocity of moral life: "you cannot continue to enjoy the privileges unless you also shoulder the burdens of empire." Alcibiades says much the same, coupling the claim that they now are "forced to plan new conquests" with a definition of Athenian conquest as doing one's duty to help others. Note that the key to the linkage of empire and moral duty is to redefine state action in terms of the individual responsibility of the citizen. This arrangement is a solution to a two-sided problem. One is that the state is acting contrary to its domestic values; neither dominating others nor suppressing dissent at home are hallmarks of a democratic society. Unqualified identification with the state makes one an immoral person within one's familiar moral context, while extension of that context to state action implies that imperial policies should be dismantled. This is the conventional division in international studies today between the international and domestic spheres, but now understood in terms of the psychology of democratic deliberation. Thus, amoral state action requires re-inscription of the moral vocabulary of everyday life in respect to the audience rather than the state.

The other side of the problem is more difficult to formulate. The two levels of moral reference also involve different definitions of agency. There is a truth in Pericles argument, which is that the empire has a life of its own. It acquires the force of necessity, as no individual can change the conditions that create and maintain it. Pericles understands the sources of empire, which include the Athenians' bold character, geopolitical position, political history, size and wealth, and technological prowess. These are not easily subject to change, so the only question that remains is their management. Empire does rob polities of the power of choice. Not to the extent claimed, but it is the case that once powerful forces are set in motion, the normal deliberative process may no longer suffice to stop them. Likewise, the language of individual responsibility can become a systematic distortion of the conditions and moral implications of state action. What should not be lost, however, is the idea that acquiescence is not the only option, and that more creative democratic alternatives may be possible.

Pericles' demagogy is most evident in the passage where he states the appeal to necessity most directly. Those who disagree with him are "apathetic" and "quite valueless in a city which controls an empire, though they would be safe slaves in a city that was controlled by others." Well. That wonderfully open society of the

Funeral Oration now is a refuge for those who are constitutionally unpatriotic. Their dissent is a sign not of an alternative judgment but rather of a flawed character. Worse yet, that character explicitly lacks the two most definitive features of the Athenian citizen: freedom and boldness. To translate into the terms often used in the U.S. today, dissent is not only unpatriotic, it also is un-American and even treason (see, e.g., Coulter, 2003). Alcibiades says the same: "a city which is active by nature" will destroy its institutions if it succumbs to idleness, i.e., if it foregoes the pursuit of empire (6.18). This is the final transposition, the final inversion of reality. One can accept that Athenian democracy created its empire. As Steven Forde (and others) put the case, the polity discovered new sources of human power that unleashed a stunning expansion of social energy. What happens, however, is that the empire is then claimed to be necessary for democracy.

This inversion is the great danger of the argument from necessity. Nicias' speech against the preemptive war against Sicily makes the point clearly: "The right thing is that we should spend our new gains at home and on ourselves instead of on those exiles who are begging for assistance and whose interest it is to tell lies and make us believe them, who have nothing to contribute except speeches, who leave all the danger to others and, if they are successful, will not be properly grateful" (6.12). (This quote can do serve as a succinct summary of Ahmed Chalabi's relationship with the U.S.) The right thing is to invest in infrastructure at home, while the empire makes the polity vulnerable to manipulation by others and drains resources that will not be repaid. Of course, this mid-course correction does not happen, not then and not now. Why, then, would a polity act against its own self interest? The first answer is distortion: specifically, because through empire it has acquired a delusional sense of insecurity. The second answer is compulsion: the empire now is like an addiction, and Pericles' words ring true after all. Let me suggest a third answer. Empire has become a "meme," a self-replicating cultural form (Dawkins 1989). Empire is not just a social fact, it is a form of artificial intelligence similar to a virus that can inhabit and convert other cultural practices to its use. Democracy is such a host practice.

