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David Hervey April 5, 2018

Rationality, Realism, and the Melian Dialogue

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Abstract

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Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* is often cited as the founding work of Realism in international relations and political philosophy, with Athenian speakers (among others) often stating that individuals and states are driven by fear, honor, and interest above all else, with justice being a secondary concern. Many scholars and philosophers who are influenced by Thucydides appear to view states and individuals as perfectly rational in their pursuit of interest. I argue that the Melian Dialogue, a key passage in the text, provides evidence that states and individuals are not, in fact, always rational, and that although they try to act in accordance with their interests, justice is not unimportant.

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Introduction

Thucydides is widely considered to be the first theorist of political and international relations realism, which claims that states care about their own interests above all else. In some way or another, most realist theories trace their influences back to his work, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. Some do so more than others, but at the very least, he is not far removed from any realist work. Some scholars (such as Kagan) have built much of their work around his, while others (like Mearsheimer) have referenced him in passing but drawn heavily on the work of those who were more explicitly influenced by him, like Hobbes. In recent years, a few scholars have challenged realist interpretations of the text, and arrived at conclusions that are entirely different from those of realists (Lebow 2001).

While realism has grown to address cases and issue areas far beyond those in the Peloponnesian War, the literature which questions realism has made it necessary to re-examine Thucydides and determine whether the text supports realist assumptions and claims, and if so, what sort of realism best applies to the Peloponnesian War. I hope to examine realism by using the case of the Melian Dialogue, which has been widely referenced by realists (Schelling [1966] 2008. Kagan 1995, Mearsheimer 2014) but examined in detail much less often. This is one of the most important and widely-known passages from the text (Wasserman 1947) so, if Thucydides is to provide the unfailing support of realism that the realists themselves claim, realism must be able to explain the decision of the Melians to go to war with Athens despite overwhelming Athenian military superiority and knowing that defeat in battle would be extremely costly.

Some might argue that debating the interpretation of a two thousand-year old text has limited bearing on modern foreign policy debates. In response, I suggest that on the one hand, there is much to be learned about human nature and the nature of the international system, and that studying an earlier time can give us a better perspective on our own. On the other hand, studying Thucydides can help build an understanding of both the strengths and the shortcomings of the realist theoretical tradition that he influenced. Thucydides and his text have been influential in discussions of policy in addition to theoretical scholarship: references to Thucydides have appeared in numerous recent books (Allison 2017) and media articles (*The Diplomat* 2017), as well as a recent congressional hearing, albeit as an aside (United States Senate Committee on Armed Services).[1]

Another area for potential skepticism of this project is that Thucydides' text may not be an accurate representation of history. This view has been thoroughly examined, and a large body of work suggests that Thucydides did indeed produce a highly accurate account of the events portrayed in the text. Other sources, both ancient and modern, support the trustworthiness of the text (see Dover 1983 for more on this). I do not entirely discount the view that, in some instances, Thucydides may omit relevant information or that, in the absence of proper sources, have applied his method of writing what he deemed probably happened or was appropriate to the situation, but treating the text as historically accurate is a common approach and one that is appropriate for my project.

[1] These largely referred to how changes in state power relative to that of other states can lead to war, which is not a subject that I will address at length in this project, but the importance of Thucydides and understanding his work more deeply are apparent.

The *History* documents a war between Athens, Sparta, and their respective allies which involved the vast majority of Greek states and even some of those outside the Greek world, like Persia and Macedonia. Athens had developed an alliance for mutual defense after Greece was invaded by Persia, and this alliance had become an empire, with Athenian allies or subjects paying tribute in exchange for defense, and Athens exerted a great deal of influence on the states in their empire, which mostly consisted of island states in the Aegean. Athens was especially notable for its naval power, while Sparta's power was based predominantly on land for much of the war.

In particular, I examine the Melian Dialogue, which occurred during a time of peace in between the two main parts of the war. The dialogue is a discussion that occurs between a group of Athenian ambassadors and the oligarchic rulers of the city-state of Melos. The Athenians give the Melians an ultimatum: either the Melians join the Athenian empire or the Athenians will go to war with them. The Melian Dialogue is the source of one of the most often-repeated descriptions of power politics and the dynamics associated with realism: as the Athenians say, (and as realists, Kagan in particular, have repeated) the strong rule as they are capable, while the weak make way (5.89). It would at first appear, from a realist perspective, that there should have been little question as to whether the Melians should accept the ultimatum so that they could preserve their independence, but they are unwilling to sacrifice their freedom even when faced with the threat of war from the much more powerful state, and they reject the ultimatum. No sooner do the Athenians state, as a fact, that the strong dominate the weak, than the Melians defy the expectations of the Athenians. This presents a question for realists: why did the Melians reject the ultimatum when faced with such an apparently obvious choice?

The Melians first attempt to dissuade the Athenians from invading. They suggest that by compelling less powerful states unjustly, the Athenians would weaken a norm or dissolve the common good of treating states justly, and that this common good is an interest to the Athenians as well, because they will eventually be weaker than another state and potentially subject to compulsion. The Athenians reject this argument and the Melians move on to the next part of their argument, that failing to resist the Athenians would be wrong because their freedom is so important to them and that they may be able to defeat the Athenians should they go to war. This constitutes the bulk of the dialogue. The Melians argue that they may be assisted by the gods, who control the fortune which decides war, given that there is a great deal of uncertainty in war. They then argue that Sparta, Athens' longtime rival, may come become involved in war, especially because the Melians are descended from Spartan colonists. The Athenians counter these arguments, but the Melians still choose to reject the ultimatum and go to war with Athens. They are eventually defeated and the Athenians kill or enslave all of the Melians.

Despite the importance of the Melian Dialogue and the problem it appears to present for realism, (that the Melians do not appear to act in accordance with what realist theory would predict) the passage has been under-studied as a case of one state failing to compel another. There has not been much examination of the dialogue from the realist perspective as compared to other interactions in the text, such as the decisions which led Athens and Sparta to go to war about twenty years before the Melian Dialogue.

Understanding the Melian Dialogue is essential to understanding the text as a whole. Even more importantly, an investigation of the Melian Dialogue can bring greater insight into

realism, its assumptions, and whether those assumptions and the theory as a whole accurately reflect reality. Above all, examining the Melian Dialogue in greater depth will help to determine whether humans are indeed rational, as some philosophers (perhaps Aristotle being the most notable in this) have argued. This in turn will bring insights into human nature, a central object of study in political theory and an important topic of the *History*. In my project, I hope to engage realism and rationalism on its own terms. The case is one that constitutes an important part of realist literature, and I intend to examine it using game theoretic methods that were developed in large part by realists themselves. Overall, I hope to determine why the Melians come to decide upon a course of action that is so apparently in conflict with the predictions of realism. The broader implications of this research will lead to insights which can then be used to shed light on other parts of the text and to refine realist theory so that it more accurately describes the reality of how states and individuals act.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

My project will draw from international relations theory, scholarly work on Thucydides, and behavioral economics to determine why the Melians decided to go to war. These perspectives are important as each of them provide different and important perspectives on my research question and are interconnected. International relations and behavioral economics are important from a theoretical point of view, while the work on Thucydides in the field of political theory is helpful for understanding the case itself as well as understanding the theoretical aspects of the text. These fields often overlap, but taking them as separate makes a review of the literature more comprehensible. In this chapter, I will also address the methods that I will use in my study.

