

***Strategic Humanism:
Lessons in Leadership from the Ancient Greeks***
A Conversation with Claudia Hauer

THOMAS G. MCGUIRE

In the following conversation, WLA visits with classical scholar and author, Claudia Hauer, to discuss her new book, *Strategic Humanism: Lessons in Leadership from the Ancient Greeks*. Recently released by Political Animal Press, *Strategic Humanism* is a provocative, highly accessible 170-page meditation on what Hauer calls “the transition of Greek society from its youth to its maturity, and into the Athenian decline.” One of the main catalysts of social transformation in ancient Greece was, of course, the gradual rise and precipitous fall of Athenian democracy. This is the story at the heart of Hauer’s book. But the larger story of emerging Greek democracy is also a narrative inflected at nearly every turn by war or the specter of war. Between 500 and 400 BCE, ancient Athens was at war for almost eighty years. In this regard, the so-called golden age of Athens was an epoch much like our own—a war-torn period in which the flourishing of literature and the arts was inextricably connected to the struggle for democracy. In a phrase borrowed from Mark Twain, Hauer describes her project as an attempt to sound out “the rhymes” between ancient Greek history and our national history. Hauer’s reading of ancient Greek literature and history is meant, then, to speak to our present national moment, and it does so with a sense of great urgency and relevance.

With an eye to our nation’s forever wars, Hauer parses leadership lessons gleaned from the experience of the Greeks in the Trojan War, the Greco-Persian Wars, the Peloponnesian War, and the moral vacuum left in the wake of the Athenian decline. Training her sights on four

signature Greek texts (Homer's *Iliad*, Herodotus' *Histories*, Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*, and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*), Hauer's aim in *Strategic Humanism* is clear and cogent: to reveal these Greek classics as signal moments in the evolution and

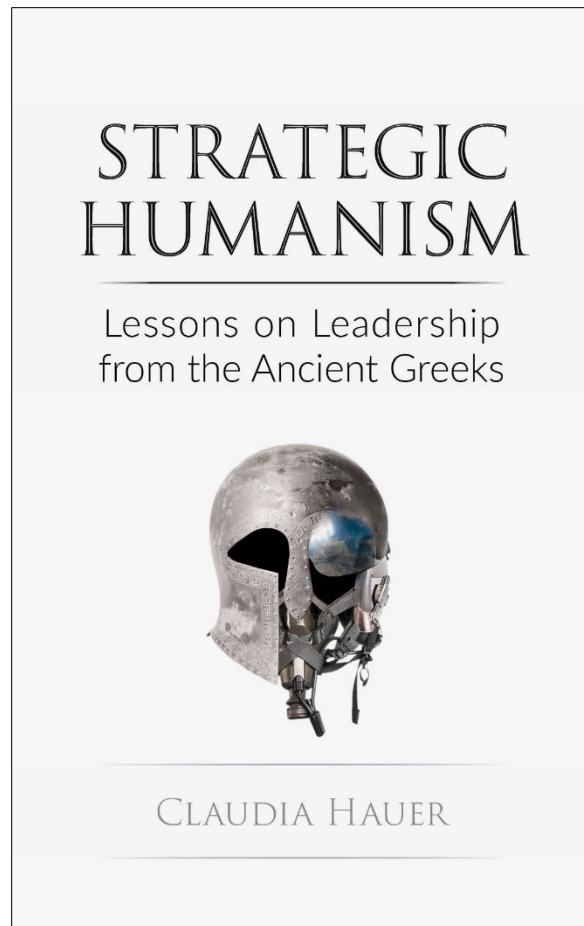


Image courtesy of Political Animal Press
<https://www.politicalanimalpress.com/>

definition of Greek humanism. Moving gracefully between close readings of epic poetry, narrative historiography, and political and moral philosophy, Hauer demonstrates how these canonical works from very different discourse traditions share, to some degree, a common, abiding interest in the problem and promise of human freedom. For Hauer, the genius and gift of Greek humanism inheres in its evolving espousal of "the idea of human as an autonomous agent who can bring all of his or her qualities to the management of his or her own affairs." As Hauer suggests, the ancient Greek subjects of her book warrant our attention and

assent, perhaps now more than ever, because of the clarity and precision with which they articulate the essence of human freedom and define the cultural, political, and moral conditions necessary for realizing the promise of genuine human liberty.

