

## THUCYDIDES (460-c.395 BCE)

- Ø Regarded by **historiographers**, along with Herodotus, as the ‘father of history’. How were the two different?
- Ø He is also called the father of **political realism** and is central to international relations. Where do you see this?

### Introduction

- “Pericles is good, human nature is bad, war and civil strife bring out the worst in us” (xix)
- “Thucydides had a dim view of human nature, and the same should go for democracy.” (xxvi) Does this view of democracy follow necessarily from his view of human nature? How about in the modern world?
- Whereas “Plato attributes the moral decay of individuals to poor company and inadequate education”, Thucydides asserts that “education and tradition cannot be relied upon. They fail when subjected to stress and once the cycle of moral decay begins, from avarice to a sense of [necessity], there is no stopping it. Apparently the only hope is not to take this road at all, to maintain traditional governments and alliances, to cling to old values and virtues, to avoid...overreach.” How does Thucydides’ lesson relate to the modern international legal system?

### Pericles’ Funeral Oration

- Focus on pp. 40-41 (37-39)
- “We alone think that a man who does not take part in public affairs is good for nothing, while others only say he is “minding his own business”” (42)
- Pericles says that “our city as a whole is a lesson for Greece”. In light of the Mytilenean and Melian discourses, what do you think that lesson is?
- How does Pericles’ conception of virtue (*areté*) differ from the modern idea of justice? What effects might this difference have on the justifiability of the Athenian empire, or on the way we view Pericles today?

### The Mytilenean Debate (Cleon v. Diodotus)

- Cleon: “a democracy is not capable of ruling an empire...your softness puts you in danger and does not win you the affection of your allies; and you do not see that your empire is a tyranny, and that you have unwilling subjects...the obey you...only because you exceed them in strength” (67)... “but if you see the matter differently, you will not win their favor; instead, you will be condemning yourselves: if they were right to rebel, you ought not to have been their rulers.” (70) **What is the core of Cleon’s argument, here and throughout the speech?**
- Diodotus: “A good citizens should not go about terrifying those who speak against him, but should try to look better in a fair debate. A sensible city should neither add to, nor reduce, the honor in which it holds its best advisers, nor should it punish or even dishonor those whose advice it does not take.” (71) **How is this a very different perspective than that presented by Cleon?**
- “Our dispute, if we are sensible, will concern not their injustice to us, but our judgment as to what is best for us...you may agree that [Cleon’s] argument is more in accordance with justice, but we are not at law with them, and so have no need to speak of justice” (72) **How does Diodotus defend this argument?**

### The Melian Dialogue: how do the Athenians respond, point by point, to the Melian arguments that ‘justice’ is on their side?

- 1<sup>st</sup> argument) “since you put your interest in the place of justice...it is in your interest not to subvert this rule that is good for all” What is the rule the Melians refer to, and how do the Athenians respond?
- 2<sup>nd</sup> argument) Let us be neutral? Athenian response: “your enmity does not hurt us as much as your friendship would”
- 3<sup>rd</sup> argument) “the gods are on our side, because we stand innocent against men who are unjust”, and the Spartans are on our side too. How do the Athenians respond to both of these claims?
- Athenian advice: “remember what is usually the best course: do not give way to equals, but have the right attitude towards your superiors and use moderation towards your inferiors.” (108)
- What do the Melians eventually decide, and how do the Athenians respond?