I have argued elsewhere that Pericles' speech is a model of prudence (Hariman 2003, 7-14; see also Beer and Hariman 1996). That claim would seem to be contradicted by the reading provided in this paper, which has highlighted his use of sophistical appeals on behalf of a policy that will destroy the polity. Nor is it enough to say that the prior reading was more formal (bracketing the content of the decision) or that he was relatively prudent compared to those around him. The correct resolution, I believe, is that the speech is indicative of how empire and democracy cohabit discourse. There is a similarly schizoid quality to American public address today, whereby arguments can pile up on one side of a question only to have the other side affirmed. The normal deliberative processes remain intact, but the horizon of possibility has been drastically foreshortened while incredible diversion of resources and deferment of the public interest accelerates. Empire doesn't displace democratic speech, but it does recode it on behalf of a different political psychology. Like other addictions, it is opportunistic and progressive. Like some other forms of artificial life, it can replicate endlessly. Like war itself (Ehrenreich 1997), the argument from necessity isn't necessary, but it is predatory.

"Like the queen of England": Playing a Part in the Imperial Spectacle

Legitimation rarely happens in a single register, and imperialism has long had the advantage of being able to appeal to all the senses as well as natural curiosity. The appeal to necessity requires a tone of high seriousness, and so there is need for a corresponding form of comedy. The Roman or Victorian imperial spectacle could do it all as a grand event in a ritualised place and time (Andrews 2000). Today the spectacular media are electronic and the experience is both continuous and continually fragmented. None the less, empire is there. But not all that is there, and I don't want to fall into the familiar alignment of visual media, political spectacles, and reactionary politics. Even brilliant studies of the imperial spectacle (Rogin 1993) can be limited by assumptions about the spectacular representation of sovereign power before a mass audience. The current inflection of the trope suggests something more sophisticated, a curious democratisation of the spectacle that includes an invitation to join in the masquerade, and that remakes imperial power as a license to act as if one were merely acting.

The ascension to empire requires that a state expand its performative repertoire, which also introduces troubling inconsistencies into national identity and the performance of domestic virtues. Empire requires successful performance by state actors – most obviously, colonial administrators have to rely on performance much more so than their domestic counterparts due to the extremely low ratios of ruler to ruled. Likewise, as George Orwell has illustrated so well, performance of the administrative role becomes a trap that brings otherwise decent people to behave badly (Orwell 1950). On the home front, empire produces mixing – from the importing of fashions and foods to intermarriage (the dreaded "mongrelisation," as it was labeled in the nineteenth century debate about the annexation of the Philippines). Soon here is there and there is here. In addition, the language of cultural superiority becomes troubling when enacted directly in democratic discourse, for the role of the dominator is not consistent with the role of democratic citizen. No wonder that its usual articulation is negative, consisting of references to the inferior other.

For the unabashed imperialist, however, there is no need for shame. And so we get to Max Boot. For the record, Boot is a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and the author of *Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power*. (The title alludes to the third stanza of Kipling's "White Man's Burden.") He also was an advocate of the invasion of Iraq and since then has returned to report on its success. In his October 2001 article, "The Case for American Empire," which called for toppling Saddam to establish a regency, he complained that "Afghanistan and other troubled lands today cry out for the sort of enlightened foreign administration once provided by self-confident Englishmen in jodhpurs and pith helmets" (Boot 2001). One scarcely knows where to begin in examining this sentence, for there is such an embarrassment of riches. What stands out above all, however, is the appreciation of self-conscious performance. To rule is to play the part of ruling, and to play the part well is to look the part. But perhaps this is a minor slip, for it does stand out in an otherwise rather seriously toned essay.

In a subsequent article, when Boot went to Iraq to report on the success of the venture he had promoted, he gave himself over to the pleasures of occupation. Boot joined the Marines at Camp Babylon, where "The former home of Nebuchadnezzar now houses rulers clad in khaki camouflage" (Boot 2003). The camp ruled south-central Iraq; "Major General James Mattis laughingly called it the Blue Diamond Republic of Iraq, after the 1st Division's nickname. If so he was president of the republic, or more accurately, its benevolent dictator." And he's a good one. "Relatively short and trim, with silver crewcut and owlish spectacles, Mattis doesn't look particularly imposing. But when he opens his mouth it becomes apparent that he's cut from the George S. Patton mold." One, seemingly deficient form of performance is more than compensated by another. But of course, there is little to lack if you are the spitting image of military leadership and owlishly wise to boot. Most important, the account has smoothly moved from reality to cinematic reality. Mattis is Patton, who is known now through the George C. Scott incarnation of him in film. That shift from reality to cinematic reality is the vehicle for a second transference from ordinary to imperial reality. By framing the general within the context of the modern spectacle, one can then easily make a second projection into the imaginary reality of empire. Which is exactly what Boot does: "At nightly briefings, he dissected PowerPoint presentations with laser-like questions that got to the heart of every problem. The issues he dealt with were more appropriate to an imperial proconsul that to a general; ... Mattis was not the least bit fazed by the challenge." By now the fictional transcriptions are piling up, albeit artfully: Leatherneck journalism, war film, cyborg action hero, proconsul. How could you not admire this guy? As long as one stays within the frame, the imperial fantasy triumphs. Of course, I can't help but add that the story is set in those "strongholds of pro-American sentiment," Najaf and Karbala.