In *Strategic Humanism*, Hauer dons the mantle of town crier, defender of the democratic polis, both past and present. Her warning is bold and unequivocal: in our time, any attempt at

leadership devoid of respect for the inherent value, rights, and responsibilities of the individual person is leadership doomed to fail in its execution of the great democratic experiment. Leaders manning the helm of our national interests and navigating the troubled waters of our present moment would do well to heed the warning shot made by Hauer's powerful study: our imperiled ship of state must be righted by a return to global and local leadership predicated on commitments not only to the freedom and dignity of each individual human person, but also the power of persuasion and cooperation instead of demagoguery and the pursuit of blind self-interest. Such seems to be the lesson Hauer gleans from the story of the Athenian decline. The Athenians lost the Peloponnesian War (and squandered their democratic society) after they allowed their demagogues to bully them into voting to launch the disastrous Sicilian Expedition, all in the service of imperial expansion and greed. After nearly a century of war, the Sicilian campaign was doomed. Athens' resources were stretched too thin; the once formidable polis was hard pressed to maintain its dwindling empire and frayed alliances. In the end, Athens opted for incendiary rhetoric over the art of democratic persuasion. Athens opted for unnecessary wars of imperial expansion over the promise and praxis of Greek humanism. In sounding out rhymes like this from ancient Greek history, Hauer spins a cautionary tale adequate to our predicament.

WLA is honored, then, to host this conversation with Claudia Hauer. Not only is Hauer a gifted scholar and educator, she is an original, provocative thinker, one who has perfected the art of distilling and synthesizing concepts from vastly different historical periods and epistemological orientations. As a purveyor of classical learning and literature, she seizes opportunities to help others to see how the past is prologue to the present. In her work as a

long-time tutor at St. John's College in Santa Fe and a five-term Distinguished Visiting Scholar at the United States Air Force Academy, Hauer espouses the need for public service committed to truly democratic ideals, ideals rooted in the wisdom of Greek humanism. In short, she is the perfect advocate for strategic humanism, a thinker whose ideas warrant a close and attentive hearing.

Thomas McGuire (TM): Claudia, thank you for joining us. First, congratulations are in order for the publication of *Strategic Humanism*. I know this is a book many years in the making. May I ask you to begin by sharing a bit about the impetus for the book? Did you have a clear vision of the project at the start, a specific intention in writing *Strategic Humanism*?

Claudia Hauer (CH): On my second day as a visiting professor at the Air Force Academy, I walked into a class I had assigned to read Thucydides. A cadet immediately raised his hand and asked, "Why do we still read this?" I realized that while I had never questioned my assumption that we should, the cadet had never questioned his assumption that we shouldn't. It got me thinking about what an effective answer to his question might look like, an answer that would be accessible, not overly-academic, that would bridge the gap between the scholarly community and the active military community. I thought Achilles would be a good place to start, since I had read Jonathan Shay's work, and knew how richly Achilles has been used as an example of the trauma caused by the betrayed warrior's moral injury. In the centuries after Homer, the Greeks experience a century of war in the 5th century BCE, a century that begins with the Persian

Invasions, and ends with Athens' devastating defeat in the Peloponnesian War. The Greeks responded to the foreign threat by finding ways to work together, and they discover their autonomy and their national identity. Herodotus fills in this narrative for us, and illustrates that the Persian threat was the basis for the Greeks' ability to hold together the disparate social, political, and military units of the various Greek cities, each with its own agenda and allegiances. Herodotus attributes this to an increasingly nuanced relationship with language, *logos*.