International Relations

The area of international relations which has the most potential to inform an analysis of the Melian Dialogue is the study of conflict, and particularly the research on what causes war. Perhaps the best-known study of this subject is Fearon's (1995) "Rationalist Explanations for War" which I will address at greater length in the following chapters. In short, Fearon presents a formal model for why rational states go to war, viewing war as a result of a failure to reach a mutually acceptable bargain over a good.[2] Fearon's work built on a theoretical structure laid out informally by Schelling ([1966] 2008). Additionally, Schelling's work focused particularly on coercion, with deterrence and compellence being its two forms.[3] This is applicable because the

[2] Here, the word "good" can refer to more than just a physical item: it includes intangible objects of bargaining such as regime type and independence as well.
[3] Deterrence is when a state uses the threat of force to prevent another state from doing something, while compellence is when a state uses the threat of force to make a state do something it otherwise would not have done (Schelling [1966] 2008)

Melian Dialogue is an example of failed compellence leading to war. The Athenians threaten to go to war if the Melians do not join the Athenian empire, the Melians refuse, and the Athenians follow through on their threats. Schelling's analysis, like Fearon's, draws on expected utility theory to determine how states will react to attempted compellence: if accepting another state's demands will harm them more than they expect the compelling state's war to do, they will choose to go to war. As I will discuss in chapter eight, this theory assumes that states (and individuals) are rational, which is controversial among many scholars.

Behavioral Economics

Schelling's work both drew from and influenced game theory, which shares the expected utility framework that is used by rationalist scholars of international relations. Economic experiments have shown that, in many cases, behavior of individuals in the real world diverges from expected utility theory. One of the most important examples of this is the ultimatum game (Guth and Kocher 2013). There are two players and two parts to the ultimatum game. In the first part, one player decides how much of a sum of money to allocate to the other player and keeps the rest for herself. In the next part, the player who did not have any control over the allocation can decide to either accept or reject it. If he accepts it, he receives the amount allocated by the first player, who keeps the rest. If he rejects it, neither player receives anything. In experiments, players often reject ultimatum offers, choosing to receive nothing rather than something. This clearly conflicts with expected utility theory and calls for alternative interpretations of decision making.

One such alternative to expected utility theory is prospect theory (Kahneman and Tversky 1979, Kahneman 2011). Prospect theory suggests that, instead of calculating the expected payoff

of a course of action and maximizing expected utility, individuals (and, by extension, states) assign different weights to different payoffs depending on whether the payoff is a relative loss or gain in comparison with the individual's reference point. Prospect theory has been applied to coercive bargaining and compared to expected utility theories of war (Butler 2007) including the case of Melos (Ober and Perry 2014).

Thucydides and Political Theory

There is a wide-ranging body of research on Thucydides in political theory, and a few works in particular are salient as providing insight into the text or being influenced by it. Strauss (1964) devotes a section of *The City and Man* to Thucydides, in which he suggests that the *History* is a work of both philosophy and history, a sort of theory-building case study. Orwin (1994) cites Strauss as a major influence and investigates the text in greater depth, examining the role of compulsion in the text and the tension between justice and necessity. Lebow (2001) examines Thucydides through the lens of the international relations theory of constructivism, determining that a central aspect of the work is the dramatic change in political behavior during the Peloponnesian War, with previously accepted norms being violated by all sides with relative impunity. It is also important to note that the first person to translate Thucydides directly into English was Hobbes (Schlatter, introduction to Thucydides 1975). Although the exact influence that Thucydides had on Hobbes is unclear given that his work on Thucydides does not say much explicitly about this influence. For the text of the *History* itself, I use Pangle's translation of the Melian Dialogue and Hobbes' translation for the rest of the text.[4]

[4] Pangle's translation only includes the Melian Dialogue and a few other passages, so it was not possible to use this translation for all of the text. It is, however, probably the most literal translation, with Hobbes' being another well-regarded one that is quite faithful to the original Greek.

Methods

I hope to determine the cause of the Melian decision to reject the Athenian ultimatum using game theoretic methods. Game theory is uniquely well-suited for understanding decision-making and there is not only work applying game theory to cases of coercive bargaining (including Schelling's and Fearon's work) but there is also precedent for this sort of work in political theory. There has been work, for example, on what sort of game best describes Hobbes' state of nature (Moehler 2009) and work applying game theory to decision making by important figures in the Old Testament (Brams 2003). Game theory has been applied more widely in political theory, perhaps most famously by Arrow (1950) and there are chapters devoted to game theory in books on political theory methods (Leopold and Stears 2008, and Blau 2017).

Chapter Three: Models of the Melian Dialogue and Analysis

The Athenian generals present the Melian oligarchs with a choice between war on unfavorable terms and subjugation by Athens. The Melians choose to go to war with the Athenians. Different scholars have presented different accounts of why the Melians decided as they did. Each account from the secondary literature on Thucydides implicitly provides a model of the strategic decision of the Melians, and theories from the broader field of international relations can be applied to this decision as well. In this chapter, I intend to present the different game theoretic models of the decision that the Melians make. In particular, I have identified four distinct accounts of the Melians' decision to reject the Athenian Ultimatum. In short, these are as follows: Lebow (2007) argues that the Melians are indifferent between defeat and surrender to the Athenians because they do not value anything else without independence, Strauss (1964) and Orwin (1994) argue that the Melians misestimate their probability of success, Ober and Perry (2014) argue that prospect theory, a branch of behavioral economics, is applicable here rather than calculations of cost and benefit, and I have applied insights about the relationship between domestic politics and foreign policy to the Melian Case because work on this area has been useful elsewhere in international relations but has not previously been applied to the Melian Dialogue.

Throughout this chapter, I assume ordinal (rather than cardinal) utilities for each outcome. This means that payoffs are placed in rank order with the highest number making it an actor's most preferred outcome, rather than a payoff having a number which reflects a monetary or utility value. I do this because there is insufficient evidence in the Melian Dialogue from which precise utilities can be determined, making a cardinal number for a payoff little more than

speculation. Additionally, using ordinal payoffs is not an uncommon approach in other game theoretic studies, and has precedent in work similar to this (Brams 2003).

Lebow:

Lebow's (2007) approach to the Melian Dialogue is perhaps the simplest. Lebow argues (2007, 183) that in the eyes of the Melians, political independence is "what makes life worth living" and therefore that the Melians are indifferent between death and living as part of the Athenian empire.

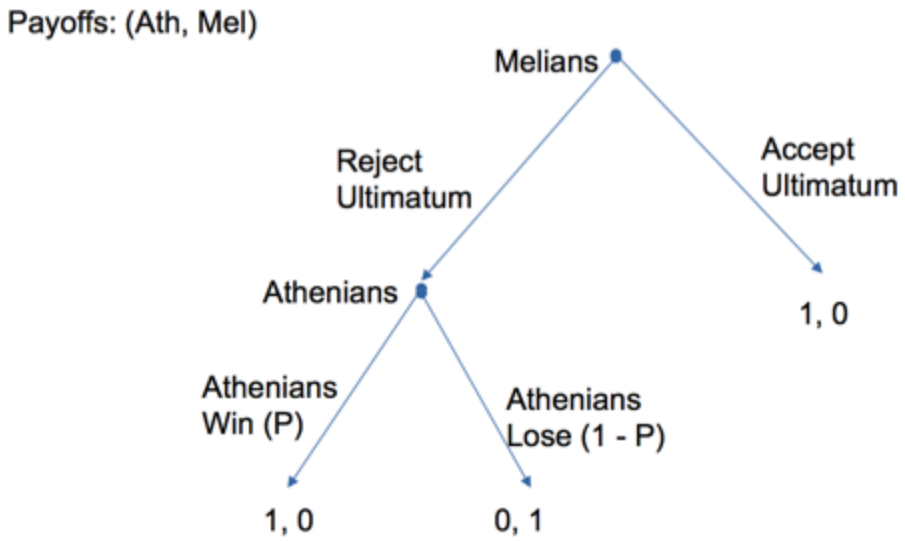

Figure 1.
Lebow's Model

As such, no matter what probability the Melians have of defeating the Athenians, they will at least weakly prefer going to war over accepting the ultimatum: if the probability of the Melians defeating the Athenians is greater than zero, they will choose war over surrender. As Lebow says, “people who are unafraid of death cannot effectively be compelled to give up their autonomy.”-Lebow is not arguing that the Melians have no desire for life or fear of death, but that to the Melians, life cannot be enjoyed without liberty and therefore that the Athenian threat of violence is ineffective.

