

## NEOCON GREECE: V. D. HANSON'S WAR ON HISTORY

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ABSTRACT: Given the fact that Victor Davis Hanson has a habit of making his views on almost everything public, it is not difficult to fit them into a neoconservative ideology. His remarks about ex-President Bush, the Iraq war or the threat of Mexican immigration to the identity of the United States leave no margin for doubt on this point. What we want to do in this article is to show how this ideology lays the foundations upon which he builds his proposals on the character of ancient Greek society, and especially on hoplite combat. Given these theoretical premises, it is easy to understand that the result is a complete distortion of the history of Greece, a distortion Hanson wants to expand to the entire history of the Western civilization\*\*\*\*.

### 1. Neoconservatism

Neoconservatism is an ill-defined political ideology which has deeply influenced the Republican Party and therefore has also left an impact on U.S. policy during the last decades of the Twentieth century. The origins of neoconservatism may be found in the City College of New York during the thirties, among a tiny group of students who were both Jews and Troskists: Irving Kristol, Daniel Bell or Nathan Glazer. They read *Partisan Review* and cultivated a very strong opposition to Stalinism and the USSR. In New York College, Kristol attended the lessons of Leo Strauss, a powerful Jewish intellectual who emigrated from Germany in 1932 with the unexpected help of Carl Schmitt<sup>1</sup>. After a short stay in Paris and Cambridge, he moved to the U.S. in 1937. He taught in New York, at the New School for Social Research from 1938 to 1949 and then at the University of Chicago uninterruptedly until his retirement in 1968. As Professor of Political Science, he made his students understand that they 'had been looking at the history of Western political thought through the wrong end of the telescope. Instead of our looking down at them

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<sup>1</sup> The connection between Schmitt and Strauss is a thorny issue. Even if they had no contact whatsoever from the moment the latter left Germany, it is clear that the 'Crown-Jurist' of Nazi Germany had an impact on the young Strauss: both were critics with the modern liberal state. See Meier 1988 and Vergniolle de Chantal 2005.

from the high vantage point of our more “advanced” era, he trained his students to look at modernity through the eyes of the “ancients” and the premoderns, accepting the premise that they were wiser and more insightful than we are<sup>2</sup>. Strauss was a committed critic of Modernity and the Enlightenment: he wanted to recover a truth, a sense of the rational which was peculiar to the Ancients and had been obliterated by the Moderns, by Hobbes in particular (a point in which he was in full agreement with Carl Schmitt). He defended Natural Law and criticized bitterly cultural relativism. In his own words: ‘If principles are sufficiently justified by the fact that they are accepted by a society, the principles of cannibalism are as defensible or sound as those of a civilized life’<sup>3</sup>. For him, the modern rejection of natural law is identical to ‘nihilism’, that is, the idea that all criteria of justice or morality are historically relative<sup>4</sup>. Yet this truth should not be revealed to everyone. As one of his students (Allan Bloom, to whom we will return later) put it in a kind of Strauss’ obituary: ‘Philosophy is dangerous for it must always call everything into question while in politics not everything can be called into question. The peculiar horror of modern tyranny has been its alliance with perverted philosophy’<sup>5</sup>.

This ‘esoteric’ concealing of the truth was also practiced –Strauss contended- by ancient authors, Thucydides included. Strauss aimed at rescuing the Greek historian from those of his interpreters who could only see the surface and catalogue him as a ‘realist’, interested only in power and domination. This was, and still is, the main conclusion reached by Classical and International relation scholars alike, such as H. Morgentau and W. Jaeger. But this was not Strauss’s opinion. In his view Thucydides ‘may be making a silent teaching about natural or divine law. That the plague follows Pericles’ speech, which mentions nothing about the gods, and that the Sicilian disaster follows the Melian dialogue, to Strauss showed that there are heavy costs in violating divine law’<sup>6</sup>.

The influence of Leo Strauss’s ideas in contemporary U.S. politics has been much bigger than what could be expected of a university professor who wrote difficult books on topics such as Plato or Machiavelli. His many students were the vehicle through which he achieved this, the so-called ‘straussians’, who have attained high positions in the administration or the universities. Although there is some overlapping, they should not be directly identified with neocons.

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<sup>2</sup> Kristol 1995, 8.

<sup>3</sup> Strauss 1965, 3.

<sup>4</sup> Nash 1998, 45. On Hobbes as (for Strauss) ‘the crucial break between the Ancients and the Moderns’ see Smith 2009, 24.

<sup>5</sup> Bloom 1974, 388.

<sup>6</sup> Gustafson 2000, 192.

Paraphrasing a well-known saying of Irving Kristol, one could almost define neoconservatives as 'straussians mugged by reality'. Reality came when Reagan was first sworn into office and put into practice the 'supply side' doctrine in the economy. Meanwhile in foreign policy he adopted a very aggressive attitude against the USSR which fulfilled neocon ambitions, an 'unholy alliance' between neocons and neoliberals from which 'a fiercely anti-democratic political culture results'<sup>7</sup>. The main impulse in this aggressive foreign policy was provided by the *Project for a New American Century*, the neocon think-tank founded in 1997 (it closed in 2006) under the general idea that 'American leadership is good for America and good for the world'. In his Statement of Principles we find the following: 'we need to accept responsibility for America's unique role in preserving and extending an international order friendly to our security, our prosperity and our principles'. Among the signatories, there were names such as Richard B. Cheney, William J. Bennett, Francis Fukuyama, Donald Kagan (an important name for us, for he is a classicist with close ties to Hanson; we will return to him later), Donald Rumsfeld or Paul Wolfowitz (who studied with Bloom at Cornell and with Strauss at Chicago).

The leading position of neoconservatives in the Bush administration and their key role in the war on Iraq is a well-known story. An American journalist even coined the word 'Leo-Cons' to summarize the deep impact of 'straussians' on neocon politicians. A full book was published in 1997 (that is three years before G.W. Bush won the elections) in order to prove 'that American neoconservatism, the ideology that dominates the Republican Party, echoes the themes of Strauss's political thought'<sup>8</sup>. Still the picture is not so crystal-clear. Strauss's abhorrence of modern liberalism does not fit in well with neoliberal doctrines in the economy which neocons, as we have already seen, enthusiastically endorsed when Reagan came into power. Hanson himself does not see a clear influence of Strauss on the foreign policy of the Bush administration (which he held to be dominated by followers of a realist approach in International Relations) while other analysts think that the leading officials of Bush's foreign policy were just liberals ('Wilsonians') in disguise<sup>9</sup>. As we shall see, Hanson's ideas are neoconservative much more than straussian, but there are some very telling echoes of Strauss's writings in his work.

Some people may think of Neoconservatism as a thing of the past –its obituary at least has already been written- but that would be a mistake<sup>10</sup>. 17 out of 24 "special advisers" on foreign policy selected by Mitt Romney worked as senior officials in the Bush administration; four of them

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<sup>7</sup> Brown 2006. Cf. Xenos 2007, 243.

<sup>8</sup> Atlas 2003; Drury 4.

<sup>9</sup> See Hanson 2009. On liberals in disguise, see West 2004.

<sup>10</sup> Bradley Thompson and Brook 2010.

signed the letter of the Project for the New American Century calling to remove Saddam Hussein from power<sup>11</sup>. Obama's victory has blocked this move, but no one can predict for how long. Meanwhile neoconservative's influence has not stopped growing, with the use of blogs, Youtube or whatever media suit their needs. Among this noisy chorus, V.D. Hanson has been and still is very generous in his public appearances or speeches. As he is a reputed professor, there is the risk that his distorted version of Ancient Greece may be taken by laymen as the canonical or the one "agreed upon" by experts. In this work we try to show that his ideology has not only contaminated his analysis of contemporary politics but his work as a historian as well. His books are an attempt at the fabrication of a non-controversial monolithic idea of Western civilization but this is a dangerous chimera. As E. Said put it in his 2003 preface to *Orientalism*: "neither the term Orient nor the concept of the West has any ontological stability: each is made up of human effort, partly affirmation, partly identification of the Other. That these supreme fictions lend easily to manipulation and the organization of collective passion has never been more evident than in our time"<sup>12</sup>. From 2003 onwards, the close defence of Western supremacy –its causes, limits, etc.- has been thriving (see footnote 63). Historians from very different traditions and specializations have joined in this discussion but it is very clear that neocons have taken the lead with V.D. Hanson taking place of pride.