Herodotus' *History* shows us how these individuals can free themselves from the fatedness that defined Achilles and develop agency and a strategic relationship with public affairs. Once I began to see the trajectory from Homer to Herodotus, I wanted to round it out with a study of Thucydides, and his account of Athens' moral and strategic decline as the Greek "civil war," the Peloponnesian War, went on. Burdened by its empire, Athens turned more and more toward tyrannical behavior. So much of this trajectory appears familiar in our own age, as our American founding fathers held together the fragile project of democracy-building, only for us now to see it risk a decline into tyranny. We too have gone from a fledgling, young democracy to a global power with imperial interests, and this has put pressure on our democratic ideals and goals.

Interestingly, it was in the moral vacuum left by the Athenian defeat, and their loss of political autonomy, that secular moral philosophy was born in the West. In the final chapter, I argue that Aristotle's ethics are the culmination of this notion of strategic humanism. Aristotle's moral philosophy is a real-world ethics, not just an ethics for peace but for war. The title of the last chapter is "Aristotle: A Moralism for Our Times."

TM: In a sense, then, your book can be read as a reply to that Air Force Academy cadet's valid question: "Why bother with this antiquated stuff, how is this ancient literature relevant to my experience, my world?" I think a lot of people nowadays—people inside and outside the military—would probably have the same response. Given the full frontal assault on the dead white male canon that's transpired in recent decades, the classics appear outdated, alien to many people. So your task, in part, has been to reveal the relevance of the Greek classics, isn't that true?

CH: I suppose the dead white male narrative might have been lurking in the cadet's question. I know it's out there. I didn't think about this narrative so much as that the cadet had simply never entertained the prospect that anything "ancient" might be relevant to his state-of-the-art education. If the book addresses the resistance of those who buy into the dead white male narrative as well, so much the better!

TM: Your book tackles the relevance of the classics on two fronts: First, it explores the way in which the story of Athenian democracy largely unfolded in the course of a century marked by incessant war is a story adequate to the precarious state of our democracy at present, and secondly, how Greek humanism serves as a necessary antidote to the effects of Cartesian rationalism. Can you speak a bit more to the first point of relevance, the story of Athens' century of conflict and the way that experience of war both fostered and placed pressure on the fledgling Athenian democracy?

CH: Our own country learned we could be a free, united democratic republic through fighting the Revolutionary War. We learned just how fragile that unity was during the Civil War. The Greeks had no national identity prior to the Persian Invasions. They identified with their city-state and its allies, that was all. When faced with a massive external threat, they had to learn to work together across all of Greece. When that nation shattered and civil war broke out in the form of the Peloponnesian War, the Greeks (and the Athenians in particular) learned the extent to which they were capable of their own arrogance and unjust aggression. The question I have is: How can we learn the right lessons from our wars? I worry that we have turned away from some of our more complicated fiascos in Iraq and Vietnam, and want only to glorify the less morally compromised narratives from earlier wars.

TM: In reading your book, I'm frequently reminded of the fact that we're not only the species capable of composing sonatas and epic poems, the species that builds Gothic cathedrals and cantilever bridges (then finds ever more destructive ways to blow them up), we're a species starved for and in search of moral reasons, warrants, ethics—all in the service of sorting through and settling on values which will ultimately drive our actions. That's why I find your final chapter on Aristotle's virtue ethics so instructive. You make the case that Aristotle was desperate to find a viable way of thinking ethically within the moral vacuum created by the Peloponnesian War. Like T.S. Eliot at the end of the *Wasteland*, Aristotle was trying to find a way to "shore up the ruins," no?

CH: Moral philosophy is born in Athens in the vacuum left by the destruction of their democracy as a result of their own hubris. Aristotle, unlike his more idealist colleagues, reaches out to encounter the world as it is. His ethical model is one in which we are constantly shaping our characters around how we interact with the world and people around us. Aristotle cares about our inner condition, and how well it calibrates morally to our circumstances. Aristotle's ethics discard the notion that any one-size-fits-all rubric could effectively handle a complex real-world situation. The military loves rubrics, but rubrics are no substitute for sensitive awareness, the ability to interpret a situation, self-control, and good judgment, all of which Aristotle defines as relational and responsive. Aristotle is a great place to start if we are interested in our own moral rebirth in an age where tyranny and arrogance are threats from within.

