

There are also some inaccuracies. Neaera's owners offered to let her buy her freedom not because 'they tired of her' (25) but because they were about to marry. The statement that phratries are clans (63) is misleading; despite much perplexity concerning their exact nature in the classical period, there is no clear evidence that their members were, or claimed to be, of common descent (they were more probably fictional kinship groups). In *agōnes atimētoi* the mandatory sentence was *not* the death penalty (75); this was mandatory only for high treason, while for other offenses a fine could be imposed — at least according to Demosthenes, 21.90. The Greek word for the right of access to the Council and the Assembly is *prosodos*, not *prosodon* (58, 61, and in the General Index). The Greek citation from [Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 42.1 (97) is missing a word (*kata*). The Greek word on p. 98, first line, should be *eleutheros*, not *eleutheron*. The *genos*' name is Kerykes, not Kerkyes (105 and n. 47).

These comments notwithstanding, this is a stimulating and important book. It will prove indispensable reading for anyone interested in ancient Athenian society and an essential item in reading lists for academic courses. K. takes a fresh look at the texture of Athenian society, and given the breadth of material covered she does an excellent job in demonstrating its multifarious nature in a clear and accessible style.

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Matthew R. Christ, *The Limits of Altruism in Democratic Athens*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Pp. ix + 215, ISBN 978-1-107-02977-4.

Having exposed the Athenians as litigious, military service dodgers, liturgy avoiders and generally 'bad citizens',<sup>1</sup> Matthew Christ (henceforth C.) carries his program of reviving the 'pessimistic view' of Athens one step further.<sup>2</sup> This time, his target is the ideal image that the Athenians had allegedly drawn of themselves 'as a compassionate and generous people who rushed to the aid of others in distress, at home and abroad' (1). This image, argues C., is deceptive. C. contends that we must penetrate the smoke screen of false ideologies that the Athenians created to mislead others, and perhaps even themselves, into believing they were generous and compassionate. In fact, it turns out that they were a rather selfish bunch of narrow-minded people who only helped family and friends. In the few cases when they did help citizens in general or peoples of other states, they did it from expediency (2). This proclivity was built into their social system. Insofar as co-operation outside the circle of kinship and friendship was concerned, Athens retained the norms and practices of the pre-democratic society from which it sprang; 'the Athenian democracy does not appear to have altered this significantly' (177).

The research strategy that C. chooses to drive home this thesis is 'a close examination of our sources' (13). Examining — selectively, as I shall argue — a series of cases spread out over various fields of activity (e.g. helping fellow soldiers, aiding the poor, nursing the sick), C. contends that scholars have erred in assuming that the passages in question reveal a great degree of generosity and compassion and a small degree of self-interest and calculation on the part of the Athenians. In fact, he sees it the other way round: as revealing a great degree of self-interest and calculation and a small degree of generosity and compassion on the part of the Athenians. To

<sup>1</sup> Matthew R. Christ, *The Litigious Athenian*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998; *The Bad Citizen in Classical Athens*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> His disclaimer, which recurs with monotonous regularity in his previous works as well, that 'my goal is not to paint a dark picture of the Athenian character but rather to come up to a more nuanced understanding of it' (2), is not worth the penny.

validate that claim, C. resorts to special pleading: he plays down, explains away, or ignores the mountains of evidence that unmistakably display a vibrant spirit of civic generosity and compassion, and misrepresents, overstates or distorts others so as to suit his purposes. Two examples may suffice to illustrate this point.<sup>3</sup>

Cimon is credited by the author of the *Ath. Pol.* with discharging the public liturgies in a brilliant manner and with supplying maintenance to many of the members of his deme (27.30). The story is retold in greater detail by Theopompus (*FGrH* 115 F 89), but this time the beneficiaries are said to be citizens of various sorts ('any citizen who wished', 'poor Athenians', 'ill-clothed citizens'). C., however, dismisses the latter passage as evidence of civic generosity on the ground that 'Theopompus regularly embellishes and exaggerates' (19), and concludes that the *Ath. Pol.* version should be preferred: in fact, Cimon only supported his fellow demesman, presumably in expectation of political support (19). There are at least two problems with this analysis. First, no explanation is offered as to what could have motivated Theopompus to present the beneficiaries of Cimon's generosity as citizens, not as demesmen. Was he part of a plot to spread the false renown of Athens as a compassionate and generous city? But, if he was, then the author of the *Ath. Pol.* must have been too! For, by singling out the Athenian demos for its 'customary mildness',<sup>4</sup> he was, in fact, paying tribute to their generosity. Hence, insofar as upper-class euergetism is concerned, the *Ath. Pol.* and Theopompus must be considered as complementary, rather than mutually exclusive sources: the fact that Cimon helped his demesmen does not rule out that he also helped other citizens. Second, if Cimon was indeed after political support, generosity towards citizens in general would have paid off much more. A deme was a negligibly small unit of a tribe (which, by the way, comprised areas far removed geographically from his deme). The main arena of political struggle was the Assembly. Here the citizens indebted to Cimon could have lent him much more valuable support than citizens in his deme. If political support was the aim, then Theopompus' version should be preferred.