## **2. Life circumstances and political ideology.**

V. D. Hanson's work has been subjected to numerous analyses and criticism from journalists, political scientists and philologists. Classical historians, however, have sought to ignore the uncomfortable aspects of his writings in an effort to retain ideas they considered worthy of discussion, to the extent that it has been argued that there are two V. D. Hanson: '(A) the distinguished historian of Greek warfare and (B) the hard-right political pundit widely known in print and internet publications. Hanson A is the author of three or four major works in the past couple decades that have had a strong and salutary influence on ancient military history. Hanson B, a darling of the neocons, habitually and facilely extrapolates "lessons" from ancient social, political, and military conditions to instruct or berate his readers about the "realities" of the western way of war as it is (or ought to be) prosecuted these days'<sup>13</sup>. From our point of view, the distinction between these two Hansons or, in other words, between what is biased and what is neutral in his work is, in this case, unpractical, because the ideology of the author destroys any

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<sup>11</sup> Hasan 2012, 38.

<sup>12</sup> Said 2003, xii.

<sup>13</sup> Holoka 2006.

claim to objectivity on his part . We do not believe, contrary to what some American colleagues have argued, that fame has led Hanson to place scholarship at the service of neoconservative warmongering policies<sup>14</sup>. This ideology, as we will try to show, already underlies Hanson's research on ancient Greece.

The big advantage we have in order to understand Hanson's circumstances comes about due to the fact that, unlike what usually happens with scholars, the information available about him, his biography, family history, and especially his ideas, is overwhelming. This is due in part to the age of information we live in, but also to a notable lack of modesty on his part. Scholars do not usually like talking about themselves, but Hanson shows no timidity or restraint. Thanks to the former, i.e., the information society in which we live, we can easily identify him as neocon<sup>15</sup>, a strong advocate for the political views of George W. Bush and D. Rumsfeld, in particular, the Iraq war<sup>16</sup>. His are over-confident statements, such as his unfulfilled prophecy that 'U.S. Marines will find more deadly weapons in the first hours of war than the U.N. did in three months'<sup>17</sup>. A quick examination of his blog<sup>18</sup> is sufficient to convince its reader of these political and ideological positions, which include other surprising statements, for example, that Iraq today, thanks to the Bush policy, is a true democracy and therefore the war has been a total success. Thanks to his characteristic openness, we are also informed about his family history: we know that his father and grandfather fought in both World Wars and their exciting exploits of war marked the childhood of young Victor Davis. Similarly, on many occasions he expressed his pride in being a farmer in the San Joaquin Valley in California. Instead of being a problem, this egocentrism becomes a clear advantage when performing an analysis of his work and his thought, for Hanson has transformed his life and circumstances into a central aspect of his intellectual work, which ultimately serves to also articulate his political thinking, making those three areas, private life, ideology and intellectual activity, a single whole. Surely he has also bitterly criticized some colleagues for doing exactly just that: to inform the reader of the racial, sexual or political

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<sup>14</sup> This judgment is summarized well in W. Robert Connor's words: 'Hanson is a very skilful scholar who made some major contributions [...]. What makes me nervous is that over time, the political agenda in his work has become stronger and more evident. I worry that the scholarly talent has become subservient to the political': Tempest 2004.

<sup>15</sup> 'The end of the neo-cons?' *BBC News*, February 9<sup>th</sup> 2009: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7825039.stm>

<sup>16</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victor\\_Davis\\_Hanson#cite\\_note-5](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victor_Davis_Hanson#cite_note-5)

<sup>17</sup> <http://old.nationalreview.com/hanson/hanson031803.asp>

<sup>18</sup> <http://pajamasmedia.com/victordavishanson/>

circumstances and biographical trajectory of the author in question<sup>19</sup>. In the same article where Hanson pitilessly punishes this lack of modesty of some American academics, he pauses to inform us that his father was an alcoholic, a matter of undeniable importance to classical studies<sup>20</sup>.

As noted above, Hanson comes from a family of farmers. This origin and the personal and family experience derived from his work as a farmer mark the first of the general lines along which not only his academic work and research but also his ideology move: his closed defence of the agricultural character of ancient Greek society results in the idea of *agrarianism* as the origin of Greek democracy and also of its true heir, that is, modern democracy, represented in the U.S.A.<sup>21</sup> The second of these lines, also present in his work from his PhD dissertation, emphasizes the importance given to the Greek way of war consisting in a decisive battle between armies of infantry composed of hoplites<sup>22</sup>. As he himself has said, his interest in war probably comes from the stories of war veterans told by his father and grandfather, who related their own experiences or those of more distant forebears<sup>23</sup>. But in our view, the most important idea emerging from this family and personal experience is that Hanson found in it both the ideal context for the emergence of democracy, ancient and modern, and the protagonist of its emergence: the hoplite-farmer, the small and medium Greek farmer, owner of the land he works, who is at the same time, responsible for the defence of his community. According to our author, the appearance in Greek history of the hoplite-farmer was essential for the emergence of a society of equals and, as a result of it, democracy. These values (importance of agriculture, small farmers as the basis of citizenship, defence of the community in the hands of its citizens, etc. ...) Hanson equates with the constitution of the USA, and from this coincidence our author develops his thesis on America as heir to Greece and the democratic ideal, or even more, his complete

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<sup>19</sup> We may mention some examples: Hanson and Heath 1997, 121 (Page DuBois) or Hanson 1998, 143 (J.P. Hallet) and 160 (T. Van Nortwick).

<sup>20</sup> Hanson 1998, 147.

<sup>21</sup> His interest in Greek agriculture is apparent since his PhD dissertation: *Warfare and agriculture in Classical Greece* (Hanson 1983); with respect to an examination of the concept of *agrarianism* as central to ancient and modern democracy, see Hanson 1999. These aspects of Hanson's work have been analyzed well by Echeverría Rey 2008, 54-7.

<sup>22</sup> Hanson has denominated this form of combat as 'western way of war,' the title of the work in which he has presented his hypothesis in this regard (Hanson 1989) and which, consequently, has bestowed upon him the prestige he enjoys as a military historian of the Ancient World, and which Hanson has taken upon himself to divulge and generalize in many of his later writings (see for example, Hanson 1999a, 44-83).

<sup>23</sup> Hanson 1989, 20-21.

identification of the contemporary USA with Greek democracies (see *infra* .20???) and nn.72, 76 and 109)<sup>24</sup>. These approaches, as we will see later, clearly mark the neoconservative ideology of Hanson.

Along with his personal experiences, a number of external influences have profoundly affected the intellectual activity of Hanson, in the field of classical and military studies. Hanson has openly acknowledged two: Donald Kagan and John Keegan<sup>25</sup>.

The first of these two authors, Donald Kagan, professor of history of Greece at the University of Yale, is a recognized specialist in the history of the Peloponnesian War<sup>26</sup> and one of the leading proponents of neo-conservative views, and the father of two famous spokesmen and publicists of this political ideology (Robert and Frederick Kagan). He also was an advocate of the Bush administration and has been actively engaged since its inception in 1997 in the *Project for the New American Century*, a think-tank which, as we have already seen at the beginning of this paper, aims to promote the global leadership of the USA<sup>27</sup>. Kagan is a fervent advocate of the idea that peace can only be maintained by a credible and sustainable military threat. This means that disarmament is in itself dangerous. In his view the best situation is that in which one power has a clear superiority over the rest and no desire to negotiate, because negotiation is appeasement and, therefore, it encourages lesser powers: their confidence and military resources increase, and so a war breaks out. If necessary, it is best to hit as soon as possible<sup>28</sup>. Although Kagan is talking about the First and Second World War, the Second Punic War and the Peloponnesian War, his words pretty much sum up the foreign policy of the Bush era<sup>29</sup>. In fact, as a result of these approaches, Kagan has become the great defender of the theory of preventive war as a method for the USA to be able to impose its policy on the world, an idea also taken up by Hanson as his own<sup>30</sup>. Vital ideological similarities, however, do not end here, as Kagan and Hanson are both ardent supporters of the primacy of classical culture in higher education. We

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<sup>24</sup> Reformulating, in this way, an identification of the USA with classical antiquity that had taken place already, during the founding of the nation, when Rome, and to a lesser degree Greece, were a fundamental reference for the Founding Fathers: vid. Miles 1978; Richard 1994; Malamud 2009.

<sup>25</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Victor\\_Davis\\_Hanson&action=edit&section=5](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Victor_Davis_Hanson&action=edit&section=5).

<sup>26</sup> As is apparent in his history of the aforementioned conflict in four volumes (Kagan 1969, 1974, 1981 and 1987) and the most recent research synthesis: Kagan 2003.