Strauss and Orwin:

The view of Orwin -- and of Strauss, who deeply influenced him -- of the Melians’ decision-making is that, in essence, the Melian oligarchs overestimate their probability of prevailing in a battle with the Athenians because of their view of nature and fortune. The Melians are explicit in their decision to trust in the gods and, to a lesser extent, the Spartans, for assistance against the Athenians. This is the heart of their argument in 5.105: “we have faith that we will not be inferior in that fortune that is from the gods. . . and our deficiency in power the alliance of the Spartans compensates, possessed of compelling necessity -- if for no other reason, for the sake of kinship and out of shame they will help! So our boldness is not in every way irrational.” In short, the Melians expect the gods and the Spartans to tip the scales in their favor. It is, of course, well known war is an uncertain endeavor. Numerous unpredictable factors can affect the success of military operations, from weather to unexpected strokes of good or bad luck for one or the other side. To the Melians, this uncertainty, chance or fortune, is determined by the gods, and the gods favor the just against the unjust.

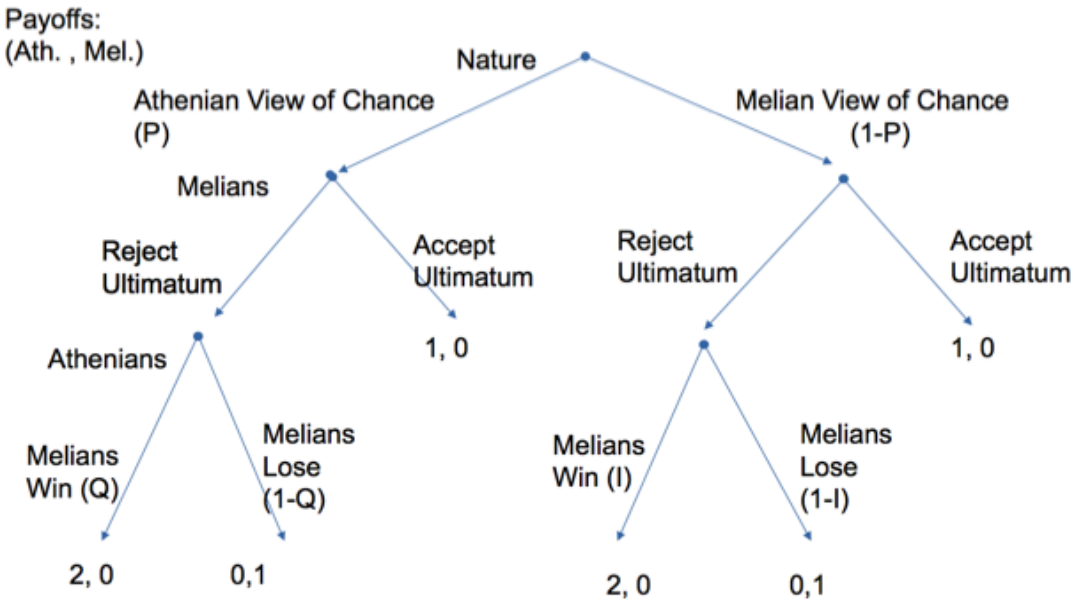

Figure 2. Decision tree representation of model presented by Strauss and Orwin

This view is summarized in detail by Orwin, (1994, 105) "the Melians take the respectable view that the gods favor those who are blameless toward them against those who are unjust." It goes assumed yet unstated in this view that aggressive military adventurism for the sake of conquest is blameworthy, although the Athenians' rebuttal consists of challenging this assumption. Yet the Melians view the gods as the cause of the events which are attributed to fortune, and the gods grant good fortune, or favorable events, to those who act in accordance with justice under their laws (which apparently preclude imperialism). The Melians thus expect the probability of victory to favor themselves, who have refrained from conquest, and make their competition with the Athenians a hopeful endeavor rather than the quixotic attempt at ensuring their safety which the Athenians portray it as.

In addition to their expectation of assistance from the gods, the Melians hope for assistance from the Spartans to even the playing field in their fight against the Athenians. This hope is perhaps more thoroughly debunked by the Athenians than the Melians' beliefs about the gods. As Orwin summarizes (1994, 107) the Athenians' counterargument to the Melians' claim that that the Spartans will assist them, "as citizens and also a city, the Spartans observe a single standard: the good of Sparta." The self-interestedness of the Spartans is seen elsewhere in the text, including in the trial of the Plataeans, where the only extenuating circumstance for having resisted the Spartan alliance, even to preserve freedom, is to have done good to Sparta (3.52). It goes almost without saying that assisting the Melians is not in the immediate interest of the Spartans and thus they are unlikely to embark on such an expedition. Melos is strategically insignificant and an island, it is both hard for Spartan aid to reach and unlikely to be able to repay any assistance that is given to it. The Melians must at least partly concur with this assessment, as their expectation of hope from the Spartans becomes a somewhat unlikely hope, as evidence by their switch to the optative mood (Orwin 1994, 107; Strauss 1964, 188).[5]

Strauss's view, while different on certain details from Orwin's,[6] is largely similar and can be described by the same model. He writes, "the Melians reveal the grounds of their hope and thus the whole extent of their disagreement with the Athenians. Two things, they say, decide the issue of wars, power and chance; as for chance it depends (to some extent or altogether) on the divine, and the divine favors the just;" (187). By highlighting power, in addition to chance,

[5] The optative mood most commonly connotes something that is wished or hoped for rather than expected (Boyer 1988). A common translation for students of Ancient Greek is "would that X happen" or "may X happen," somewhat like the Arabic phrase "mashallah" meaning "God willing."

[6] Such as, for example Strauss's apparent suggestion (187) that the Athenians at Melos may be agnostic about the existence of the divine, while Orwin explores the nature of the gods that the Athenian envoys believe in but does not question their faith in those gods.

Strauss perhaps betrays his skepticism about what odds of success the Melians had to start with: the Melians were clearly outmatched in power, so by acknowledging that chance is only half of the equation means that they, trusting in chance, have already half-understood that they are in a predicament that they will not easily escape, even with the help of the gods.

