Critical Engagement

CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT

What is critical engagement?

- Critical engagement means a number of different things.
- There is critical engagement with the ancient sources
- There is critical engagement with modern scholarship
- And, MOST IMPORTANTLY, there is critical engagement with the question, topic and subject.

Planning and Critical thought

Why is planning important?

- Because arguments (when backed with evidence) are complicated.
- If you do not plan (and just start writing), then you are in danger of:
  - FORGETTING THINGS
  - LEAVING THE EVIDENCE OUT
  - NOT CONNECTING THE INDIVIDUAL POINTS SO THAT THE ARGUMENT FOLLOWS A LOGICAL SEQUENCE

Questions to ask

- Does point B follow on from point A?
- Does the evidence support my point?
- Is there another way to view the evidence?

Delivery of argument and critical thought

Issues to consider

- Am I saying what I want to say?
- Am I presenting a point so that it is relevant to the argument?
- Are there any holes in the argument?
- How do I fill the holes in?

Example

What I want to argue

- Thasos had access to mines. Mines were important and made a polis strong financially. Athens did not want Thasos to be strong. So Athens tried to take Thasos' mines.

What is actually in my assignment

- Mines were extremely important in the Greek world. This explains why Athens attacked Thasos and why Thasos revolted.

And you have not explained:

1. That this is financial importance
2. That Athens was concerned about Thasos' power.
3. Why Thasos being strong was a danger to Athens.
4. How the mines are connected to the revolt.

Criticism of modern scholarship

Main issues/blocks

- I don’t know enough about the subject…
- What the article/book says looks persuasive…
- But I might be making a mistake…
- But I think I agree with the article/book…

Agreement vs. Disagreement

- Criticism of modern scholarship does not mean that you must disagree.
- As long as you take a critical approach to the argument/point presented by the scholar, there is nothing stopping you from agreeing.

Showing agreement with a critical attitude

- Juxtapose two scholarly views:
  - X argued this, Y argued the opposite. I agree with Y because his argument takes into account ancient source Z, which I think is more reliable on this subject due to reasons A, B, C.
- Support a scholar's argument with extra evidence:
  - I agree with D's position on issue F. D's position can be further strengthened if one considers ancient source G, which shows H,F,U.

Disagreement with a scholarly view

- Due to lack of sources used in the argument.
- Because he/she does not consider the weaknesses/issues of source A.
- Because the argument ignores sources B,C,D.
- Because the opposite scholarly view as demonstrated by scholar X and based on sources E,F,G is more persuasive and adheres more closely to the picture created by the evidence.

Reverse engineering

SIMON HORNBLOWER , 'THE RELIGIOUS DIMENSION TO THE PELOPONNESIAN WAR, OR, WHAT THUCYDIDES DOES NOT TELL US', *HARVARD STUDIES IN CLASSICAL PHILOLOGY* , VOL. 94, (1992), PP. 169-197

First steps

- So you are researching Thucydides, probably with an interest in Thucydides' weaknesses, or with a specific task relating to either Thucydides and religion, or Greek historians and religion.
- Hornblower's article will come up top in most searches where Thucydides and religion are combined.
- It is not the only one however, and you need to make certain that you have other aspects of the debate to research, not just one scholar's opinion and argument.

What is the article about? i.e. SPECIFICALLY

- IN a recent paper, E . Badian speaks of Thucydides and his "contempt for established Greek religion.'" This is strong language, but justified. **I am not, however, concerned in this article with the tricky question of Thucydides' own religious beliefs**, if he had any. My theme is a different one, namely: **the consequences for our understanding or misunderstanding of the second half of the fifth century, of Thucydides' neglect of the religious factor in his narrative. The speeches will concern me less**; they admittedly go some way to redress the general imbalance.
- Hornblower (1992: 169)

- **Not about Thucydides' religious beliefs.**
- **About the problems that Thucydides' account creates for us as historians**
- **He will not work too much on the speeches.**
  - **WHY?**
  - **IS THIS IMPORTANT?**
  - **WILL THIS ARGUMENT BE LESS ENCOMPASSING BECAUSE OF THIS?**

Close reading and checking of sources

The first minor silence can be introduced in the form of a question: what about the Olympic Games of 432? They are never mentioned by Thucydides, but they certainly happened: we know[4] the mes of three of the victors, one of them a Spartan who was victori the four-horse chariot event. The contrast w 8 Olympic festival, four years later s turned by the Spartans into a str d Thucydides gives the Mytilenaean s their own status as suppliants of Ze e god of suppliants.[5] We should like t t the 432 Olympics: presumably Ath s or pilgrims. This raises a neglecte ll

Have you checked Thucydides? Does he indeed not mention these Games?

[3] See, →, G. L. Cawkwell, "The Foundation of the Second Athenian Confederacy," *CQ* xxiii (1973) 47 ff. at pp. 57 f.

[4] L. Moretti, *Olympionikai: I Vincitori Negli Antichi Agoni Olympici* (Rome 1957) pp. 105 f.

[5] iii 9–14; Zeus: iii 14.1.

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