

Chapter 5 Viewpoint Activity



In the Greek world, Athens and Sparta were rivals not only in politics but also in their overall approach to life, to education, and even to making war (textbook pages 109–112). Leaders in each city defended their way of life. In the excerpts below, King Archidamus of Sparta and Pericles of Athens describe some of their reasons for thinking their own way of life is best. Both speeches were recorded by the historian Thucydides.

◆ *As you read, think what these attitudes meant for ordinary people in each city-state. Then, on a separate piece of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

The Values of Sparta and Athens

Pericles of Athens: The freedom which we enjoy in our government extends also to our ordinary life. There, far from exercising a jealous surveillance over each other, we do not feel called upon to be angry with our neighbor for doing what he likes, . . . But all this ease in our private relations does not make us lawless as citizens. Against this, fear is our chief safeguard, teaching us to obey the magistrates and the laws, particularly such as regard the protection of the injured. . . .

Further, we provide plenty of means for the mind to refresh itself from business. We celebrate games and sacrifices all the year round, and the elegance of our private establishments forms a daily source of pleasure. . . . while the magnitude of our city draws the produce of the world into our harbor, so that to the Athenian the fruits of other countries are as familiar a luxury as those of his own.

If we turn to our military policy, there also we differ from our antagonists. We throw open our city to the world, and never by alien acts exclude foreigners from any opportunity of learning or observing.

King Archidamus of Sparta: We are both warlike and wise, and it is our sense of order that makes us so. We are warlike, because self-control contains honor as a chief constituent, and honor bravery. And we are wise, because we are educated with too little learning to despise the laws, and with too severe a self-control to disobey them, and are brought up not to be too knowing in useless matters. . . . In practice we always base our preparations against an enemy on the assumption that his plans are good; indeed, it is right to rest our hopes not on a belief in his blunders, but on the soundness of our provisions. Nor ought we to believe that there is much difference between man and man, but to think that the superiority lies with him who is reared in the severest school.

“We throw open our city to the world, and never by alien acts exclude foreigners from any opportunity of learning or observing.”

These practices, then, which our ancestors have delivered to us, and by whose maintenance we have always profited, must not be given up.

Source: Thucydides, in *The Greek Historians* (Penguin Books, 1959).

Questions to Discuss

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| <p>1. What qualities of Athenian life does Pericles mention? How do these contrast with those that Archidamus points out for Sparta?</p> <p>2. According to Archidamus, what kind of a person do Spartans consider superior?</p> | <p>3. Recognizing Ideologies From his speech and what you have read about Sparta, what kind of learning do you think King Archidamus would consider “useless matters”? Would an Athenian agree?</p> |
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