But irony is not enough, because Boot takes the game to a new level when he goes out on a mission (now with the Army) and makes this delicious remark: "I felt like the queen of England waving regally at Iraqis as we drove by in our three-Humvee convoy." This is at once a moment of personal disclosure and an explicit act of political imagination. And, like the self-confident Englishman imagined earlier, it is a moment where external performance and internal consciousness are unified. Which, of course, is Boot's goal: he writes to make Americans comfortable with the imperial policy he promoted. Moreover, by going subjective, Boot obtains the license for uninhibited expression of the imperial fantasy. There we are: official, sovereign, proud, and acknowledged by the subaltern peoples as their natural rulers as we pass before them on parade.

The subjective emphasis also allows Boot to finesse the contradiction between his imperial ambitions and the egalitarianism otherwise celebrated in the article. Americans are identified in terms of their khaki's contrast with regal splendor, and they live at a camp where "everyone from buck private to three-star general waited in a long line before getting fed." Perhaps this is why Boot goes in drag. "I felt like the queen of England," he tells us. Boot announces that he is changing genders at the same time that he is changing classes and nations. Going in drag takes one, happily, from a supposedly egalitarian society to one that was organised explicitly by class. Domination over others is naturalised by reference to supposedly beneficent hierarchy in the queen's homeland. One also wonders why Boot enjoys the

shift so much; perhaps the "techno-muscularity" (Boose 1993) that celebrates savage wars needs another outlet, or at least to be softened for the public spectacle. Rather than go down that path, I think it is safer to say that the scene serves as an allegory for American empire. As a democratic nation, we know we are not supposed to be imperialists, yet here we are. By donning the queen's body, Boot assumes two parts, mortal and mystic, thus neatly dividing practice and principle (Hariman 1995, ch. 3). One's transcendental identity is not changed, but one adopts the appearance of another political body. One acts as if, to excuse actually being so.

Most important, it's all in fun. This tone and the corresponding attitude of playing at history is an important element of the imperial imagination. Whether caught up in "The Great Game" in central Asia in the 19th century, or landing on an aircraft carrier beneath a sign that reads Mission Accomplished, the imperial actor lives in a world that is a stage (Dowd 1999). There may be a direct line from Teddy Roosevelt to George H.W. Bush: both have enjoyed dressing up as soldiers and each has acted as if history were a form of play. Peoples become crowd scenes, while demonised native leaders, dramatic conflicts, and bold actions are set well above the mundane work of multi-national cooperation, and, above all, there is the background suggestion that the carnage wreaked upon those caught in the field of fire isn't really happening. Or, if it is happening, it is excusable because the actor is still learning the game. One of the staple ideas in the neoconservative literature on empire is that the U.S. is still in an "adolescent" phase (Kurth 1997): imitating others while still too self-conscious, unsure of itself, and unable to realise its promise until it adopts a more mature – and muscular – approach to the world. Boot is a more skillful writer than might be first apparent, as his joyride with the military embodies the virtues of adolescence in support of a policy that is to be the transit to adulthood.