The focus of both Orwin and Strauss on chance is central to their accounts of why the Melians chose as they did. They Melians, not truly knowing the likelihood of success in battle against the Athenians, make an estimate of that probability based on two assumptions: chance favors the just, and they themselves are just. As such, the Melians estimate a high probability of victory, at least relative to the Athenians' estimates of this probability. In this view then, the probability of victory (or defeat) is key to understanding why the Melians chose as they did. In the model implicit in Strauss's and Orwin's work on the Melian Dialogue, the Melian estimate of their probability of defeating the Athenians is so high that the decision to go to war, trusting in a relatively high probability of victory, is rational. To return to Orwin, when the Melians turn to discussing the gods and Spartans "the issue is no longer whether Athens can reasonably attack. It is whether Melos can *reasonably* resist." (103, emphasis added). In the eyes of the Melians, this issue is settled, as they choose (reasonably, under their estimate of the odds) to resist.

Ober and Perry

Ober and Perry leverage prospect theory, a branch of behavioral economics, in an attempt to explain the decision made by the Melians. At its most basic, prospect theory asserts that actors are boundedly rational rather than perfectly rational and overvalue large potential (but unlikely) gains and undervalue likely potential large losses (Ober and Perry 2014). Prospect theory refers

to a wide range of effects seen in experimental studies of decision-making (Kahneman and Tversky 1979). Most importantly, actors under prospect theory do not make decisions based on maximizing their own utility but on gains and losses relative to a reference point. Specifically, prospect theoretic actors do not make decisions based on maximizing their utility, but estimate payoffs based on a value function in which different outcomes are assigned a value that probably does not correspond to the outcome's expected utility. The value function generally underweights gains and overweights some losses. Also, a prospect theory actor is more loss-avoidant than it is gain-friendly (Kahnehman and Tversky 1979; 279). The formal model of prospect theory value functions convey this weighting through a coefficient on the probability term: however, it is important to recognize that an actor's estimate of a probability is not itself different in prospect theory than expected utility theory. As Kahneman and Tversky say, "decision weights are not probabilities: they do not obey the probability axioms and they should not be interpreted as measures of degree of belief" (280). In short, the value function and the weights assigned to different payoffs make actors either risk-acceptant or risk-averse depending on the prospects that they face. Kahneman (2011) develops this further, suggesting the 'four-fold pattern' which Ober and Perry explore in their arguments. This pattern is that actors are risk acceptant when faced with likely losses or small chances of gains, and they are risk-averse when faced with likely gains or small chances of losses. This can lead to over-insurance by risk-averse actors or large gambles being made by risk-acceptant actors. The four-fold pattern is, to some extent, a simplification, but it is the account of prospect theory that is most used by Ober and Perry, as opposed to earlier prospect theory work such as Kahneman and Tversky's 1979 study.

Ober and Perry specifically suggest that under what Kahneman and Tversky call the certainty effect, (Perry and Ober 2014 212, Kahneman 2011, 315) when faced with a choice between likely substantial losses relative to the status quo and a much less likely outcome with no losses, prospect theory actors will be risk-seeking and therefore more likely than a strictly rational actor to choose the option with the small chance to avoid losses.

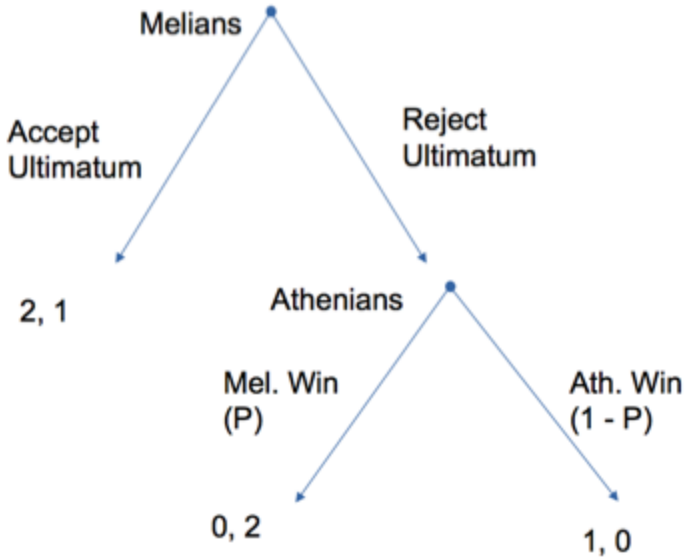

Figure 3. Decision tree representation of Ober and Perry's Model

The value function for the payoff of choosing to go to war under prospect theory, implicit in Ober and Perry's analysis and adapted from Kahneman and Tversky (1979) by Butler (2007) is produced below:

$$V_{Mel} = w(p)(1 - c - r)^{\beta} - w(1 - p)\lambda(r + c)^{\beta}$$

Where V is the value of war, p is the probability of a Melian victory, c is the costs of war, r is the reference point, (in this case, the status quo) w is the weight given to a probability, β is the degree of risk propensity, λ is the degree of loss aversion. This equation can be simplified to the one below:

$$U_{reject} = P * Loss + [(1 - P) * Win + A]$$

Where U is expected utility, P is probability of losing, loss is the payoff in the case of a loss (zero or a negative number). Win is the payoff in case of victory,[7] and A is a premium representing the value of choosing a risk-seeking strategy to a prospect theory actor facing large losses with a high probability.[8]

For the Melians to reject the ultimatum under these circumstances, the equation below would have to be true, given that this decision reflects a Melian assessment that the utility of rejecting an ultimatum is greater than the utility of accepting it:

$$U_{accept} < P * Loss + [(1 - P) * Win + A]$$

[7] This is equal, in Perry and Ober's view, to the Melians' status-quo utility and does not take into account that an actor will pay costs of war even if it wins.

[8] A is essentially the difference between a prospect theory value and an expected utility at a given probability, risk aversion, and loss acceptance. Risk aversion and loss acceptance cannot be more than speculated about here, but the estimate of probability is assumed as objective and known (Butler 2007).

Ober and Perry's argument focuses on the Prospect Theory term (shown as "A" above) and concede that under conditions of strictly expected utility (i.e. not Prospect Theory) decision making, the Melians would have chosen to surrender. It is therefore vital to their argument to establish that prospect theory does in fact apply to the Melians in this case. Furthermore, the main difference between a prospect theory analysis and an expected utility analysis is that in the prospect theory analysis, the weight of a probability is most relevant to the Melian decision, while in an expected utility analysis like the one implicit in Strauss' and Orwin's accounts, the only variable is probability if the payoffs of each outcome are given, which in this situation, they must be, as the outcome of war is either death or victory.

A key empirical difference between expected utility and prospect theory models of bargaining and war is that under conditions of prospect theory, states may choose to go to war even if they agree on the probabilities of victory and defeat (Butler 2007). I will return to this empirical implication of prospect theory and coercion in chapter five, as well as the difference between assigning undue weight to a risky but relatively higher-gain outcome and simply misestimating the probability of that outcome.

Domestic Politics:

Another potential explanation for the Melians' decision-making process lies in their domestic politics. This explanation leverages the international relations literature on the relationship between domestic politics and policy outcomes in a way that has not previously been applied to the Melian Dialogue. This model uses an insight most famously stated by Immanuel Kant ([1795] 1983) and mentioned above as being cited by Fearon, that the benefits and costs of war

do not accrue to the same members of society. The elite class from which rulers are often drawn receives most of the benefits from war, while the common people pay most of the costs. This is highly relevant to the Melian Dialogue, given Melos's oligarchic system of government. The Melian leaders, according to this model, choose to go to war because they will receive most of the benefits of war, keeping their property and their sovereignty. The people receive few of these benefits, having little property in the first place and, with no political rights, no sovereignty to protect. Furthermore, the Athenian democratic government, in contrast with the Melian oligarchy, is relevant as well. With few exceptions, Athenian subject states became democracies -- in the Mytilenian Debate, Diodotus specifically notes the friendship between Athens and the popular faction within most cities -- and the Melian oligarchs could reasonably expect that the probability of popular revolution would jump if they were to become an Athenian subject state.