<sup>27</sup> <http://newamericancentury.org/>

<sup>28</sup> Kagan 1996.

<sup>29</sup> The notion of 'pre-emptive' war was revived by President Bush in a speech at West Point in June 2002 and set forth more fully by the White House in the 'National Security Strategy of the U.S.' Ferguson 2005, 152.

<sup>30</sup> Mendelsohn 2004. Hanson 2003..

shall see later what kind of classical culture. Both argue, as direct legacy of Leo Strauss, the applicability of the lessons of ancient history to current policy and both set their activity as the two spokesmen of classical culture in the neoconservative ranks<sup>31</sup>. Common interests and objectives seem to point to the possibility that Hanson is quietly paving the way to succeed Kagan, born in 1932, as the classicist par excellence of neoconservatism<sup>32</sup>. The fact that Hanson has focused a recent book on the Peloponnesian War<sup>33</sup>, in our view confirms this desire to connect himself with Kagan and the neo-conservative tradition, as it is well known that the history of the Peloponnesian War by Thucydides has become, largely thanks to Leo Strauss and Kagan himself, 'the favorite neoconservative text on foreign affairs'<sup>34</sup>. Since the end of World War II, the Thucydidean text has enjoyed considerable prestige within the most conservative sectors of the American political landscape. Until the demise of the USSR and as a result of the fortunate words that the Secretary of State of President Truman, George Marshall, pronounced in 1947, it was regarded as the great teaching of the classical past on the Cold War<sup>35</sup>.

His second major influence, John Keegan, was a British military historian (he died August, 2012), awarded the Order of the British Empire (OBE), who enjoyed international recognition as a historian of war. His works have been translated into various languages, and they have played an important part in the renewal that military history has experienced in recent decades<sup>36</sup>. As was the case with Kagan, between Hanson and Keegan there is also ideological and political affinity reflected, for example, in the public defence of the Iraq War by Keegan<sup>37</sup> and

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<sup>31</sup> Cfr. [http://www.rightweb.irc-online.org/profile/Kagan\\_Donald](http://www.rightweb.irc-online.org/profile/Kagan_Donald). Barry Strauss' reflections on Robert D. Kaplan's thought and work offer a magnificent example of the applicability of the teachings of the classics to current politics which neoconservative thought defends: Strauss 2004.

<sup>32</sup> The praise exchanged between the two clearly demonstrated their close intellectual relationship, and, above all, their ideological and professional affinities, so, for example, for Hanson: 'Donald Kagan is a well-known, if not controversial, historian. Most recently in a series of articles, lectures, and television appearances he has led the defense -a thankless enough, but necessary, task- of the traditional teaching of western civilization against recent onslaughts by the metahistorians, deconstructionists, new historicists, and the pack of other assorted 'there are no facts' revisionists' (Hanson 1992, 119), while the latter states that 'Hanson's work on the role of the small family farmer in the development of democracy is the most important work in Greek history in my lifetime' (Tempest 2004, 3).

<sup>33</sup> Hanson 2005.

<sup>34</sup> Kristol 2003; see also Frachon and Vernet 2006, 71.

<sup>35</sup> On the history of this interpretation: North 2003; Miller 2004; Lane Jr., 2005.

<sup>36</sup> Citino 2007.

<sup>37</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=John\\_Keegan&action=edit&section=3](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=John_Keegan&action=edit&section=3)



the collaboration of both, as columnists, in the *National Review On Line*<sup>38</sup>, one of the most active publication defending and propagating conservative and neo-conservative American ideology<sup>39</sup>. Keegan's influence on Hanson is primarily intellectual and focuses, on one hand, on the acceptance of the link between culture, technological development and form of war and combat<sup>40</sup> and, on the other hand, on the study of the psychology of the fighter, adopting the viewpoint of the soldier who takes part in the war<sup>41</sup>; both features Hanson introduced frequently in his writings, in his work as columnist and in his historical essays<sup>42</sup>. There are several proofs of the intimate intellectual relationship between the two authors such as the enthusiastic preface to *The Western Way of War* written by Keegan<sup>43</sup>, the dedication to Keegan of the book *Hoplites*, whose editor is Hanson<sup>44</sup> or the authorship by Hanson of the volume about the war in Ancient Greece (*The Wars of the Ancient Greeks*) in the *Cassell History of Warfare* whose General Editor is Keegan.

### 3. V. D. Hanson's Greece: a culture forged in battle

Having broadly outlined the influences governing Hanson's thought, we will now move on to analyze the way that his ideology articulates the main tenets of his historical work. Therefore, we will now review some of his fundamental ideas about Ancient Greece beginning with the 'Western way of war.' Hanson's central thesis in this regard is well known: the Greeks invented a way of war that minimized the damages because everything was resolved into a single brutal infantry clash, which, despite everything, was not too deadly in demographic terms. The rest, which was not infantry, i.e., cavalry, light troops, horse carts, either was not used at all or had a secondary importance. In his book he performs a very detailed recreation of the different stages

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<sup>38</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=John\\_Keegan&action=edit&section=1](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=John_Keegan&action=edit&section=1) and [http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Victor\\_Davis\\_Hanson&action=edit&section=1](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Victor_Davis_Hanson&action=edit&section=1)

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.nationalreview.com/>.

<sup>40</sup> Formulation developed in Keegan 1994, 1 ff., whose influence on Hanson is clear in the chapter titles of his *A War Like No Other* (Hanson 2005), inspired, as a tribute to him, in the titles in Keegan's book: cf. Wheeler 2006.

<sup>41</sup> Point of view that constitutes one of the most praised aspects of Keegan's work, (Keegan 1976). This influx had already been previously mentioned, as is apparent in the words of Wheeler, 1990, 122: 'Battle, divorced from its strategic and tactical contexts and studied as individual soldiers' personal experiences, represents a genre of the "new" military history spawned by Keegan, who inspired and introduces Hanson's treatment of hoplite phalanxes'.

<sup>42</sup> With respect to the link between technology and forms of war, see, for example, Hanson 2003. The introduction of the psychological aspects of combat is clear in his work, since Hanson 1989, 107-96, forming, as time goes by, one of the most characteristic elements of his work just as, for example, is clear in chapter 8 of Hanson 2005, dedicated to the description of naval combats.

<sup>43</sup> In contrast to Keegan's praise of the book, we may mention the opinion expressed by Buckler 1991, 237, who sees it as 'unfortunately incompetent and misleading regarding the political and social aspects of Greek military history'.

<sup>44</sup> Hanson, ed. 1991, XVI.

of combat, almost always taking the perspective of the hoplites, trying to evoke their effort, their fears, and their pain. He is not interested in tactics, political issues, or logistics, only in the infantry soldier surrounded by his friends, neighbours and relatives, who will meet face to face with the enemy.

From the beginning Hanson refuses to seek help for this task in the studies of Greek society –on kinship, slavery, women-, because such studies are, in his view, politically biased. This bias invalidates them completely, so Hanson can get rid of all that weight in one fell swoop, in one paragraph, in fact: 'Nor do the social scientists do us any better if they investigate the role of labour, slavery, women, family and kin relationships in order to discover some structure in classical society that validates their ideas about contemporary politics –for inevitably they have a political agenda'<sup>45</sup>. We are not sure, on our part, that generally speaking the author's political views destroy the full value of his scientific work. But we are sure that this happens precisely in the case of Hanson, in which political prejudices contaminate his proposals about full hoplite combat.

First, his political bias seems very obvious when he says that, in reality, war was not devastating, for this is an essential premise of his study that allows him to get rid of all approaches postulating economic reasons as true causes of warfare. In his opinion, it is not likely that the damage to crops was excessive, because the enemy did not have much time to spare, after all, they had to take care of their own. Armies do not waste time trying to uproot vineyards, a long and difficult process, and if cut or burned, the consequences of this would not be very serious in the long term. At least that is what Hanson says<sup>46</sup>, but we do not think that having to face the prospect of a long winter of hunger can be taken so lightly. The consequences of the destruction inflicted by the enemy might not be irreversible for the crops themselves, but most likely devastating to the people who have to live out of them<sup>47</sup>. Perhaps nothing illustrates this better than the peculiar and unusual strategy of Athens in the early years of the Peloponnesian War. Its walls and navy allowed the city to stock up while the Lacedaemonian army and their allies camped in Attica. The wounded honour, contrary to what one would expect, following Hanson's approach, did not push them to confront the invaders and drive them out of the *polis*. Instead, the Athenians remained within the protection of the walls because they, unlike the rest of the Greeks, did not need their own crops to survive. In terms of numbers, Hanson accepted without further discussion, the figure given by Krentz, that is, in a battle around 15% of the

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<sup>45</sup> Hanson 1989, 7.