The generalization that the Athenians drew a (false) image of themselves as benevolent helpers of people outside the circle of the family and friends and of other states recurs in this book, with slight variation, at least eight times.<sup>5</sup> However, examples which clearly belie it are systematically ignored. One such passage is Thuc. 3.49.4., according to which the crew of the trireme dispatched in 428 B.C. to convey the Assembly's decision to put the entire adult male population of Mytilene to death, is said to have deliberately procrastinated. A second trireme, dispatched the next day to convey the reversal of the decision, went hell for leather, its crew sleeping on a rota system and continuing to row even while they were eating, arriving only just in time to prevent the executions. Since the objects of the rowers' compassion were neither kin nor friends but citizens of another state (moreover, enemies: the Mytileneans had done them considerable harm not long before), and since self-interest can be ruled out as motive, the incident must be taken to reveal the Athenians as compassionate and generous people who rushed to the aid of others in distress abroad.

But let us move away from individual incidents to the big picture, which in C.'s account receives short shrift. The Athenians set up a system of government in which the rate of participation and degree of citizen involvement in the political process far surpassed the rate of participation and degree of citizen involvement found in any known subsequent system of government. They created a culture that in terms of originality, sophistication, and influence ranks

<sup>3</sup> A host of others are analysed by Robert Wallace's review of C.'s book (*BMCR* 2013.11.37). Wallace's overall judgment is noteworthy: 'I often came away believing rather the opposite of Christ's thesis'.

<sup>4</sup> χρώμενοι τῇ εἰωθίᾳ τοῦ δήμου πρότῃτι (22.4), i.e. for being so generous as to permit all friends of the tyrants that had not taken part with them in their offences during the disorders to dwell in the city.

<sup>5</sup> Pp. 89, 118, 127, 137, 175, 176, 179, 181.

among the highest in the history of humankind. They built a city which won the unqualified admiration of contemporaries and subsequent generations. Is it likely that they achieved all this while guided by a myopic, narrow-minded, pre-democratic cooperative ethos — of helping friends and kin, harming enemies, and helping strangers only from expediency?

To get to the bottom of this issue we must rid ourselves of the simplistic notion (on which C. operates) that being unselfish is good, being selfish (or being generous or compassionate to only a minimal extent and only towards a limited category of people, as C. has it) is bad. Cooperation is not about selfishness. All human beings without exception are selfish. Selfishness is hard-wired into our system by evolution. Cooperation is about ways in which one can best attain one's self-interest without neglecting that of others. For people living in tightly-knit communities, two diametrically opposed strategies present themselves (with, of course, a whole range of mid-way combinations). One is narrowly pursuing one's self-interest, without giving heed to the interests of others, and collaborating with others towards the achievement of communal goals only to a minimal extent. Another is pursuing one's self-interest, but integrating the interests of others into this pursuit, on the understanding that through this integration both one's self-interest and communal goals will be best promoted: rewards will be maximized through cooperation. Interestingly enough, the two strategies are not evenly distributed in human societies. Some societies are more cooperative than others.

The implication of C.'s thesis for this issue is that the Athenian strategy of interpersonal relations resembled the first strategy outlined above. However, everything we know about collaboration (and we know quite a lot, collaboration being one of the hottest research topics in fields such as game theory, evolution studies and economics) would seem to militate against such a conclusion. Observing that 'cooperation is the architect of creativity throughout evolution, from cells to multi-cellular creatures to anthills to villages to cities', the mathematician-evolutionist Martin Nowak has created idealized communities in a computer and charted the conditions in which cooperation can take hold and bloom. He himself was amazed by one of his central findings: 'despite nature's competitive setting — based on natural selection — the winning strategies of direct and indirect reciprocity must have the following "charitable" attributes: be hopeful, generous, and forgiving'.<sup>6</sup> In light of this, I suggest that the Athenians could only have achieved what they did by significantly altering the strategy of interpersonal relationships they had inherited from their non-democratic ancestors, and by working out some particular version of the second strategy of interpersonal relationships outlined above, one which involved a great deal of generosity and compassion on their part, and an unusually high degree of cooperation. This is what the comparative framework suggests, and this is what the mountains of evidence that C. has attempted to play down, explain away, or ignore, point to.

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<sup>6</sup> Martin A. Nowak, *Super Cooperators. Altruism, Evolution and Why We Need Each Other to Succeed*. New York: Free Press, 2012, at pp. xix and 272. Nowak's findings offer substantial confirmation to the thesis of my book, *Morality and Behaviour in Democratic Athens*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, which C. has dismissed as non-realistic (BMCR 2007.07.37).