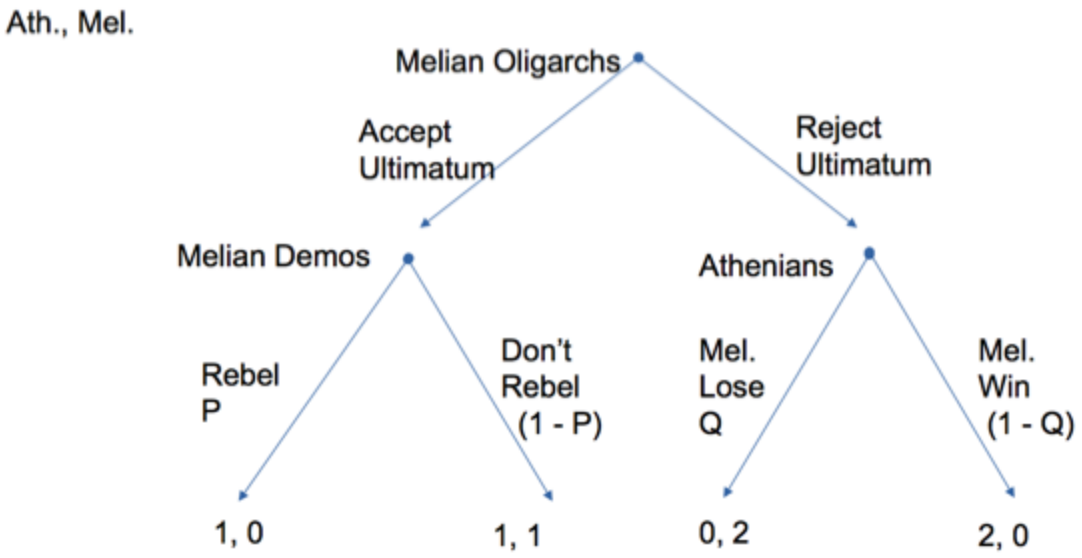

Figure 4. Domestic politics model

Domestic politics in Melos, then, add another reason for the Melian oligarchs to resist Athenian subjugation. Faced with a choice between probably losing a war with Athens or probably being overthrown by their own subjects, the Melians could realistically be expected to be indifferent between the two choices. Specifically, the Melians would have expected that, given Athens' support for democratic revolutions elsewhere, the Athenians could have supported such a revolution in Melos even if the Melians accept the ultimatum.

Chapter Four: Analysis of Models

In the next chapter, I will analyze each of these models. In particular, I will examine whether there is evidence in the text for the empirical implications of the different models. Each presents a different set of reasons for why the Melians reject the ultimatum, Lebow suggesting that they value nothing without independence, Orwin and Strauss suggesting that the Melians overestimate their probability of victory due to their belief that the just are favored in battle, Ober and Perry arguing that the weight of an outcome that avoids losses led to a premium on the expected payoff of going to war, and the domestic politics argument being that the strategic decision-making process for the elites who determine policy involves different payoffs from those for the state as a whole.

To determine whether a model accurately describes the Melians' decision-making, I examine the text of the Melian Dialogue and the statements made by the Athenians and Melians. These statements provide insights into the Melians' decision making process, as well as the expectations and potential payoffs of the two states. A potential danger of this approach is that either side, and perhaps especially the Melians, may have been disingenuous in some of their statements given that they have an incentive to bluff and overstate their own power. However, there is significant evidence that this is not the case. The Athenian threat to invade is credible, as a bluff would have been costly not only in the resources it would require to send an Athenian army to Melos, as they have already done when the dialogue occurs, but in the harm that bluffing would do to Athens' reputation if they failed to follow through on it. Overall, given the costs of the Athenians' actions in the lead-up to the Melian Dialogue and the costs of not backing up their

words with actions suggest that the Athenians were not bluffing at Melos: bluffing would have been more costly than the alternative.

While the Athenians make costly signals that they are not bluffing, the Melians do not apparently make such costly signals in the Dialogue itself, although their defense expenditures can be considered a costly signal (Fearon 1997). Yet the eventual Melian decision to reject the Athenian Ultimatum is itself a signal that they were not bluffing. Like the Athenians, they back up their words with actions. Furthermore, the apparent adjustment they make to their estimate of the probability of victory (specifically, revising their expectation that the Spartans will assist them) shows that their statements reflect actual beliefs and are not merely "cheap talk" or signalling to the Athenians. Had the Melians been bluffing, they would not have admitted that the Athenians have a point, and they certainly would not have rejected the Athenian ultimatum and gone to war. They could not reasonably have expected that the Athenians were bluffing, for the same reasons noted above, and they certainly would not have gone to war with the Athenians. Furthermore, there are strong theoretical reasons for discounting the possibility that the Melians may have been bluffing. Fearon (1997) finds that "no plausible equilibria involve bluffing by the defender" (p. 71).

Overall, the statements of both sides are grounded in their assessments of facts. The Athenians could not have been bluffing given the costs of a bluff being called, while the Melians revise their statements in ways that could not be accounted for had they been bluffing. Most importantly, both sides go to war on the basis of the assessments that their statements reflect, providing the strongest evidence that neither was bluffing in the Dialogue.

Lebow

Lebow argues that the Melians are indifferent between allowing their state to become an Athenian subject and death. This appears to contradict the broad-based consensus in Political Theory and other disciplines that states and individuals have an instinct for self-preservation. This consensus is seen in recent accounts, such as Waltz's ([1959] 2001) and earlier accounts, such as Hobbes's ([1651] 1982). Hobbes states that self-preservation is an inalienable natural right and that natural law makes individuals act to preserve their lives ([1651] 1982, 79, 87) although not necessarily their freedom. Waltz builds upon this, pointing out that self-preservation, indeed life itself, is a means to an end of enjoying potential future goods that could not be enjoyed in death. These potential future goods could include intangible goods such as freedom.

Yet the fact that Melian indifference between death and surrender would fly in the face of perhaps the entire corpus of Political Theory is not a sufficient condition for the rejection of the hypothesis that such indifference is indeed that case: sometimes received wisdom is wrong. It is therefore necessary to consult the record of the interaction between the Melians and Athenians.

The Athenians, in 5.87, lay out the subject of the dialogue, and specifically state that they intend to discuss which course of action will be safest for the Melians, and in their response (5.88) the Melians agree to this agenda. It is, of course, disingenuous for the Athenians to offer their counsel to the Melians in this way yet keep the threat of violence held out in case their "counsel" is ignored, but even in a discussion as frank as this one, the Athenians make a rhetorical attempt to make their coercion less of an affront to the Melians' sensibilities.

As noted above, the Melians agree to a discussion that examines only what course of action can be taken to preserve their safety. This demonstrates that they view their safety as good (either in itself or instrumentally). Safety (σωτηρία, also translated as preservation) here refers specifically to physical security or, more simply, staying alive. There is no evidence, in this context, that it could reasonably refer to the preservation of the Melians' independence. Indeed, there are no alternate translations of σωτηρία which refer to freedom or independence, and some definitions refer even more directly to physical security that the context here. It is clear, then, that the Melians value their physical security by their willingness to enter a discussion specifically about preserving it. The Melians cannot, then, be indifferent between death and surrender. They value their lives and life after surrender comes with the possibility that they may have their freedom restored as the independence of many Athenian subject states was restored during and after the war. Indeed, the Melians would have known of previous examples, from the Persian War, in which states surrendered to Persia (Medized) but regained their independence after the Persian invasion was defeated (Thebes being perhaps the best-known example of these).

