Theorising Crisis: Readings of the Stasis at Corcyra
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Although the influence of Thucydides’ account of the Corcyrean stasis has not been as pervasive as that of the Melian Dialogue or Mytilene Debate, it has established him as a theorist of civil society as well as of international relations, as his analysis of the breakdown of political and social order under external pressure is founded on a theory of its operation under more normal conditions. However, readings of that analysis, and the conclusions drawn from it, have varied dramatically. For nineteenth-century liberals, for example, it emphasised the importance of consensus-building institutions in moderating and channelling individual and party interests; for their conservative opponents, it illustrated the dangers of making concessions to mob rule; for more radical thinkers, it revealed the permanent presence of violent tensions and fault-lines in society. Thucydides is consistently cited as an authority in analysis of social breakdown, but to support radically different positions.