<sup>46</sup> Hanson 1989, 24: 'few long-term effects'.

<sup>47</sup> On the grave consequences of the Peloponnesian war on the farmer, see Gallego 2009, 70-73. Cfr. Thorne 2001.

soldiers on the losing side died<sup>48</sup>. Given the demographic weakness of the Greek *poleis*, 15% of adult males appears to be a respectable figure<sup>49</sup>. The total number of adult males in a 'Normalpolis' in the classical period has been estimated to be between 300 and 1250. Poleis were very small units in which a disaster of this magnitude could have serious consequences in the long term. In addition, as it is well known, averages are misleading because they conceal or disguise debacles of major proportions. In the battle of Mantinea, for example, from the figures given by Thucydides it can be inferred that the losing side lost a third of its men<sup>50</sup>. Hanson only summarily discusses this point, because once the issue of destroyed crops and battle casualties is removed, for him the answer is clear: Greeks were fighting for a matter of honour, because the enemy invasion was an 'insult to their sovereignty'<sup>51</sup>. To quote his own words: 'Infantrymen marched out not to save their livelihoods nor even their ancestral homes, but rather for an idea, that no enemy march uncontested through the plains of Greece'<sup>52</sup>. Hanson's hoplites are straight out of a book of chivalric romance, fighting for honour and risking their lives, but keeping the villains out, together with women and children, spectators amazed at the feats of valor that unfold before their very eyes. Hanson's hoplites are a product of the imagination of its author, more similar to Amadis de Gaula or Tirant lo Blanc than to the Greek infantry soldier.

The anti-materialist approach of Hanson, that is, his refusal to consider that any sharp economic causes lie behind armed conflicts, leads him to an absurd conclusion. Absurd not only because it underestimates the damage that war caused, but because it suppresses very clear and well known facts from the overall picture. In other words, prejudices led him to overlook core facts of the history of Ancient Greece, such as slavery, which he does not even mention in this book, when one of the most important consequences of the defeat is the enslavement of the vanquished. From Hecuba's lament to the desperate resistance of the Melians, Greek citizens did not face death only, but also slavery<sup>53</sup>. And we also have Sparta. Military defeat could not only

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<sup>48</sup> Krentz 1985.

<sup>49</sup> Nagle 2006, 56. According to Hansen 2006, 5 and n. 15, the defensive force of a Greek *polis* would be formed by, approximately, 25% of its total free population.

<sup>50</sup> Thucydides (*The Peloponnesian War* V, 74) mentions 1,100 deaths among Argives, Kleonaioi, Orneatai, Athenians and Mantineans. He doesn't tell us the total number of soldiers, but he mentions that the Spartan army and its allies numbered about 3,500 men and was clearly more numerous than that of its enemies (*The Peloponnesian War* V, 68).

<sup>51</sup> Hanson 1989, 34.

<sup>52</sup> Hanson 1989, 5.

<sup>53</sup> Cfr. Garlan 1982, 58-60. Andreau and Descat 2006, 88: 'un tiers environ des prises de villes ou de batailles connues par nos sources se terminent par la capture d'esclaves'.

mean death, starvation and slavery for some, but the end of the polis itself, the annexation by the victor and, for the vanquished, to be converted in helots. Tyrtaeus' songs, that V. D. Hanson so very much likes, exalted the Spartan victories and the subjugation of the Messenians. But Hanson did not mention the Helots. Not even once. Nor does he mention Salamis, which is very understandable, because the merit of the victory over the Persians corresponded, this time, not to the hoplites but the *thetes*, that is, if we translate using Hanson's dictionary, the victor in Salamis was not the middle class but the proletariat. The conflict, moreover, although decisive, was not an infantry battle, but a naval combat. Therefore, since Salamis does not fit into his particular Procrustean bed, it is best to ignore it, as if it never existed. Plato, of course, could not do the same. He did not hide his criticism, because in his view (*Laws* 707a5-c7), although Salamis saved the Greeks, it also made them worse. Plato repudiated the Athenian democracy, so that his criticism of Salamis is consistent, for this victory opened the door to democracy. What is not consistent is to repudiate Salamis and yet to admire democracy.

This idea of honour, the defence of honour as a cause of conflict, is due, as we have seen, to Hanson's desire to reject any materialistic approach. It has a very specific source, which we should examine for a moment. Kagan refers several times to honour in his study of the origin of wars. Generally speaking, he states that: 'The reader may be surprised by how small a role in the instances studied here, and, I believe, in many other cases, considerations of practical utility and material gain, and even ambition for power itself, play in bringing on wars and how often some aspect of honour is decisive'<sup>54</sup>. Although without mentioning him, Kagan is referring to Leo Strauss' interpretation of a famous triad of Thucydides (1, 76, 2), according to which people go to war for three reasons: fear, honour, and self-interest. Following Strauss, Kagan corrects his source by restricting the three motifs to a single cause: honour. The triad is part of a speech by the Athenians who were accidentally in Sparta when this city was discussing whether to declare war on Athens or not. In that speech, the Athenians say: 'It follows that it was not a very wonderful action, or contrary to the common practice of mankind, if we did accept an empire that was offered to us, and refused to give it up under the pressure of three of the strongest motives, fear, honour, and interest'<sup>55</sup>. The passage gives three reasons for preserving the Empire Athenians had inherited, but Kagan mentions just one.

This Thucydidean triad is also crucial for Hanson, as a favourable reviewer has shown: 'Thucydidean "fear, honour, and self-interest" and careful social and material analysis (as

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<sup>54</sup> Kagan, 1996, 8.

<sup>55</sup> Translation Richard Crawley, Thucydides. *The Peloponnesian War*, London, 1910.

Hanson) would provide the needed corrective to the 'history of ideologies'<sup>56</sup>. Thus, we have reached the core of Hanson's thought, which is none other than the interpretation Leo Strauss made of Thucydides<sup>57</sup>. Strauss stopped at the famous triad of 'honour, fear and interest'<sup>58</sup> to conclude that if these three reasons are considered compulsive enough to 'be forced' to maintain an empire, as the Athenian legates declared, then it must be concluded that no war, nor the exercise of tyrannical power of some cities over others, is unjust. Thucydides recognizes, therefore, according to Leo Strauss, that there is a natural right of the strongest, which does not, in every circumstance, lead to expansionism<sup>59</sup>: Sparta was as imperialistic as Athens, but its empire went unnoticed because it was old and had reached its natural limit. Leo Strauss's conclusion is transparent: 'The lesson of Thucydides' work as a whole may be said to be that the order of cities which is presupposed in the most noble Spartan proclamations is altogether impossible, given the unequal power of the different cities which inevitably leads to the consequence that the most powerful cities cannot help being hegemonial or even imperial'<sup>60</sup>. But while the imperial impulse is the same, not all cities rule the same way. In this, the Athenians are superior because they are moved not only by fear and interest, but also by honour; they exert their imperial government more fairly and less greedily: 'the ultimate justification of the Athenian Empire is less compulsion, fear or profit than everlasting glory –a goal to the pursuit of which the Athenians are not compelled or with which they are not obsessed, but to which they have freely and fully dedicated themselves'<sup>61</sup>.

Hanson refuses to acknowledge that his father and grandfather won the war because they had better equipment and more resources than their respective enemies<sup>62</sup>. They won the war, as he believed, because they were better, because the *polis* to which they belonged (Hanson calls it the West when in fact he means USA), like Periclean Athens, defended higher values than those of their enemies. In the bibliographic addendum to the second edition of *The Western Way*, he notes: 'I will remark that any attempt to suggest that Western military prowess has mostly resulted from privileged natural resources, microbes or geographical and

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<sup>56</sup> Samons II 1998, 117. With 'history of ideologies', Samons is referring to the work of J. Ober.

<sup>57</sup> Strauss 1978, chapter 3.

<sup>58</sup> Strauss 1978, 183.

<sup>59</sup> Strauss 1978, 191.

<sup>60</sup> Strauss 1978, 239

<sup>61</sup> Strauss 1978, 211.

<sup>62</sup> Hanson's father and grandfather are mentioned *in extenso* in Hanson 1989, 20-21.

environmental conditions... rather than values and ideas, is unconvincing'<sup>63</sup>. We will now examine which values he refers to.