But perhaps there is more to Lebow's argument than there at first appears to be. Lebow stresses that the Melians chose as they did out of considerations of honor (181) in much the same way that Kagan (8, 61-61) stresses the importance of honor as a cause of the Peloponnesian War as a whole. While there are important differences between Lebow's and Kagan's definitions of honor, honor, to both, can be interpreted as being something like credibility. Kagan's interpretation of the failure to resolve the crisis which began the war is helpful for understanding this interpretation: one of the causes of the war was the Megarian Decree, perhaps the first recorded use of economic sanctions as a tool of foreign policy. The Athenian policy of embargo

was not in itself important, but Pericles argued that withdrawing the embargo under Spartan pressure would lead to future Spartan demands, and thus to defend their honor or credibility, the Athenian assembly voted against repealing the decree.

Returning to the Melian Dialogue, but applying this same approach to honor, it is imaginable that the Melian oligarchs in 416 had the same thought process as the Athenian people in 431: accepting the ultimatum and joining the Athenian empire would lead to an irreversible loss of honor. This line of thinking states that the Athenians, seeing their demands accepted, would be emboldened rather than placated, and would only demand more onerous tribute and sacrifices from the Melians. In short, the implicit Athenian promise that they wanted nothing more than "friendship" from the Melians was not credible. Although this may have made accepting the ultimatum less attractive, it could not have put it on par with death or slavery. If the Melians had any sort of drive for self-preservation, or if they hoped to enjoy any part of life, they would have been better off as Athenian subjects than they would have been in defeat.

This lack of credibility (assuming it existed despite a lack of textual evidence in the Dialogue itself for it) would certainly have made the Athenian ultimatum less attractive, but it would still have been better off than the worst-case outcome of death and slavery. However likely the Athenians would have been to unilaterally change the terms of their agreement with the Melians, their threat to attack if the Melians rejected the ultimatum was entirely credible, as was their threat to kill or enslave all of the Melians if and when the smaller state was eventually defeated. The Athenians had already begun raiding the island (5.84.1) by the time the dialogue occurred, and as such the expedition must already have been there. The threat was not one of far-off retribution if the ultimatum was rejected, it was to be carried out immediately by a force

that was already present. Especially given the Athenian statements in 5.95 and 5.97, in which the envoys say that they intend to conquer Melos to show their power to any islanders who would consider rebelling, for the Athenians to depart the island without either making good on their threats or securing Melian acceptance of the ultimatum would be unthinkable. Such a retreat without results would call into question the Athenian credibility and honor that was the cause of the expedition in the first place, not to mention the war.

In short, if the Melians were to hope for salvation, their only options would be to accept the ultimatum or to defeat the Athenians in combat. Any analysis of why Athenian compellence failed must take this into account and understand that defeat in battle simply was not an acceptable or even indifferent option relative to any other. Choosing to die rather than surrender to the Athenians would not only lead the Melians to losing the good that is life (as in fact happened) but would also foreclose the possibility of enjoying future goods, such as liberty. It is not possible, then, to conclude that the Melians were indifferent between death and surrender.

Incomplete Information:

There is a great deal of evidence, both in the Melian Dialogue itself and in the secondary literature, to suggest that the Melians could have and indeed did misestimate their probability of defeating the Athenians, and went to war on the basis of this incorrect estimation. This is perhaps most clear from the Melians' statement in 5.104, in which they argue that they can reasonably resist the Athenians: "nevertheless, we have faith that we will not be inferior in that fortune that is from the gods. . . and our deficiency in power the alliance of the Spartans compensates, possessed of compelling necessity. . . so our boldness is not in every way irrational." Clearly,

their decision is made based on their estimate of the probability of succeeding in battle, even if this estimate was flawed.

Despite Athenians rebuttals, the Melians' decision and their grounds for it is largely unchanged by the end of the dialogue. In 5.112, at the very end of the dialogue, the Melians say "entrusting [the city] to the hitherto saving fortune from the divine and the aiding retribution from humans, even the Spartans, we will try to save ourselves." It is important to note that the Melians seem to have less trust in the Spartans than they did at first, lending limited evidence to the claim that they understand that their fight is hopeless, as the Spartans are unlikely to even the balance of power between the two sides. Yet the other of the two factors which decide wars -- chance (or fortune) -- is still apparent to the Melians, and they trust in this fortune to save them from the Athenians.

The Athenians, in their reply, are skeptical of the Melians' assessments, but to some extent miss the point, saying (5.113), "having to the greatest extent staked and put your faith in the Spartans, and fortune, and hopes, you will to the greatest extent fall." The Athenians seem to think that the Melians are being intransigent, and that their arguments fell on interlocutors unable or unwilling to understand them. Yet this is unfair to the Melians, as they clearly have understood the Athenian arguments that the Spartans will not aid them. It is specifically their assessment of fortune, rather than the Spartans (or their hopes) which the Melians trust in for the preservation of their liberty.

Even the International Relations scholars who hold most closely to the realist assumption that power and interest, above all else, allow for this sort of misestimation of probabilities. It is useful to return to Fearon here. Wars, he says, can occur because of incomplete information, in

which the sides do not agree upon what the outcome would be if they were to go to war. Although it is often possible for sides to display their capabilities in hopes of adjusting a potential adversary's calculation of the expected outcome of a war, the Melian case is problematic for such displays of capabilities given that the issue is not the balance of power per se, but the gods and their nature.

Prospect Theory

There is some reason to think that Perry and Ober have a strong point. Indeed, the Athenians' final statement in the dialogue could just as easily be a brief summary of Prospect Theory: "You alone. . . judge the things in the future to be clearer than the things seen, and the unevident you see, by wishing, as having already come to pass;" (5.113). In a way, this same statement describes the subjects in Kahneman and Tversky's (1979) work, who would choose payoffs with a non-maximum expected value. To explain this, Kahneman and Tversky suggest a number of effects, and although it is somewhat clear which ones apply in this case, there is more ambiguity than Ober and Perry seem to suggest about what the overall prediction of prospect theory would be to the Melian case. Indeed, different effects of prospect theory would produce conflicting results: on the one hand, the certainty effect would predict that the Melians would overweight a payoff that is certain (or has a probability of one) relative to an uncertain one. The certain payoff in the Melian case is surrender, so the certainty effect would push the Melians toward accepting the ultimatum. On the other hand, Ober and Perry emphasize the relative overweighting of unlikely outcomes that is seen in some prospect theory value functions.

While Ober and Perry's application of a modern behavioral economics theory to an ancient case provides an example for potentially fruitful research, the case is much weaker than they suggest. There is also no evidence in the text to suggest that the central empirical implication of prospect theory (at least for international bargaining) is at work: that states can choose non-optimized strategies even with perfect information. The Melians hold to a somewhat unupdated estimate of their probability of victory at the end of the dialogue. The evidence here is too ambiguous to say that prospect theory was at work -- the evidence points to a simple misestimation of probability.