TM: Whether it's Aristotle or T.S. Eliot struggling to find meaning in the wake of enervating wars of attrition, the aftermath of armed conflict somehow forces all kinds of moral reckonings, doesn't it? Isn't that what we must do to be ever more human and humane—or to recover our humanity following conflict? As Seamus Heaney, the great Irish poet, puts it, we humans are essentially "hunters and gatherers of values." So as your readers make their way through your book and come into significant contact with the Greek primary sources at the heart of your analysis, they'll be doing some of the essential work of what it means to be fully human—rooting out and cultivating values that can be a force for good. To that end, your book seems to make the argument that we need the poet Homer and the playwright Sophocles just as much as we need the historians and philosophers like Herodotus, Thucydides, and Aristotle. Isn't that so?

CH: You're a poet, Tom, and I have learned from you a strong sense that the study of poetry bears on our understanding of how we are human. I love the "hunters and gatherers of values" concept. We can turn to Greek literature in that spirit of the moral quest. That notion is compatible with my project, thank you! We need to collect the treasures that lie in the humanities, of which the Greek epics, tragedies, histories, and moral philosophy play a huge and foundational role in the West. These treasures will help us make sense of our own age, and our own selves.

TM: Agreed. To my mind, that's the *raison d'être* for the study of the humanities within our service academies and war colleges. We have to carve out a space to study the intersection of war and culture, a space that allows the cadets and officers studying in these institutions to confront the central concern of Greek humanism: *What are the conditions that best allow us to exercise our capacity for choice, freedom?* Where else will our officers and future officers have the time and leisure necessary to grapple with such matters from non-dogmatic angles of approach?

CH: I could not have written this book if I had not spent time teaching at a service academy. I am extremely grateful for my time as a visiting professor at the Air Force Academy, for it was in the intersection of my "ivory tower" liberal arts college background and the relentless pragmatism at the Academy that I realized the extent to which these two groups are talking past each other. Advocates of the humanities preach to the already converted, and military education has a huge incentive to prioritize scientific and data-driven models and solutions that

can accommodate the military's bureaucracy. The problem comes when we assume that these types of scientist solutions can answer the question about how to be human. Cadets and officers coming out of these educations are going to need humanistic tools to deal with the challenges and possible trauma they are going to encounter as human beings in the profession of arms.

TM: You and I have often discussed how the work of the humanities in a place like USAFA must somehow always circle back to this primary question: *How do our essential democratic values square with our human capacity and propensity for waging war?* Insofar as your study parses the pressures war placed upon democratic society in ancient Athens, I call your book a cautionary tale adequate to our present predicament. Am I correct to say *Strategic Humanism* holds up the political, cultural, literary, and philosophical milieu of ancient Greece as a kind of looking glass (perhaps a cracked looking glass as Stephen Dedalus would say) in which we might take one good look at ourselves both collectively and individually? Was this one of your aims in writing the book?

CH: Maybe not quite a looking glass, but an evocation of Mark Twain's insight that "history doesn't repeat, it rhymes." As we hunt and gather what we need from the Greeks, we need to juxtapose this political and military story of Athens' emergence into a free democracy, and her hubristic decline in response to the challenges of empire with our own American narrative of founding, civil war, and rise into a massive international power. At the individual level, our own warriors are not immune to the types of war trauma that dis-integrate Homer's Achilles, or Sophocles' Ajax, for example. War may teach us who we are as a nation, but only if we attend to

the lessons. I argue in the book that one of the best ways to learn the right lessons is to notice the ways in which our own story “rhymes” with that of the Greeks.