### 3. Specific values of Western Civilization

Moreover, and this is another of the problems that, in our view, ruins Hanson's hypothesis on the 'Western way of the war,' our author builds up a completely ahistorical entelechy<sup>64</sup>. This Hellenic form of decisive battle from which the 'Western way of war' derives (decisive clash of heavy infantry corps whose main motivation is honour and which, as a form of war, minimizes damage to the people involved in the fighting) is very sparsely documented in ancient Greece: when we have good documented evidence of the Greek forms of war, it does not have the characteristics attributed to it by Hanson. The way of war Hanson has reconstructed existed only for a short period of time, in the early Archaic period, and with features that, more than forty years ago, were studied and analyzed brilliantly by Angelo Brelich<sup>65</sup>. From that period onwards, the Greek way of war, like any other historical phenomenon, evolved, changed and transformed, at the same rate as Greek societies did<sup>66</sup>. As a result, these ways of war are as Hellenic as the model built by Hanson. However, for our author, these other military practices in reality represent degenerated forms of the ideal<sup>67</sup> and, hence, his rejection of them, a rejection derived from the fact that the changes introduced in Greek war, according to Hanson, were caused by the transformation of the early democracy of small farmers, landowners and hoplites<sup>68</sup>. If we take into account the cultural

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<sup>63</sup> Hanson, 1989, 237. Clear reference to the hypothesis defended by Diamond 1999, 13 ff., to explain the differences between the historical evolution and the industrial development of western culture and the rest of human cultures, a hot topic as seen in recent publications: Morris 2010; Ferguson 2011.

<sup>64</sup> As Burke 1991, 174 put it: 'any claim that the ethic of hoplite warfare has been imprinted on Western military thinking remains conjecture'. On the weaknesses of Hanson's hypothesis on the Western Way of War from a historical perspective, see Lynn 2008,12-27.

<sup>65</sup> Brelich 1961, classic study of the understanding of the oldest forms of Hellenic warfare Hanson overlooked in *The Western Way* (Hanson 1989) and which, although quoted in his other works (see, for example, the bibliography of Hanson 1999)), is not even mentioned once in his lengthy and detailed study on the historiography of the military history of Antiquity: Hanson 1999b.

<sup>66</sup> This denial of the change in the forms of Greek war has been a repeated criticism of the hypothesis of the existence of a 'Western Way of War': 'In stressing continuity, he plays down or ignores the changing character and practice of Greek warfare between the Persian wars and the battle of Chaeronea', cf. Wheeler 1990, 123.

<sup>67</sup> Proof of this is provided by the chapter title of *The Other Greeks* (Hanson, 1999) in which Hanson states the transformations within the hoplite battle: 'Hoplites as Dinosaurs', pp. 321-49.

<sup>68</sup> A link between the small peasant proprietor and hoplite, as indicated by many of the commentators on the work of Hanson, was far from true in ancient Greece: Buckler, 1991, 236-7: 'A considerable weakness of the book is conceptual. Hanson maintains (pp. 4-5, 15) that the hoplite was a small-holder, not an aristocrat, whereas the

character of the war, an idea Hanson has taken from Keegan, then any change in war tactics necessarily implies a cultural change and, therefore, if archaic hoplite battle was abandoned in ancient Greece, this was due to the disappearance of the egalitarian society of primitive peasant-soldiers<sup>69</sup>. Both are losses that Hanson would not accept if we consider his belief in the West, primarily the USA of today, as heirs to the Greek democratic forms and Greek way of war. He is therefore forced to convert ways of war and political systems as developed by the Greeks into ideal values completely unaffected by historical evolution.

Hanson's hypothesis on the development of Greek democratic forms of government is just another example of historically unchanged entelechy. He sees the emergence of the *polis* and Greek democracy as a direct consequence of the existence in Greece of a class of small peasant proprietors together with *agrarianism*, that is, the prevalence of traditional forms of agricultural life<sup>70</sup>. The problem with this view comes from the fact that the two largest and best known Greek city-states, Sparta and Athens, do not fit into the model: Sparta because in its

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sources prove precisely the opposite' and 'In reality, hoplite warfare took place between aristocrats or other members of the upper classes, among whom it originated in the Archaic Period and continued during the Classical, something that Hanson has also failed to appreciate. Only the wealthy possessed the means to buy expensive armor and the leisure to learn how to use it'; Burke, 1991, 144: 'What we should recognize in this - and what is inadequately explored by Hanson - is that ancient hoplite warfare was essentially elitist in character, conducted significantly on the very fields that determined the status (economic, social, and political) of the combatants, and waged in a manner that approached ritual'.

<sup>69</sup>This relationship between hoplite tactics and democracy is far from being as inseparable as Keegan and Hanson claim, cf. Buckler, 1991, 237. Hanson could have avoided this confusion between democracy on the one hand and the egalitarian character of the oldest Greek city-state on the other had he paid attention to some of the already classic works of the much maligned French anthropologists on the ancient Greek world, instead of putting them at the center of his criticism. Almost four decades ago Jean-Pierre Vernant indicated how such equality precedes the development of Greek democracy 'All those who shared in the state were defined as *homoioi* – men who are alike – and later more abstractly as *isoî*, or equals [...] In the sixth century this image of the human world was precisely expressed in the concept of *isonomia* – that is, the equal participation of all citizens in the exercise of power. But before it had acquired this fully democratic meaning, and before it had inspired such institutional reforms as those of Cleisthenes, the ideal of *isonomia* was able to convey or to extend communal aspirations that went back to the very origins of the polis': Vernant 1982, 61. With regard to the relationship between democracy and isonomy, see Lévêque and Vidal-Naquet. 1997, 18-22.

<sup>70</sup> This hypothesis is developed, among other works, in Hanson 1999, especially chapters. 4 to 7; see a simple formulation in pp. 398-9: 'So we should now reconceive the polis, constitutional government, the origins of individualism and Greek warfare itself as efforts to perpetuate independent landowners as exclusive citizens of the city-state, endeavors not so much to empower farmers as to create larger and responsible community of equals. All were institutions utterly unimaginable without the supporting infrastructure of an agrarian middle'.

recorded history, as is well known, was never established as a community of small farmers, and Athens because, unlike Hanson's contention, appears in the Archaic sources as a community in which the aristocracy, the Eupatrids of our texts, played a fundamental role<sup>71</sup>. We see, therefore, how the Hanson hypothesis, possible in many Greek city-states during the archaic period, becomes a rigid and unalterable model. This rigidity and lack of change, basically, is caused by the need to demonstrate that if the USA is the heir to this culture and to these unchanged Western values that were founded in ancient Greece, this is because the path the United States followed has been similar to the Greek one: a democracy based upon *agrarianism*<sup>72</sup>. However, we should note that the Greek democracy Hanson defends is clearly not the radical democracy of Periclean Athens, a political regime supported by a public no longer formed by small farmers<sup>73</sup>. In a similar way, his democratic ideal has little to do with what today are considered democratic regimes, partly because, as Hanson points out for the USA today, the agrarianism that necessarily must be the basis of such regimes is, at present, disappearing and giving way to forms of land use based on what Hanson terms *agribusiness*, which has put an end to the democracy of small farmers associated with American independence<sup>74</sup>.

As the loyal follower of Kagan that he is, Hanson uses his interpretation of the Greek past as support for his neoconservative readings of the world we live in. This is the origin of other historical works of his, in which his attention turns away from classical antiquity in order to peruse the survival of his fabricated entelechies. This is the case with, for example, works such as *The Soul of Battle*, where Epaminondas, Sherman and Patton are presented as defenders of a perennial and perpetual idea of democracy and as fighters against tyranny -predecessors, that is,

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<sup>71</sup> Argument also amply highlighted by the commentators on the work of Hanson: 'Because of his agrarian focus Hanson tends to treat Thebes and the other communities in Boeotia as poleis more typical of the norm than Athens', cf. Rahe, 1997, 461.

<sup>72</sup> Hanson 1999, 358, quotes Thomas Jefferson to justify the importance of agrarianism in the history of the USA and its form of government: 'I think our governments will remain virtuous for many centuries; as long as they are chiefly agricultural; and this will be as long as there shall be vacant lands in any part of America. When they get piled up upon one another in large cities, as in Europe, they will become as corrupt as in Europe'. Hanson takes it from Griswold 1948, 31, but the original quote can be found at Thomas Jefferson, 'Letter to James Madison, December 20, 1787,' in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Julian P. Boyd, vol. 12, Princeton (New Jersey), 1955, p. 442.

<sup>73</sup> On Hanson consideration of the Athens of Pericles, cfr. Hanson 1999, 358-69.