Domestic Politics

A domestic politics approach to the Melian Dialogue is not one that has been commonly applied in the literature, but it is instructive all the same. The Peloponnesian War, as seen elsewhere in the text (namely the Mytilenean Debate) and noted, at least in passing, in the secondary literature, (Lebow 2007) included an element of class conflict, as manifested by conflict between oligarchies and democracies. The democratic Athenians sided primarily with other democracies or with democratic factions within city states, while the Spartans sided with oligarchies and oligarchic factions. The logic of this argument is that the Melian oligarchs saw democratic revolutions elsewhere after states accepted Athenian hegemony, and would have wanted to avoid the bloody civil strife (or *stasis*) the engulfed many contemporary cities.

This argument has some similarities to Lebow's in that it suggests that the Melian payoff for choosing surrender is less than or equal to the payoff for choosing a likely doomed attempt to fight Athens. Yet while Lebow claims that the two payoffs are as he says because of the value

that the Melians place on security, this argument claims that the payoff for surrender is so low because it leads to the same outcome as war. The choice, framed this way, is not between going to war with the Athenians or surrendering to them, it is instead a choice between going to war with the Athenians or civil war.

The Athenian ambassadors, then, are surprising in the apparent contempt with which they hold democracy and the many (rather than the elite). The dialogue starts (5.85) with an unquestioning Athenian acceptance -- and even endorsement -- of the Melian oligarchs' decision to exclude the many from decision-making. The Athenians attribute this decision to a desire "to prevent the many from being deceived by us on account of hearing in an uninterrupted speech seductive and unrefuted things all at once." They summarize in one sentence perhaps the single biggest criticism of democracy: that voters, specifically those without education, can be irrational (Aristophanes, *Acharnians*, Brennan 2016). The repetition of this criticism of democracy by democratic citizens is followed by an apparent endorsement of oligarchy, saying, "you who preside ought to act in an even safer manner." This sets up a dichotomy between the frivolous political decisions of the many and the safer rule of the few. It is surprising that such an endorsement of oligarchy would come from democratic citizens, and signals to the Melians that the oligarchic faction (if it could be called that in the absence of the *stasis* which gripped so many other states) is alive and well in Athens, despite its government.

These arguments from the Athenians suggest that a revolution would have been unlikely had the Melians accepted the ultimatum. They show that an aristocratic class (although not an oligarchic regime) existed in Athens even after its transition to democracy, and even held considerable political power. This is seen in Athenian history with the prominence of aristocrats

like Pericles and Alcibiades in Athenian democratic politics. Furthermore, although it is easy to make the generalization that Athenian allies were democracies and Spartan allies were oligarchies, this generalization overlooks numerous exceptions. There were several oligarchies in the Athenian alliance, with Mytilene being perhaps the most notable example until it revolted from the Athenians. The affair of Epidamnus, in which Athens and democratic Corcyra sided with the Epidamnian oligarchic faction against the democratic faction, is another case in which the generalization does not hold (Robinson 2006 addresses this in greater depth).

Clearly, then, an oligarchic government was not necessarily incompatible with being a part of the Athenian empire. Perhaps more importantly, going to war with Athens rather than accepting the ultimatum could make revolution *more* rather than less likely. As Diodotus notes in the Mytilenian Debate, the common people often resist going to war with Athens (3.47) and such defection would not only have shifted the balance of power even more against the Melians, but suggests that the Melian state would have been made less stable by going to war with Athens. In short, the danger of revolution was present whether the Melians accepted the Athenians' ultimatum or not, and although Athens did institute democratic regimes in some cities, there is evidence to suggest that the chance of revolution would have been no less if the Melians rejected the ultimatum than if they accepted it.

This evidence that domestic politics should not have motivated the Melians to reject the ultimatum is not necessarily evidence that domestic politics was not, in fact, the cause of the Melian decision to go to war. Importantly, after the opening lines of the Dialogue, the two sides do not discuss oligarchy or democracy any further. This is itself evidence that domestic politics was not a major factor in the Melians' decision-making. Had domestic politics been a major

concern of either side, they could reasonably have been expected to discuss this subject at greater length. That they do not is evidence against domestic politics being a motivation for the Melians' decision to reject the ultimatum. As such, it is not possible to attribute the Melians' decision to domestic politics.

Chapter Five: Results

As I have shown in the previous chapter, the first and fourth models (Lebow's and domestic politics) of Melian decision-making do not appear to explain the eventual result. The second and third remain (misestimation of probability and prospect theory). Although, as I will expand upon in this chapter, prospect theory's major empirical implication suggests that there is more going on than the theory allows for. It is important, first, to compare and contrast this model and the prospect theory explanation of Ober and Perry, and then to go into greater detail about the nature and implications of this model.

Ober and Perry's model has some similarities with Orwin's and Strauss'. Perhaps most importantly, both rely on bounded rationality rather than complete rationality to explain the decision made by the Melians. Prospect theory is an example of bounded rationality in that individuals and states acting in accordance with it predictably make decisions that are not utility-maximizing, while Orwin and Strauss seem to suggest that although the Melians' decision would have been a utility-maximizing one were their assumptions (i.e. their estimate of the probability of winning) correct, these assumptions made on the basis of emotional beliefs that cannot be considered rational, so the decision-making process as a whole cannot be considered perfectly rational.

On the other hand, Ober and Perry themselves draw a contrast between their reading of Thucydides and Orwin's (p. 206-207). Specifically, Ober and Perry rely on prospect theory and behavioral economics to understand the Peloponnesian War, and suggest that these dynamics were an important theme of Thucydides' work (p. 207). Orwin and Strauss, however, regard

Thucydides' work as more philosophical than scientific. To the extent that Ober and Perry find that bounded rationality rather than perfect rationality is an important part of human nature and decision making, I agree with their claims and find that these claims are supported in the text, but the evidence that prospect theory sufficiently describes the Melians' decision-making is not entirely convincing. To understand this, it is necessary to more thoroughly examine the differences between Ober and Perry's account of the Melians' decision making and Orwin's account.

The difference between expected utility theory and prospect theory that is most relevant to the Melian Dialogue (and the differences between Orwin's and Ober and Perry's accounts of Melian decision-making) is that a prospect theory actor will be likely to choose an outcome with a possibility of higher gains over a certain outcome of a lesser gain (Kahneman and Tversky 1979). The prospect theory actor over-weights the probability of higher gains, or chooses the risky (probabilistic) outcome *for its riskiness* rather than because of a calculation that the risky outcome will lead to a better expected outcome. The over-weighting of probabilities is different from a mis-estimation of probabilities under incomplete information. A prospect theory actor is risk-seeking when faced with a prospect of losses. An expected-utility actor chooses whichever outcome has the highest expected utility. The difference between Orwin's (and Strauss's) account of the Melians' decision is that they misestimated the probabilities, while Ober and Perry's account suggests that the Melians chose a risky war because that choice allowed for the possibility of a no-loss outcome for them.[9] It is clear that the Melians hold fast to their misestimate even at the end of the dialogue, and that this misestimation is what leads to the war.

[9] Although as mentioned above, this is unrealistic given that war is costly even for the winning side. I do not address this in-depth in this project in hopes of giving Ober and Perry a more fair hearing, but neglecting this is an area for critique of their study.