TM: In the classroom and in conversation with you at USAFA, I’ve often heard you declare, “Through war, we come to know who we are.” Your book suggests that the ancient Greeks came to *be* who they were through their experience of war in the 5th century BCE, but that’s not the whole of it. More importantly, they came to *know* who they were by seriously reflecting on the way their wars shaped, challenged, perhaps even betrayed their essential values and sense of themselves as a people. To my mind, such reflection constitutes one of the essential functions of war literature. Is there a way we can conceive of the texts you examine as instantiations of war literature?

CH: So much of Greek literature is war literature. And it’s important to see it as such, because in Greece, there was a citizen-soldier model. As these citizen-soldiers returned to the *polis* after combat, they needed the ancient epics of war and homecoming, they needed the Greek tragedies, they needed to tell their own histories with war. Perhaps war literature has shifted its meaning in an age where so few citizens will ever experience war. Perhaps fewer people explore it as a genre? For the Greeks it was essential civic work, gathering at the Dionysian festival to watch Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*, or *Ajax*, and experiencing the collective catharsis of processing these tragic and traumatic stories. Or gathering to hear a bard perform Homer’s *Iliad*. War literature is a robust way for those who have experienced the trauma of war to come to terms with it, and can bring those who don’t experience it closer to the war experience, without

glorifying war. As the civil-military divide increases in our country, we need to help our warriors.

I have often heard you stress, Tom, the way Native American communities and others create rituals around homecoming from war, to acknowledge the “other” place they have been, and the need to reclaim then into the world of peace. Sebastian Junger has made strong arguments for the need in our age for a similar approach.

TM: As I read your book, I kept recalling the work for which Bryan Doerries has become so well known, his Theater of War project. To the chagrin of the purists and traditionalists, Doerries is constantly updating the tragic vision of Sophocles and Aeschylus for our time. Do you take some of your inspiration from what Doerries has been able to do with his attempts to bring Greek humanism into present-day military communities?

CH: Yes, I do! Doerries shows us the way those Greek tragedies were living documents, as they were performed ritually on the slopes of the Athenian acropolis in front of the entire citizen-soldier community. I love the way Doerries has found his way to the heart of that living, cathartic process. He is entering wounded communities with this amazing art form that Greek tragedy represents. Drama is a pre-technocratic form of *techne*, or craft, and Doerries understands its power to bring healing. Greek tragedy, as Nietzsche pointed out, gives voice to the ways in which human life entails suffering. We cannot medicate our way out of this suffering. We have to look at it, listen to it, hear the stories behind it. Doerries is so good at this. In the book, I try for a similarly fresh-voiced approach, abandoning scholasticism in favor of trying to bridge the old and the new. If we can't answer the question “Why do we still read this?” in a compelling way to

people who have questions, who have suffered, then something about our way of being human is lost.

TM: One of the conclusions you came to with a group of scholars in a recent online discussion of your book ([Political Animal Press panel](#)) is that Greek humanism dares to consider the anomalous, very unmodern idea that the experience of suffering can hold positive value, that it sometimes yields wisdom and compassion. To my mind, one of the great gifts of reading ancient Greek tragedy is how it teaches us to interrogate pain. I know there's only so much one can include in a book, but I wonder if you considered the possibility of including a discussion of the great Greek general and playwright, Sophocles, who gives us remarkable portraits of broken warriors some of whom find a way to restoration and re-integration (Philoctetes), and some of whom who don't (Ajax). In the sequel or companion volume to *Strategic Humanism*, can we look forward to a discussion of Sophocles?

CH: If there is a sequel, and that is a big "if," Tom, it will definitely work with Sophocles. And with Homer's *Odyssey* and the theme of the warrior's homecoming.

TM: My sense is that in this book you don the mantle of town crier, defender of the democratic polis. Is it fair to say that you see the study of Greek humanism as a pathway to recuperating the value of the individual, integrated human person?