<sup>74</sup> American agrarianism crisis exposed in Hanson 1999, 411-425. In fact, as Rahe 1997 well said, behind Hanson's arguments on Hellenic agriculture and society are always his personal experience and the USA: 'His insights into the character of Greek civilization are largely derivative from his own experience as a farmer: when he depicts the ancient Hellenic smallholder, he always has his own neighbors and kin in mind. Their attitudes, their outlook, their prejudices, their fears, their expectations he attributes to their ancient forbears'.



to the USA in its fight against Saddam Hussein's tyranny during the Gulf War<sup>75</sup>. Much the same can be said for his contribution to the collective work coordinated by Hanson himself, *Makers of Ancient Strategy*, where, again, he uses the figure of Epaminondas as a predecessor of preventive war, thus justifying historically the 2003 War on Iraq and Kagan's doctrine on this form of armed intervention<sup>76</sup>. However, we think the most significant work in this regard is Hanson's *Carnage and Culture*<sup>77</sup>, a book in which, through analysis and the study of a number of decisive battles ranging from the Persian to Vietnam Wars, he defends and legitimizes the superiority of Western culture. This ideological background of the work is never hidden, as its subtitle (*Landmark battles in the rise of Western power*) clearly proclaims, but it is very conveniently summarized in the following passage: 'Western civilization has given mankind the only economic system that works, a rationalist tradition that alone allows us material and technological progress, the sole political structure that ensures the freedom of the individual, a system of ethics and a religion that brings out the best in humankind – and the most lethal practice of arms conceivable'<sup>78</sup>. Naturally enough, Western civilization has inherited most of these prominent features from classical antiquity: philosophy (rationalist tradition), democracy (political structure which guarantees freedom of the individual) and the most lethal form of war (the battle of infantry, as inherited from hoplite combat).

The central argument of *Carnage and Culture* seeks to explain the triumph of the West in contemporary times because of its superior conception of freedom. Thus, as has previously been mentioned, Hanson assumes that, from ancient Greece to the modern USA, the Western concept of freedom has formed a single continuous story. We think that from a historical standpoint, this argument is terribly weak and from the ideological point of view, it links, as in the quotation above, contemporary liberty to Western capitalism as the two pillars of Western civilization, and again, the USA as the purest heir of the Western (that is, Greek) traditions<sup>79</sup>. The West wages war in defence of its freedom. This argument, as it is easy to understand, offers a solid justification and

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<sup>75</sup> Hanson 1999c, 12. See also P. Maslowski's review (2000).

<sup>76</sup> Hanson 2010.

<sup>77</sup> Hanson 2002.

<sup>78</sup> Hanson 2002, 472.

<sup>79</sup> As is clear from statements like: 'Throughout this book I use the term "Western" to refer to the culture of classical antiquity that arose in Greece and Rome; survived the collapse of the Roman Empire; spread to western and northern Europe; then during the great periods of exploration and colonization of the fifteenth through nineteenth centuries expanded to the Americas, Australia, and areas of Asia and Africa; and now exercises global political, economic, cultural, and military power far greater than the size of its territory or population might otherwise suggest.': Hanson 2002, 10.

defence of American militarism, interventionism and pre-emptive war. The idea of freedom which Hanson defends can be summarized, in the words of one of his critics, D. Renton, as one in which 'citizens should own their own farms, provide their own weapons, be free from taxes and centralized government'<sup>80</sup>, *i.e.*, we are moving within the limits of democratic freedom, founded in ancient Greece within that community of peasants, small landowners-hoplites so dear to our author. Following this ideal, we come to a society of small landowners similar to the one that in the mind of Hanson the USA originally was, where everybody could carry weapons such as hoplite infantry weapons or guns and firearms, which historically and constitutionally U.S. citizens can take home; they are neither heavily taxed nor under strong government power, the citizens constitute the community, the state. These are freedom and democracy as Hanson interprets them, completely different, as we have already pointed out, from the radical democracy of Periclean Athens, which our author considers a virus<sup>81</sup>.

Without going into further detail, as many critics have stated, the proposals presented by Hanson in this work are deeply biased by his own political ideology that distorts reality and historical accuracy in favor of precisely the ideology of author<sup>82</sup>. It is, therefore, bad historical work, but, at the same time, perfect justification of American interventionism, as evidenced by the fact that *Carnage and culture*, after the attacks of September 11, 2001, became a best-seller, as a result of a very timely second edition, in which Hanson, in a new preface, claimed that the United States, for the reasons stated in the book, had to face such attacks and achieve victory<sup>83</sup>.

This interpretation of the contemporary world from the perspective and the supposed lessons of the past borders on the surreal in his monograph on the Peloponnesian War<sup>84</sup>, a work which, as already indicated, may have more to do with Hanson's ambition to occupy a position in the neoconservative intelligentsia as heir to Kagan than to any other purpose. For, as many commentators have already noted<sup>85</sup>, this is a work whose background is both the war on Iraq and Hanson's obstinacy to identify that war with the conflict between Athens and Sparta, an identification which truly speaking is quite difficult to see. *A War Like No Other* is a misleading

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<sup>80</sup> Renton 2003.

<sup>81</sup> Hanson 2002, 71; Renton 2003

<sup>82</sup> As has been shown, among others, by Renton, 2003 or C. Bray, 'Torturing History. A military historian abuses the past': <http://reason.com/archives/2002/04/01/torturing-history>

<sup>83</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Victor\\_Davis\\_Hanson&action=edit&section=6](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Victor_Davis_Hanson&action=edit&section=6).

<sup>84</sup> Hanson 2005.

<sup>85</sup> See: J. Taylor, 'Thucydides vs. Victor Davis Hanson. Bogus scholarship in support of a failed policy': <http://www.antiwar.com/orig/jtaylor.php?articleid=11557>; G. Brecher, 'It's All Greek to Victor Davis Hanson': <http://www.amconmag.com/article/2005/dec/19/00029/>

work: it provides an excellent example of what vulgarization should not be, with constant and in many cases far-fetched comparisons of ancient characters and events with others from present<sup>86</sup>. In summary, it makes inappropriate use of anachronism, a practice that if controlled may be very useful to gain better knowledge of ancient Greece, as it has been noted by N.Loraux<sup>87</sup>.

Hanson's work, therefore, becomes a plea for a Western civilization, heir to agrarian Greece: a mere entelechy created by our author in favour of the political interests of the ideology he advocates. This Western civilization, in his own words, is characterized by the following features<sup>88</sup>:

'There are, as I see it, at least twelve fundamentals of Western civilization that originated exclusively in the agricultural practice of the *polis* [...]: 1. Private ownership of land. 2. Free choice and independence in economic activity. 3. An economic mentality that sought to improve productivity 4. Liberation from oppressive and capricious taxes and rents. 5. Constitutional government based on local representation. 6. Chauvinism of a cohesive middle stratum, neither wealthy nor poor. 7. Notions of egalitarianism and equality of property holding. 8. Private ownership of arms. 9. Citizen composition of amateur militias. 10. Absolute subservience of military organization to civilian political control. 11. Desire to limit and control defense outlay. 12. Preference in warfare for decisive engagement and frontal assault'.

These features, as is evident, do not speak about the West as the heir to Greek *agrarianism*, but they define, quite clearly, the United States as lawful heirs and, therefore, defenders of Western culture. A fact which is particularly evident if we consider number 8, only explicable if we fall into anachronistic excess enough to convert possession and storage of weapons at home, by the Greek hoplite, into a precedent of the right that the U.S. Constitution

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<sup>86</sup> Among the many that adorn the work we can cite: the identification of the situation in Greece during certain periods with the war that took place in Beirut between 1975 and 1985, a process known as *Lebanonization* of Greece (p. 99 ff.) , the comparison of the family of Alcibiades with the Kennedy family (p. 63); Brasidas qualification as a sort of Che Guevara or Fidel Castro (p. 120), statements like the factors that led to the invention of Kevlar helmets and hoplite defensive weapons were the same (p. 137) or the identification of Platea and Omaha Beach (p. 168). In some cases these comparisons have been, for years, part of the approach of Hanson to the past, as the application of the term *Lebanonization* to the Greece of the Peloponnesian War in his review of Kagan appears to demonstrate: Hanson 1992, 119.

<sup>87</sup> Anachronism subject to certain conditions, as noted by Loraux, 1993. Hanson, of course, does not respect these conditions in his work.