David Spurr demonstrates how the theatrical trope is a commonplace for writers from the metropole, including anti-imperialists. He notes that they "resort to the theatrical metaphor in order to come to terms with an unfamiliar and potentially absurd reality" (Spurr 1993, 55). Boot goes beyond that, but no farther than Spurr's concluding observation about the several forms of "aesthetisation." The aestheticised representation is a means by which "a powerful culture takes possession of a less powerful one." Thus, "it can be understood quite literally as colonisation." Seen this way, one now can place all those photos that appeared during and immediately following the conquest. Among the more apropos were these images: First, generals occupying a long table in a palace for a press conference, their khakis contrasting with the marble opulence around them while they nonetheless played perfectly their parts as imperial commanders. Second, the many images of troops occupying the palaces, sitting in thrones, standing in great halls, and – in an unconscious intimation of things to come – a female soldier posing in mock provocativeness on a great bed. Third, the repeated emphasis in text and image of the civilian administrators' work boots. In major media coverage (e.g., *Time* and the *New York Times*), Rumsfield and Bremer were in drag, switching classes as adroitly as Boot switched genders. Apparently, there is need to go fictional when justifying the occupation of Iraq. The motif of going in drag becomes a fantasy of power and a powerful delusion. Ultimately, one has to ask if the administration's claim to be bringing democracy to Iraq isn't another example of going in drag while going

abroad. In any case, the resistance grows, and eventually one finds oneself within Jean Genet's *The Balcony*.

Frankly, there is little irony in what happened next. Perversion was sure to follow, not because anyone went in drag, but because thoroughly heterosexual soldiers were given a license to play with people. For all his obscenity, Rush Limbaugh and others like him (including at least one congressman) were on message when they described the torture in Abu Grahib prison as "hazing." What becomes clear from interviews with Lynndie England and others is that they had little conception that they were doing anything wrong, and they justified it by saying that they were just having fun. If you don't believe them, just look at them in the photos. And they could do this because they, too, were blurring the distinction between image and reality. By taking snapshots and video of themselves toying with the prisoners, and by interposing torture with their homebrew pornography, the soldiers were creating a low culture equivalent of Boot's textual artistry. And in doing so they made domination complete.

"Affection": Empire, Affinity, and Conservative Sociality

Empire persists in part because it is seductive. The lure of domination is only the half of it, and visions of order, stability, travel, exchange, cosmopolitan culture, and multi-cultural harmony are hard to resist. The middle ground between force and law is something not yet fully excavated. This intermediate realm includes as essential features, first, the attraction of rich, pluralistic social interaction, and second, the pleasure of administration. Thus, one of the fantasies of empire is the idea of beneficent administration of a global civil society. This is a society of widening affinities – in the Latin root of the term, of going beyond borders to merge differences, as in marriage. Affection can be either the motive for or proof of doing that well. In its best and still limited form, this trope channels the regulative ideal of prudence. More commonly, it is another form of delusion that co-opts the political and journalistic class into continued service of ever more vicious forms of imperial power.

Administration is essential for empire. Indeed, a current proponent of empire faults the U.S. for not having elites that are committed to imperial service (Ferguson 2004). The claim is true, yet begs the question by not counting corporations, semi-governmental institutions such as the World Bank, and NGOs as imperial instruments. What certainly is the case is that administration itself does not have public appeal and social cachet in the U.S. as it once did in Britain. What does work are appeals that are thoroughly corporate in character and dissemination: the rhetoric of a global civil society. Through everything from the mise en scène of corporate advertising to college international exchange programs, the American media offer a vision of a global society where transportation, communication, and social interaction operate seamlessly. Cultural difference is marked as a source of benignly erotic energy, while social and economic exchange occur effortlessly through the global expansion of familiar forms of consumption.

This vision of empire is the opposite of the appeal to necessity. Force is hidden, and in its place is offered a transcendent form of cooperation. Social vitality and all the aesthetic pleasures of cultural pluralism are offered without the stifling constraints of social life as it is experienced by insiders in more parochial settings.

Only one thing needs to be added: some form of cohesion. Without that, the swirl of difference can quickly dissolve into conflict and anarchy; or so it seems to the imperial eye. The more that one is committed to abjuring force, the more one has to depend on a concord of interests or on affection. Many would counsel that interests are the more reliable cement, but, of course, that poses a problem for the empire, which is predicated on placing its interests above others. Thus, the prudent administrator will coordinate interests where possible, while also be disposed to promote some form of mutual affinity that operates more at the level of emotional attachment than through the calculation of interests. Which is exactly what Edmund Burke did when faced with the American question.

