

### **The Corinthian Speech at Sparta**

(Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, translated by Rex Warner, Penguin Books, 1972, pages 75-77.)

'We should not like any of you to think that we are speaking in an unfriendly spirit. We are only remonstrating with you, as is natural when one's friends are making mistakes. Real accusations must be kept for one's enemies who have actually done one harm.

'Then we think we have as much right as anyone else to point out faults in our neighbors, especially when we consider the enormous difference between you and the Athenians. To our minds, you are quite unaware of this difference; you have never yet tried to imagine what sort of people these Athenians are against whom you will have to fight—how much, indeed how completely different from you. An Athenian is always an innovator, quick to form a resolution and quick at carrying it out. You, on the other hand, are good at keeping things as they are; you never originate an idea, and your action tends to stop short of its aim. Then again, Athenian daring will outrun its own resources; they will take risks against their better judgment, and still, in the midst of danger, remain confident. But your nature is always to do less than you could have done, to mistrust your own judgment, however sound it may be, and to assume that dangers will last forever. Think of this, too: while you are hanging back, they never hesitate; while you stay at home, they are always abroad; for they think that the farther they go the more they will get, while you think that any movement may endanger what you have already. If they win a victory, they follow it up at once, and if they suffer a defeat, they scarcely fall back at all. As for their bodies, they regard them as expendable for their city's sake, as though they were not their own; but each man cultivates his own intelligence, again with a view to doing something notable for his city. If they aim at something and do not get it, they think that they have been deprived of what belonged to them already; whereas, if their enterprise is successful, they regard that success as nothing compared to what they will do next. Suppose they fail in some undertaking; they make good the loss immediately by setting their hopes in some other direction. Of them alone it may be said that they possess a thing almost as soon as they have begun to desire it, so quickly with them does action follow upon decision. And so they go on working away in hardship and danger all the days of their lives, seldom enjoying their possessions because they are always adding to them. Their view of a holiday is to do what needs doing; they prefer hardship and activity to peace and quiet. In a word, they are by nature incapable of either living a quiet life themselves or of allowing anyone else to do so.

'Your inactivity has done harm enough. Now let there be an end of it. Give your allies, and especially Potidaea, the help you promised, and invade Attica [the peninsula Athens is on] at once. Do not let your friends and kinsmen fall into the hands of the bitter enemies. Do not force the rest of us in despair to join a different alliance... But if you will only make up your minds to act, we will stand by you... You have heard what we have to say. Think carefully over your decision. From your fathers was handed down to you the leadership of the Peloponnese [the peninsula Sparta is on]. Maintain its greatness.'