CH: I love the word pathway, because that is the theme that moves the book. The cadet's question "why do we still read this?" seemed to me to arise from his profound immersion in a post-Cartesian paradigm in which ancient things are suspect, and everything has to be state-of-the-art, data-driven, science-driven innovation. I would never deny that this science is needed, but it can't replace the understanding of the human condition and the cycles of human violence that a humanist text like Thucydides can convey. I wanted to make an argument that the humanism of the Greeks isn't archaic; it isn't ancient history, and it's still part of how we construct the human world. But the post-Cartesian world view has such a lock-hold on today's young people. I decided to try to illustrate the shift away from Greek humanism that occurred decisively in the 17th century, with René Descartes and Francis Bacon, so that readers could recognize the way history "decided" to break with the earlier paradigm, and replace it with the technocratic scientific narrative about the human condition.

My work with Baconian and Cartesian rationalism in the book's first chapter is intended to show the extent that we lose sight of the full range of pathways available to ourselves. Technocracy, the "rule of technology" implies that each new invention locks us into the next. Greek humanism is a wonderful antidote to this seemingly inevitable shrinkage in our age of our sense of the full panorama of human judgment and human agency.

TM: You mention Baconian and Cartesian rationalism, which brings us to the second front on which you argue for the relevance of studying the Greek classics—namely, your book underscores an essential difference between Enlightenment humanism and Greek humanism. As such, you offer a persuasive critique of the limitations inherent in Enlightenment humanism. Can

you please parse the worldviews inherent in each brand of humanism and say a bit more about the Cartesian approach to essential problem of being human versus the approach of Greek humanism?

CH: Enlightenment humanism, simply put, focuses on how technologies can improve the physical quality of life of humans around the globe. Think of penicillin, and what it brought to the wounded and the ill. Or fertilizer, which enables food production on a scale that would be unattainable in many parts of the world. The dark side of this technological approach to humanism is only now emerging, as it appears that the very production cycles that enable these benefits are having unforeseen consequences on the climate. The fields that could only a few decades ago feed millions are now themselves being ravaged by flooding and fires as the climate changes. These catastrophic events pose even further challenges to our way of being human. In such an age, it seems to that Greek humanism is more important than ever. Greek humanism focuses on how we respond to the inevitable suffering that human life entails. It suggests models for democratic, peaceful political solutions, and it encourages creativity, and a robust relationship with the power of language to effect change. At the individual level, it encourages that we find holism, we find ways of making ourselves whole. Odysseus, for example, found his way home from war in the truest sense. He found his way back to himself, in ways that the more impetuous heroes could not do. The Greeks had to develop themselves strategically in response to the Persian invasion in what we at least today would think of us a relatively un-technologized environment. So what we see with these Greek stories is the development of innovative ways and modes of communication, without the interventions of

controlling technologies. *Logos* becomes something that can direct human beings toward their moral caliber.

TM: You mention the dark side of technological innovations such as the deleterious effects of industrialized fertilizer production. A few years ago, you told me that Fritz Haber, the renowned German chemist for whom the Haber Process is named, was actually your great-grandfather. Ironically, it was the same Fritz Haber who took his technological knowledge of chemical processes and in turn developed Germany's first WMD program in World War I. The inventor of WMD also saved hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of Europeans from starvation in the early twentieth century. This is the stuff of Greek tragedy. It's the story of humankind. In light of this backstory, I find the thrust of your work with Greek humanism and your call for a restoration of virtue ethics so powerful, so moving, because it serves perhaps to redress some of the violence and destruction your great grandfather helped bring to the world. I find your work in relation to your great grandfather's story not only fascinating, but also emblematic of the precipice humanity finds itself on at this moment of ecological crisis. It seems our reliance on technology, for example, will either save the planet or render it unfit for life. The antidote of chemical fertilizer gave way to the poison gas of the trenches and gas chambers. How do you see your story and work in relation to all of this?