Burke saw that the British Empire – which he celebrated – was producing a serious deformation in British polity. The result was loss of political reason in the parliament, of a desirable political future, and of something central to Britain's understanding of itself as a society. (All three risks are very real possibilities in the U.S. today.) Burke zeroed in on hubris and abstraction as the central motive and means of the deformation, while providing an astute analysis of the foundations of American public culture, the conditions of imperial rule, and the limitations of force. As with Thucydides, the speech on "Conciliation with America" at times makes for chilling reading in the contemporary context. Burke countered the Parliament's punitive approach with an alternative conception of colonial administration defined by four principles: orientation toward mutual advantage (which, in turn, depends on recognition of the other's relative autonomy); respect for the deep relationships between liberty and history within each society (which rejects one, liberal, Enlightenment model of national development); a doctrine of military power which concentrates on defense of the center and involves only sparing application to maintain system balance on the periphery (contrary, for example, to the current war on terror); relentless pragmatism in negotiations in order to avoid imperial overreach and to maintain "affection" as the primary bond between peoples (in contemporary terms, he would recognise difference while counting heavily on American ideals as means for creating good will).

This last appeal is the emotional heart of the speech. "My hold of the colonies is in the close affection which grows from common names, from kindred blood, from similar privileges, and equal protection." This is Burke's heart on his sleeve, a testament to the deep sociality and common life defining the conservative imagination and enshrined in the British constitution. Today, the sentence immediately deconstructs in the hands of the post-colonial reader, and it is harder to sell images of subject peoples looking up to their masters. (But not impossible, for that figure remains a staple of conquest coverage and of middlebrow magazines such as *National Geographic*.) Nonetheless, the appeal to an empire of mutual affinity persists. The common language is now airport English, and the other bonds of affection are now visualised and internalised as the signs not of old England but of modernity itself. Modern fashion is the kindred blood, modern education the similar privilege, modern civil society the realm of equal protection. The selection of American puppets in Iraq is only the most recent example of the strategy of securing affinity based on a common modernity rather than on a culturally inflected recognition of diverse interests. (And hence the embarrassment when the puppets such as Ahmed Chalabi prove to imitate their masters too closely – e.g., by being criminal capital-

ists capable of cutting deals contrary to any national interest.) This affinity is not what Burke would recognise, of course, for it is at once more abstract and more eroticised (particularly as it operates through commercial advertising) than his sense of organic relationships. It also operates in both registers of liberalism (neoconservative and progressive). Nonetheless, it is a powerful fantasy: pacific, transparent, frictionless, a civil society imagined as an embodied internet of social trust. Whether a neocon imagining Kurds embracing capitalism or a NGO liberal promoting sister city exchanges, the idea persists that the world can be woven together through social interaction that will create bonds of affection.

Burke's model for colonial administration obviously has its problems. He lived in a world of settler colonies and trading post empires; he assumed a wide swath of cultural homogeneity; the affection that is to limit imperial power wanes with distance where it is easily replaced by abstraction; he was not persuasive. Most important, Burke's acceptance of empire should be replaced today with a richer political imagination that can allow for the development of alternative modernities (Taylor 2004). That said, Burke's explicit use of prudence to combat imperial folly remains an object lesson in political judgment. Britain's policy toward the American colonies snatched defeat out of the jaws of victory. More important, Burke shows the vital importance of two, reciprocally operative axioms for using power without becoming addicted to it. These are to remain committed to the sustainability of the political system, and to beware how that system makes people into instruments of its own destruction. Perhaps not so ironically, the result is much the same whether one selects democracy or empire as the practice to be sustained: in each case, the unchecked growth of imperial power poses a serious threat. Power develops into a self-perpetuating cultural formation that exceeds any original intentions and co-opts those practices that would keep it in check. Empire can destroy democratic polity, and it can destroy itself. Whether one accepts or rejects empire, one has to face the question of how to sustain a polity that has become deeply entangled in imperial relationships, institutions, and policies. This is a problem of prudence, and it is one that is wished away by the appeal to global unity.