<sup>88</sup> Hanson 1999, 403-4.

gives to every American citizen to own a gun for his own defence<sup>89</sup>. However, the shield was part of Greek heavy infantry, so it cannot be compared to the weapons that many American homes jealously guard. A more accurate equivalent would be to defend the right of citizens to have a tank in their gardens ready to be driven to the battlefield when mobilized. The truth is that professional armies with weapons which are not the soldier's but the public treasury's property are a constant in the West since at least Early Republican Rome. The professional army does not depend on the handguns its soldiers can keep in their bedrooms.

#### 4. Teaching the classics.

The main intellectual mentor of the neocons, as we have already seen, is Leo Strauss, whose influence is visible also in Hanson, though perhaps not directly but through Kagan or other neocon thinkers. Allan Bloom's 1987 work, *The Closing of the American Mind*, has also been profoundly influential on the neoconservative 'persuasion'<sup>90</sup>. This book is a lengthy lament against the damage which in his opinion the student movements of the Sixties caused to American universities. Because of the cowardice and weakness of teachers, students were able to deal a mortal blow to the noble American university tradition, sole heir to the glorious nineteenth century German university: 'Whether it be Nuremberg or Woodstock, the principle is the same. As Hegel was said to have died in Germany in 1933, Enlightenment in America came closest to breathing its last breath during the Sixties'<sup>91</sup>. Equating the exaltation of Nazi Nuremberg (die Parteitag der NSDAP filmed by Leni Riefenstahl in *Triumph des Willens*) with the hippie music festival at Woodstock (1969) can only be done by a violent perversion of language, but the phrase, in its brutal falsehood, reveals who some of Bloom's enemies are. In a more peaceful manner, he identifies others: 'radical Left French ideas in comparative literature. From Sartre, through Goldmann, to Foucault and Derrida'<sup>92</sup>.

Hanson has co-authored an updated version of Bloom's classic book, perhaps in a lighter style, but with no major new features: *Who Killed Homer?*<sup>93</sup>. He shares with him the same antagonist, 'French-inspired postmodernism'<sup>94</sup>, which brought the 'catastrophe of the 60's'. For

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<sup>89</sup> Constitution for the United States of America, Article the fourth, Amendment II: 'A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed': <http://www.constitution.org/cons/constitu.htm>

<sup>90</sup> Bloom 1988.

<sup>91</sup> Bloom 1988, 314.

<sup>92</sup> Bloom 1988, 352; see p. 320.

<sup>93</sup> Hanson and Heath 2001.

<sup>94</sup> Hanson, 1998, 167. Regarding the genesis and evolution of this process: Hanson and Heath, 2001, 81-101.

Bloom, as well as Hanson, the virus that the 60's introduced into American society, is called 'cultural relativism' and together with its partners, such as feminism, is a deadly virus because it attacks the supremacy of the West and in particular of the USA which are 'one of the highest and most extreme achievements of the rational quest for the good life according to nature'<sup>95</sup>. Hanson shares in, as we have seen, this burning faith in the essential American superiority, which he particularly aims at Hispanic immigration, a problem that was not felt to be as urgent when Bloom published his book. In the early twenty-first century, however, the arrival of Hispanics from Mexico increasingly threatens to call into question the 'good life According To Nature'. Hanson's recipe for solving the problem of immigration is a total immersion in the culture and values of the United States, with the recognition of its superiority over all others (including Europe, which he disdains<sup>96</sup>). Multiculturalism, like liberalism, argues that no way of life is preferable in itself so the state must maintain a neutral position allowing each citizen to live lives of their own choosing. This is anathema to Hanson as it was to Bloom, worthy heirs of Straussian thought, because natural law dictates that there are some values to be preferred. Superior values are concentrated in the USA, which must therefore impose them, by force if necessary, on other nations, or at least preserve them against the subversive attacks of postmodernism. The deep commitment to the superiority of United States is perhaps one of the axial ideas of neconservatism that differentiates it from both liberalism and old conservatism<sup>97</sup>. At the end of the day, the great 'Western civilization' of Hanson appears to be little more than a petty provincial fear of change.

Like Leo Strauss and Allan Bloom, Hanson sees the Greek origins of Western civilization as central to getting our civilization out of the current crisis<sup>98</sup>, a crisis which largely stems from the abandonment of classical culture in today's world. Guilty of this loss of classical culture are, in large measure, classical studies themselves and their scholars who, as a result of their specialization, have turned a blind eye to the general public<sup>99</sup>. They are teachers no longer, but rather professionals, to the extent that 'the study of Greek in the last twenty years became a profession, a tiny world--but a world of sorts nonetheless--of jets, conferences, publicity, jargon, and perks'<sup>100</sup>. In this, Hanson merely echoes a very controversial report by another neocon, William J. Bennet. As chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, Bennet blamed

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<sup>95</sup> Bloom 1988, 39.

<sup>96</sup> Hanson, 2003b, 136, cf. p. 96 and pp. 122-3.

<sup>97</sup> Aronowitz, 2007, 68.

<sup>98</sup> Regarding the characteristics of these settings, see Hanson and Heath, 2001, 21-58.

<sup>99</sup> Hanson 1999, 406-9.

<sup>100</sup> Hanson and Heath, 2001, 157; process described in detail on pp. 144-53.

the universities themselves for the poor state of the humanities in Higher Education. According to him, the professors have retreated behind the cloak of expertise, professionalism, jargon and pedantry<sup>101</sup>.

There is, however, a telling point in which Hanson departs from the guidance provided by Bloom's diatribe. As a solution to the deterioration of higher education, Hanson proposes four basic guidelines that should guide future classics: 1. Academic populism or vulgarization, 2. The study of general subjects that allow us to obtain lessons from past for present needs 3. Faithfulness to the ancient sources and certain prevention against random use of theory, models, etc. 4. Appeal to imagination and emotion as the means by which to capture the spirit of the past<sup>102</sup>. They are, as the reader will have discovered, the four basic principles governing the historical production of Hanson.

The solution Hanson proposed for the salvation of classical studies does not include their transformation into a truly modern 'science' of antiquity. The interest in classical antiquity today can only be recovered, in his opinion, through popular works like his, sometimes of dubious quality, truly a disservice to history and not just ancient history but history in general. As pointed out by one of his critics, when reviewing *Carnage and Culture*, the 'historians owe history more respect than this [meaning the one Hanson shows in this work]'<sup>103</sup>. Here, in Hanson's populism, lies the difference with Bloom, who was reacting precisely against the tendency of universities to become factories to fabricate graduates, with the consequent reduction in the quality and high standards of teaching. Hanson requires professors to write simple works for the public, and bitterly criticizes them for producing abstruse books, almost incomprehensible outside the small circle of connoisseurs. He dismissed them as 'elitist', connecting with a tradition deeply rooted in the egalitarian United States. This distrust of any kind of privileges was summed up well by the character played by James Stewart in 'The Philadelphia Story' (George Cukor, 1940): 'With the rich and mighty, always very little patience'. This is no longer true today, as the privileges of the rich and the powerful are accepted quite naturally in America and Hanson will not be the first to

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<sup>101</sup> Bennet 1984. On the conflict between 'paleoconservatives' and 'neoconservatives' lying behind Bennet's selection to the post, see Nash, 1998, pp. 337-8. On Bennet, "who bowdlerizes Greek myth and history for his best-selling book of virtuous stories" see DuBois 2001, 63.

<sup>102</sup> Basic formulation developed in the beginning, in Hanson, 1999, 409-11, and later expanded, especially in regard to practical application in academia, in Hanson and Heath 2001, 209-49.

<sup>103</sup> Bray, 'Torturing history' (n. 79), p. 2.

criticize this situation as he has accepted from advances of \$ 500,000 on some of his works<sup>104</sup> or prizes of \$ 250,000<sup>105</sup>. Despite this large amount of dollars, Hanson sees himself as 'one of the crowd', close to the common people and against the elite professors, requiring them to use their knowledge to serve the people. Now the privileged are not the evil rich depicted by Frank Capra, but much of the American intellectual elite. Hanson's populism (simple recipes to indoctrinate the masses) is unprecedented in the work of Bloom, who precisely bemoaned the falling standards of quality in American universities. The ultimate goal of Hanson is the indoctrination of young patriots willing to die in aggressive wars in Iraq or anywhere else in defence of values which are simple but also higher than those of other nations in the world. At least of his missionary faith there can be no doubt: 'We have lost sight of any real intellectual or educational goal –to explore, to understand, to explain, to disseminate, and, yes, to proselytize, to *convert*<sup>106</sup>. The faith that Hanson wants students to convert to is none other than that of the superiority of the U.S..