CH: Thanks for bringing this up, Tom. As you know, I have long struggled with my Haber legacy. You use the word "redress." For me, the word has always been "atone." I suppose it's quite common to feel that one needs to atone for the villain in their family, but with Haber it's more

complicated, because he did so much good as well as so much evil. I agree that it is the stuff of Greek tragedy, and also who we are as human beings. Your question evokes for me the possibility that we could collectively atone for the villains, that we don't have to bear these burdens alone within the affiliated family. This is what Greek tragedy works on, with the characters of Oedipus, Orestes, and others.

TM: Your grandfather's story strikes me as something at once deeply private and yet integral to your public service as a scholar, writer, and teacher. Can you speak to this, please?

CH: At the memorial for Haber's daughter (by his second wife) a few years ago in England, we sang the hymn "Bread of Life." It was a way of acknowledging the transformative power of fertilizer on agriculture. But it's not that straightforward. He is also responsible for the "gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs" of Wilfred Owen's WWI poem "Dulce et Decorum Est." I have taught that poem in many a USAFA classroom, and never had the courage to tell the class my personal connection to it. What your question leaves me with is, let's work for the good. Let's throw our efforts toward the salvation of this precious planet. In terms of the book, let's designate strategy as something that sets these goals, and speak up against the goals of violence and horror. Thanks for raising this here. It's cathartic to think and speak about it. Aristotle defines catharsis, or literally "cleansing," as the goal of the public enactment of the tragedies. For him, it's civic. We don't carry these burdens alone. It's like the warrior homecoming. We shouldn't make them do this work alone. It should be a shared civic responsibility.

TM: You call the book *Strategic Humanism: Lessons in Leadership from the Ancient Greeks* instead of *Greek Humanism: Lessons in Leadership*, or something to that effect. Could you say a bit about your title, please?

CH: In the post-Cartesian context, “strategy” may be one of those key words that summons up technocratic data-driven determinations. I prefer the Aristotelian connotation, and I hope that comes across in the book! Aristotle uses the metaphor of the *strategos*, the Greek word for “general,” as a way of conveying the ordering principle. Granted, generals do not always live up to this notion in real life, but in theory at least, the general is there to order the layout of the army, and to ensure that the appropriate goals are realized. Paired with “humanism,” I hope it conveys that this is an argument for a strategy that orders the phenomena around the highest human goals. We need to deliberate in human terms on how to order our work around such goals. In your earlier question, you point out that the planet is at risk. Surely that is a humanist goal for strategy, to aim at preserving a life-giving planet? In Herodotus, the character of Themistocles never loses sight of the strategic importance of a victory for the freedom-loving Greeks against the imperialist Persians. What does that translate into in contemporary times? Technologies bring salvation, but they also inflict long-term harm. In this age of COVID-19, technology’s limitations are on display. This is a good moment to reflect on these limitations, and on the enduring power of human values.

TM: One of the most provocative and inspiring insights in your book emerges from your critique of the rise of Cartesian rationalism and its pervasive influence on attempts to solve the greatest challenges of our time through purely technological means. What's the danger in what you call the post-Hellenic approach to the essential problems of being human? How would a better understanding and application of the Hellenic approach to being human enrich not only our private lives, but also our work as educators, leaders, and influencers in the public sphere?

CH: Francis Bacon and René Descartes differed in their methods, but they both dedicated themselves to what Bacon explicitly called "the mastery of nature." The scientific attitude toward nature changed from an interest in "Why?" to an interested in "How?" Nature became seen as inert material be manipulated in order to yield up its secrets, so that they could in turn be manipulated for improved physical quality of human life. Physical quality of life has improved vastly as a result of this. Yet the Greeks were interested in the philosophical quality of life. And something like this novel coronavirus teaches us that science cannot always shield us from our relationships to suffering and loss. Post-Cartesian science has focused on medicating pain. While we need these medications, we also need some deeper way of contextualizing them in a human life. Hellenic humanism is predicated on the pronouncement that human life is characterized by striving, contesting, and often conflicting. It's in how we respond to that truth that we show our caliber as individuals and as a people.