One should not be too hard on emotional affinity in a world habituated to violence. Those committed to cooperation rather than force and to affinity rather than interests alone have their virtues. They also have to a characteristic vice, which is collusion with the system they would reform. Here another conservative, Cicero, provides the best example, as Peter Rose and C.E.W. Steel have each demonstrated (Rose 1995, Steel 2001). I'd like to feature a more contemporary case, which is the American journalist. To put it in simple terms, the media are suckers for stories and images of affection. Boot must know as much, for he adds that pitch to his report: "As we crawled through the crowded city streets, we tossed soccer balls to any kids we saw. As soon as the first ball came bouncing out, a tremendous excitement seized the urchins. They ran after the SUV, arms outstretched, shouting 'Mistah! Mistah!' The kids were ecstatic and so was Lopez. With a big smile on his face, he said, 'I wish I could take all of them home with me'" (Boot 2003). (When Boot isn't dealing in shade he replays the diction of darkies loving their masters.) It may seem incredible that anyone today could represent the colonial relationship as one between adoring children and adults carrying gifts, or that Iraqis might be imagined as Hispanics in the making, but there it is, and it is commonplace. Whether focus-

ing on foreign peoples welcoming American travelers, soldiers, and investors, or on U.S. service clubs shipping charity goods abroad, there is continuing recourse to the trope of natural affinity and affection to mediate imperial exchange. Such coverage may encourage cooperation, but it also is an on-going collusion with the harsher forms of imperial domination. Ultimately, it is one thing to work for affection and to earn it, and quite another to project it as the sure result of one's actions. The ideal of a global civil society is easily converted into the delusion that They either love us or hate us, and that they should love us, and that once we have imposed our system on them, they will love us. In trying to win their affection, we succumb to narcissism, which is no check on violence.

The Empire of Rhetoric

Anyone speaking of empire should do so reflexively. Barthes has spoken of the "empire of rhetoric," albeit in the past tense (Barthes 1988). Is it not the case that a fantasy of imperial power often informs temporal projections of rhetoric? Whether longing for the past or imagining a future restoration, visions of rhetoric's hegemony over the human sciences are legion.

Recourse to the metaphor of rhetoric's empire probably is a small thing, more pitiable than dangerous. There is a deeper affinity between rhetoric and empire, however, which one cannot expunge without giving up on something of great value – its association with democracy. A clue comes from study of the relationship between Athenian character and Athenian imperialism (Forde 1986, Raaflaub 1994). Athen's character was forged in its political history, most notably its simultaneous development of democracy and successful warfare against the Persian invasions. Forde argues,

> *the self-assurance gained from this experience was of a revolutionary, not to say hubristic, kind. It is the peculiar character of this self-assurance that leads the Athenians from the desperate, defensive action against the Persians to the offensive explosion of imperialism that followed. For one might say that what the Athenians discovered as a body on their ships is the enormous potential of purely human power – that is, human power standing on its own and bereft of its traditional supports, terrestrial or otherwise. It would be difficult to overestimate the political significance of such a discovery for a community, for traditional piety acts not only as a support, but as a restraint on the activities of men and states. Therefore, insofar as daring among the Athenians represents a transformation of and a replacement for traditional courage, it is an innovation predicated in part on overcoming the inhibitions imposed by piety. Those inhibitions include restrictions on the accumulation of power and on its exercise, in the name of justice. Amorality is at the core of what daring signifies in Thucydides' Athenians.* (Forde 1986, 437)

If the explosive expansion of Athenian society to dominate the Greek world stemmed from its discovery of "human power standing on its own," one must take that discovery very seriously. Now the Greek enlightenment and empire have a common source. More to the point, rhetoric is, in the realm of speech, one of the several versions of this discovery. The fact that many of the sophists in Athens were metics is beside the point, for they went where they would have the most

receptive audience. Speech understood as a human power standing on its own, unleashed from piety, and its exercise identified with the wholly amoral accumulation of power: these are the themes of the *Gorgias*. No wonder rhetoric was feared for its impious unleashing of social energies. And are not the claims made for it imperial? Not limited to any genre or subject or occasion, demoting local knowledge to a fungible material for manipulating local decision-makers, championed as a universal method for generating persuasive power in any setting, the art of rhetoric assumes the features of an imperial science. More tellingly (and think now of the Jesuits), it is portable, an ideal learning for those who are going to be at the leading edge of imperial expansion or assuming the tasks of colonial administration. Note how Plato, no friend of democracy either, featured hubris as a central characteristic of students of rhetoric, in contrast with Socrates' supposed humility. And wasn't the central dilemma of classical ethics that the rhetor had to be self-regulating, and to be so while possessing a power that could potentially overwhelm not only others but also one's sense of self-restraint? This, too, is the problem of empire, which becomes ever more dependent on self-regulation as it grows ever more unlikely to exercise it. Again, think of Abu Grahib.