It is then only natural that the interpretation that Hanson offered on the crisis of classical studies and classical culture in general, proves to be as biased and burdened by his ideological prejudices as the rest of his work. Many of his critics have pointed out that his explanation of the crisis of classical studies in the USA is overly simplistic: it ignores the accelerated process of the loss of interest experienced since the 1980's<sup>107</sup> and for ideological reasons, attributes the responsibility of the changes in the last three decades of the twentieth century to being the result of the influence of postmodernism and, in particular, of post-structuralism<sup>108</sup>. Unlike what Hanson considers, both theories offered, at the time, novel epistemological approaches to the Social Sciences and Humanities, being therefore much more than left-oriented philosophies of achieving

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<sup>104</sup> As was the case with his recent monograph on the Peloponnesian War: *Tempest* 2004; see also Miller 2004 and Wheeler 2006, 816.

<sup>105</sup> Bradley Prize 2008, awarded by the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation (<http://www.bradleyfdn.org/cm-prizes.asp?ID=2008BradleyPrizeWinners>), foundation of conservative ideology that aims 'to strengthen American democratic capitalism and the institutions, principles, and values that sustain and nurture it' ([http://www.bradleyfdn.org/foundations\\_mission.asp](http://www.bradleyfdn.org/foundations_mission.asp)).

<sup>106</sup> Hanson and Heath 2001, 147.

<sup>107</sup> Marrs 2007, 46: 'If the late-twentieth-century academy seems to have forgotten Homer, it is because generations of Americans between 1850 and 1962 decided that Homer no longer mattered'.

<sup>108</sup> Some American historians have blamed multiculturalism for this loss of interest not only in classical culture but also in history in general. In this regard, we may mention the Forum published in *The American Historical Review*, 94/3, 1989, pp. 654-98, which under the joint title 'The Old and the New History', collects the contributions of Theodore S. Hamerow ('The Bureaucratization of History'), Gertrude Himmelfarb ('Reflections on the New History'), Lawrence W. Levine ('The Unpredictable Past: Reflections on Recent American Historiography'), Joan Wallach Scott ('The Other's Side of the Story') and John E. Toews ('The Old History and the New: A Comment').

political change<sup>109</sup>. A clear bias, as indicated by Margaret M. Miles<sup>110</sup>, can be detected in the conception of the classical world that Hanson and Heath used in *Who Killed Homer?*, where archaeology is excluded from the scope of classical studies, centred solely around knowledge of languages and literature. Once more, Hanson's conception of 'classic' is another ahistorical entelechy. It is one thing to say that 'the Greek way of looking at the world – what we call Greek Wisdom – offers a vision of human nature and the place of man in the world unique to the preindustrial Mediterranean and central to all subsequent Western thought'<sup>111</sup>. But it is quite another to argue that everything in current Western culture is the consequence solely of Greek influence: 'it is not reductionist or fantastic to ask why it is that even the most vociferous academic critic of the West would prefer to fly Swissair, check into the Mayo Clinic, scream obscenities in Times Square, run a red light in Omaha, swim with his girlfriend on Santa Cruz beach, or live next to a U. S. Army base in Texas – rather than board a Congolese airliner, leave his appendix in Managua General, use Allah's name in vain in downtown Jeddah, jump the curb on Singapore, wear a bikini and Speedos in Iran, or vacation near the home of the Korean National Guard. Why? The Greeks'<sup>112</sup>.

The vision of classical culture that Hanson defends implies seeing it as an unchanging monument whose value lies in the universality, without alteration, of the teachings and values that are transmitted<sup>113</sup>. It involves, basically, establishing a hotline between the Greeks and us, implicitly suppressing the millennia that separate us and them, also ignoring reinterpretations, forgetfulness or losses occurred to classical culture during that period; in a word: ignoring change, that is, history. Despite what Hanson may think, Westerners are not Greeks nor can they –presumably- think like a Greek<sup>114</sup>. This is something that modern historical and cultural research about the ancient world can see very clearly, partly as a consequence of the influx of modern approaches borrowed from social sciences such as sociology or anthropology: to separate ourselves from the Greeks, to be aware of differences, does not imply, as Hanson seems to

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<sup>109</sup> C. Paglia, 'The Mighty River of Classics: Traditions and Innovation in Modern Education', *Arion*, 9/2, 2001, pp. 103-104.

<sup>110</sup> Miles 1999, 174.

<sup>111</sup> Hanson and Heath 2001, 25.

<sup>112</sup> Hanson and Heath 2001, 56.

<sup>113</sup> With regard to the concept of classical as historical and ideological construction, the findings of Porter 2005 are of great interest.

<sup>114</sup> 'Thinking like a Greek' is, in fact, the title of a chapter of *Who Killed Homer?* Hanson and Heath (2001) devoted to define and characterize the classical culture.



assume, denying the importance of the classical heritage<sup>115</sup>. Such a conception has always been very present to these anthropologists of antiquity, so reviled by Hanson, as evidenced by the words of Jean-Pierre Vernant, way back in 1965, where he defended a separation of ourselves from the Greeks in order to come back to them and find them in their proper historical dimension:

'And yet, if there is a history of human interiority [*l'homme intérieur*] to complement the history of civilizations, we must again adopt the slogan first advanced by Zevedei Barbu in his *Problems of Historical Psychology*: "Back to the Greeks!" (...). The Greeks are distant enough for us to be able to study them as an external subject, quite separate from ourselves, to which the psychological categories of today cannot be applied with any precision, and yet they are sufficiently close for us to be able to communicate with them without too much difficulty. We can understand the language used in their writings and reach beyond their literary and other documents to their mental processes, their forms of thought and sensibility, their modes of organizing wills and action – in sum, to the structure of the Greek mind'<sup>116</sup>.

Contrary to what Hanson thinks, this classical tradition and culture has been assumed by scholars of antiquity influenced by structuralism and post-structuralism as a monument not closed to change but as an object of reflection, which may help to unveil, through reflection, historical processes of the present. In this way classical heritage becomes something alive and useful for each historical moment. This approach to the ancient world is not, despite what Hanson says, a French creation developed after the Second World War. No doubt, as Leonard has shown<sup>117</sup>, classical culture was a field of critical reflection within the political and social debate that developed in France during that period and served to open the door to a new world and a new vision the past. In fact, different historical periods –from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment–reconstructed the Greek past, or legacy, differently. Benedetto Croce<sup>118</sup> claimed that 'every true history is contemporary history', as long as our approach to the past is always made from the present:

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<sup>115</sup> Hanson and Heath 2001, 22: 'Modern anthropology and sociology have tended to concentrate on cultural anomaly rather than similarities that transcend the confining environment of time and space. To the social scientist, a southern Mediterranean people from two and a half millennia ago who worshipped a pantheon of bizarre gods, routinely slit the throats of animals in sacrifices, dressed men up in drag on the dramatic stage, practiced female infanticide, and ritualized sodomy would seem to have little to do with what we now call Western culture'.

<sup>116</sup> Vernant 2006, 14. For a critical view of these approaches from this very school, see Loraux 1996, 275-297.

<sup>117</sup> Leonard 2005.

<sup>118</sup> Croce 1921, 12.

'for it is evident that only an interest in the life of the present can move one to investigate past fact. Therefore this past fact does not answer to a past interest, but to a present interest, in so far as it is unified with an interest of the present life'.

This is a nuclear principle that has been assumed by those 'bad classicists' influenced by structuralism and the 'French Theory', so criticized by Hanson. But our author, however, is not aware that his work moves within the very same parameters only in a much more simple and misleading way. Few authors with work as anchored in the present as his have worked so hard to defend the timelessness of classical culture and ancient history.

#### **5. The historian's craft.**

It is not, therefore, this anchoring of Hanson's work in our present or in his own life experience which leads us to affirm that we are facing an author who writes against history. Other examples easily come to mind of historians, like Mommsen and Humboldt, strongly marked by their vital circumstances. This is a situation that obviously continues to affect the historians of antiquity, not only those who embrace approaches similar to Hanson's but also those who, theoretically and methodologically speaking, are at odds with the positions he defends, as it is the case of Jean-Pierre Vernant, whose work was marked by his experience in the French Resistance<sup>119</sup>. If we say that Hanson writes against History it is because in his work he distorts the facts completely. He uses history as a mere vehicle for the transmission of certain values and with a political agenda in its most simple and straightforward form. It is precisely this lack of respect for what Marc Bloch termed 'the historian's craft' (*le métier de historien*)<sup>120</sup> which makes his books vulgarizing propaganda for the neoconservative right in the United States.

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<sup>119</sup> Vernant 2004, 19 ff.

<sup>120</sup> Bloch 1953.