TM: As a former military officer and professional educator, one of the things that increasingly alarmed me as I served in various national security capacities was the privileging of STEM as the

primary vehicle for maintaining our ascendancy on the world stage. Oh, STEM our salvation! We've done this, I believe, to the detriment of our national security. Is it fair to say your book serves as an argument in favor of adopting a healthy dose of the humanities to counteract the wrongheaded worship of STEM that one finds today so prevalent in our military and society at large?

CH: The STEM as salvation narrative is so prominent in military circles. At the Air Force Academy, cadets come into the Philosophy Department's ethics class thinking that being moral is a problem you can solve by following an OODA loop, or some other external techno-rubric. In that class, in reading Aristotle and Kant, many cadets encounter for the first time in their lives the notion that that they might have their own tools of reason that can guide them effectively toward moral solutions and moral courage. This is the problem I have with the STEM as salvation narrative, is that it can't develop the intellectual courage to look strategic choices head-on. Everything becomes tactics, logistics. The end and goal gets taken for granted, and the process whereby the goal should be a subject for human deliberation and dialogue is overlooked. STEM is vitally needed for affairs that require a scientific solution. But only the humanities and the liberal arts can address the human condition in its deeper context. And the need for that will not go away, just because science continues to innovate with respect to technology. If anything, I would argue that the need has become greater. We are, if not in "mortal peril," at least in "moral peril" in our age.

TM: I've always been fascinated by the fact that Greek tragedy came into its maturity during the Athenian century of war, a century of tremendous growth in the conception of human liberty, but also a century of tremendous suffering. Can you say something please about the role of hubris in the demise of Athens? I ask this because hubris is always at the heart of Greek tragedy, the classical art form that is just a bunch of talk, or should I say, dialogue. Hubris is not a friend of dialogue. Democracy depends on the power of persuasion, the power of dialogue. In your book, you note how Thucydides singles out the type of hubris or arrogance that led to Athens' downfall—you gloss the Greek word *pleonexia* which denotes a particular brand of hubris, right?

CH: *Pleonexia* is such a great word. It means literally "love of more," and it reflects the appetites and passions unchecked by reason. The Athenians lost the Peloponnesian War when they allowed their demagogues to goad them into voting to send a massive aggressive expedition to conquer Sicily, at a time when their resources were stretched by war, and they were already challenged to manage the empire they owned. Sound familiar? I offer Aristotle as an antidote to this arrogance. Aristotle insists that things be done for the right reasons. In the relentless push to be innovators, we need to remember that the moral caliber of our goals matters, and says volumes about who we are. We need to learn to ask not just "can we?" but "should we?" Maybe that's the way to ensure we learn the right, i.e. moral, lessons about who we are from our wars.

TM: That's a fine note to end on, or should I say a fine "rhyme" to end on? Thank you for joining us, Claudia. We look forward to your next book.

CH: It's been a pleasure, Tom. Thank you.

Claudia Hauer has been a tutor (teaching member of the faculty with multidisciplinary expertise) at St. John's College since 1994. She has served several tours as a Distinguished Visiting Professor in the Department of English and Fine Arts at the United States Air Force Academy (2010–2012, 2016-17). She has also been a Distinguished Visiting Professor in the Department of Philosophy, United States Air Force Academy, 2014–2016. During the 2019-20 academic year, she held the Lyon Chair in Professional Ethics in the Department of Philosophy at the United States Air Force Academy.

Thomas McGuire is a poet, war literature critic, and Irish Studies scholar. His work has appeared in *North American Review*, *New Hibernia Review*, *Poetry for the More-Than-Human-World: An Anthology of Poetry & Commentary*, *Southeast Review*, *Dispatches from the Poetry Wars*, and *Open-Eyed, Full-Throated: An Anthology of American/Irish Poets* (Arlen House, 2019). He serves as Poetry Editor for *War, Literature & the Arts*. His poem "Four Ways of Looking at Magpie--A Most Becoming Bird" appeared in *Best New Poets 2020: 50 Poems from Emerging Writers*.