This is not to deny the differences between speech and other forms of action. One should be careful, however, when praising rhetoric or relying on its natal association with democracy. Human power standing on its own can free peoples, build civilisation, and work wonders. It also can become a god onto itself, whose name is empire.

References:

Anderson, Benedict. 1991. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.* London: Verso.

Andrews, James. 2000. The Imperial Style: Rhetorical Depiction and Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. *Western Journal of Communication* 64, 53-77.

Barthes, Roland. 1988. *The Old Rhetoric: an Aide-memoire.* In *The Semiotic Challenge*, trans. R. Howard. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Beer, Francis and Robert Hariman. 2004. Le post-réalisme aprčs le 11 Septembre. *Études Internationales* 35, 689-719.

Beer, Francis A. and Robert, Hariman. 1996. Strategic Intelligence and Discursive Realities. In F. A. Beer and R. Hariman (eds.), *Post-Realism: The Rhetorical Turn in International Relations*, 387-414. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press.

Bernal, Martin. 1987. *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, Vol. 1. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Boot, Max. 2001. The Case for American Empire. *The Weekly Standard* 7, October 15.

Boot, Max. 2003. Reconstructing Iraq with the Marines in the South and the 101st Airborne in the North. *The Weekly Standard* 9.1, September 15.

Boose, Lynda. 1993. Techno-Muscularity and the "Boy Eternal": From the Quagmire to the Gulf. In A. Kaplan and D. E. Pease (eds.), *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, 581-616. Durham: Duke University Press.

Burke, Edmund. 1998. Speech on Conciliation with America. In D. Womersley (ed.), *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful and Other Pre-Revolutionary Writings*. London: Penguin.

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

Coulter, Ann. 2003. *Treason: Liberal Treachery from the Cold War to the War on Terrorism*. New York: Crown.

Dowd, Maureen. 2004. Lost in a Masquerade. *New York Times*, December 9.

Erhenreich, Barbara. 1997. *Blood Rites: Origins and History of the Passions of War.* New York: Henry Holt.

Ferguson, Niall. 2004. *Colossus: The Price of America's Empire*. New York: Penguin.

Forde, 1986. Thucydides on the Causes of Athenian Imperialism. *American Political Science Review* 80, 433-48.

Hariman, Robert. 1995. *Political Style: The Artistry of Power*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hariman, Robert, ed. 2003. *Prudence: Classical Virtue, Postmodern Practice.* University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Kaplan, Amy. 2002. *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Kaplan, Amy and Donald E. Pease, eds. 1993. *Cultures of United States Imperialism*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Kurth, James. 1997. The Adolescent Empire. *The National Interest* 48, 3-15.

Ober, Josiah. 1998. *Political Dissent in Democratic Athens: Intellectual Critics of Popular Rule.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Orwell, George. 1950. Shooting an Elephant. *Shooting an Elephant and Other Essays.* London: Secker & Warburg.

Raaflaub, Kurt A. 1994. Democracy, Power, and Imperialism in Fifth-Century Athens. In J. P. Euben, J. R. Wallach, and J. Ober (eds.), *Athenian Political Thought and the Reconstruction of American Democracy*, 103-146. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Rogin, Michael. 1993. "Make My Day!": Spectacle as Amnesia in Imperial Politics. In A. Kaplan and D. E. Pease (eds.), *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, 499-534. Durham: Duke University Press.

Rose, Peter W. 1999. Theorizing Athenian Imperialism and the Athenian State. In T. Falkner, N. Felson, and D. Konstan (eds.), *Contextualizing Classics: Ideology, Performance, Dialogue Essays in Honor of John J. Peradotto*, 19-39. Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield.

Rose, Peter. 1995. Cicero and the Rhetoric of Imperialism: Putting the Politics Back into Political Rhetoric. *Rhetorica* 4, 359-400.

Said, Edward W. 1993. *Culture and Imperialism.* New York: Knopf/Random House.

Said, Edward W. 1978. *Orientalism.* New York: Pantheon.

Spurr, David. 1993. *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Steel, C.E.W. 2001. *Cicero, Rhetoric, and Empire.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Taylor, Charles. 2004. *Modern Social Imaginaries*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Thucydides. 1972. *The Peloponnesian War.* Trans. Rex Warner. New York: Penguin.