While Ober and Perry say that the Melians misestimated their probability of victory, this is not entirely in line with the psychological microfoundations of prospect theory. Misestimation of a probability is different from an over- or under-weighting of a probability. This is clear from experimental studies of prospect theory. In Kahneman and Tversky's (1979) study, experimental subjects were given certain probabilities of different outcomes, and acted in accordance with prospect theory rather than expected utility theory. In the Melian Dialogue, there is not evidence suggesting that the Melians would have made the same decision given certain knowledge of the probability of winning the war as they did when the probability was estimated, although the Melians appear to trust in their hope of winning rather than their expectations based on probability.

Furthermore, while prospect theory suggests that actors are risk-averse when faced with losses, the Melians would have paid large costs even if they had defeated the Athenians, given that war is extremely costly. They would have retained their independence, but the costs of war would have been high. Even if the Melians made a "gamble for resurrection," a favorable outcome of this gamble would have been costly. The costs of war even if it is won are not examined in great depth by Ober and Perry, although this does not call their larger claim (that the Melians are better described by prospect theory rather than expected utility theory) into question as much as the lack of textual evidence for a prospect theory approach and the Melians' apparent misestimation of their probability of victory rather than an overweighting of the probability of defeating the Athenians.

That the Melians appear to be described better by expected utility theory under incomplete information than by prospect theory is not a categorical rejection of prospect theory:

it describes many decision makers and decisions better than expected utility theory does, as numerous economic experiments give evidence for, including Kahneman and Tversky's own, but also work influenced by them. Furthermore, there is not yet much published literature which attempts to apply prospect theory to strategic interactions in international relations, and such research is a promising area for future work (Butler 2007, Chung 2014, Stein 2017). The test for prospect theory is "whether [it] adds more to our understanding of politics than it detracts in added complexity," (Butler p. 228) and in this situation, at least, it appears that the familiar theoretical framework of expected utility is sufficient.

Lebow's focus on honor is also helpful for understanding the Melians' potential disincentives for peaceful settlement in greater detail, as he highlights the fact that Athenian subjugation would have been onerous. Expanding upon his understanding (and taking other parts of the text into account) it is clear that this ultimatum would not be Athens' last. On the other hand, any outcome which contained the possibility of eventual liberation from Athenian rule would have been better than death, and even at this point in the war (after the Spartan defeat at Pylos and the Peace of Nicias, concluded on terms favorable to Athens) liberation from the Athenians was conceivable.

It is also important to consider an explanation which turns to domestic politics even if it did not have much explanatory power in this particular case. The element of class struggle in the Peloponnesian War between democratic and oligarchic factions can be (and indeed is) easily overlooked. I took steps to consider this aspect of the war in my analysis precisely because this element of the war has not been considered by many contemporary scholars, although it was apparently influential on Hobbes (Evrigenis 2006).

Yet overall, the approach which focuses on the Melians' beliefs and misestimation of probability holds the explanation for their decision-making that is most grounded in the evidence from the text. Prospect theory may have been at work as well, and as Ober and Perry note, it is complementary to the understanding of the Melian Dialogue that is conveyed by Orwin's and Strauss' approach to the Dialogue. Most importantly, both models emphasize the incomplete rationality of the decision to reject the Athenians' ultimatum. Although the Athenians tried to, as they saw it, debunk the Melian expectations of assistance from the gods or Spartans, they ultimately failed. They seem to come to the dialogue with the expectation that the Melians are already aware of the probabilities of victory and defeat. Directly before their often quoted statement about the strong and the weak in 5.89, the Athenians appear to assume that the Melians share their beliefs about the international system, saying that they are "dealing as knowers, with knowers, of the fact that just things. . . are judged to be consequence of equal compulsion," clearly placing the Melians in the same category as themselves in terms of knowledge if not in power. Even more particularly, the Athenians refer to their belief that in the international system, power (the ability to compel) is placed above everything else.[10] Yet judging from the Melians' rejection of the ultimatum, the Athenian (and now the realist) view of the international system is not as self-evident as it would appear.

[10] The Athenians do suggest that justice *does* matter in the international system between actors with equal power. This case, however, is trivial, given the negligible probability that any two actors will have equal power and, given the constantly-changing power of many states, the short time that any two states' power would be equal if it ever were.

Chapter Six: Athenian Decision-Making

Before moving on to discuss the significance of these findings for the study of Thucydides as well as international relations, it is important to inquire as to why the Athenians decided to invade Melos in the first place. So far, this project has viewed the decision as given, as indeed it appears to be in the Melian Dialogue: the dialogue occurs with an Athenian army at the gates of Melos, perhaps quite literally. Yet the Athenian decision to invade Melos is puzzling. The city-state is, until this point, only tangentially involved in the war, providing a major piece of evidence that Melos was geopolitically insignificant. Modern assessments have likewise concluded that Melos was neither prosperous nor commercially important compared to other cities, especially Athens (Ober 2008). Why, then, did Athens devote money, ships, and soldiers[11] to conquering an essentially insignificant island? Kagan (1981) suggests that this was a prelude to the Sicilian Expedition, but does not expand upon that claim in any greater detail.

Early in the dialogue, the Athenians suggest that their own subject states are the greatest threat to them. They say, "it is not those who old sway over others, as do the Spartans, who are terrible to those over whom they are victorious (but the contest for us is not with the Spartans), but the subjects, presumably, of those that hold sway, when they themselves prevail in attack." (5.91) Although the Athenians are making a general statement here, it applies to their particular situation: the Athenians hold sway over numerous subject cities, and they claim that their subjects will be more terrible in war than the Spartans will be. It follows from this that the

[11] Thucydides states (5.84.1) that the initial Athenian and allied force consisted of thirty-eight ships and about three thousand soldiers. Not a large expedition, but still more than was dispatched to assist the Corcyraeans in the affair of Epidamnus which was an important cause of the war.

Athenians hope to avoid future rebellions by their subjects, which had already proved a problem earlier in the war.

Next, the Athenians make it clear that their decision to attack Melos is motivated by their desire to deter future rebellions by their subjects: "your enmity harms us less than your friendship -- manifesting to those who are ruled a sign of [our] weakness, while your hatred is a sign of [our] power." (5.95) This statement is made within the context of a discussion about the relationship between the Athenians and their allies, and it lays out the Athenian approach to deterring future rebellions, which provides their rationale for the invasion of Melos. By invading Melos, the Athenians hope to provide, as they say, a sign of their power, as a signal to their subjects that attempts at rebellion will be unsuccessful. The Athenian invasion of Melos, then, is an attempt to deter the subjects from rebelling.

I will not argue with the Athenian claim that invading Melos will signal their capabilities and help deter their subjects from rebelling, nor will I challenge the claim that they are almost certain to defeat the Melians. Yet, even if these assumptions are correct, the Athenians do little to prove that the benefits of invading Melos outweigh the costs. Especially at this point in the war, not long after the stunning Athenian defeat of the Spartans at Pylos, and after the Athenians have defeated a major rebellion at Mytilene, there is not much reason for the subjects to question Athenian capabilities or resolve.[12] Adding Melos to the Athenian empire would certainly be a signal of Athenian power, but such a signal does not seem necessary. While the benefits of invading Melos are dubious, the costs are certain. Both sides could reasonably expect a siege of the city (which was practically the only strategy that was used for attacking cities at the time) to

[12] There may still be a question of the balance of power between the Athenians and Spartans but this is not a main focus of the Melian Dialogue and the Athenians are entirely clear that it is their subjects whom they most hope to deter, not the Spartans.

take at least several months and be costly in both lives and resources for both sides. Why, then, did the Athenians issue an ultimatum to the Melians if the payoff of war is, at best, limited, while the costs are certain?

The simple answer, which is so apparent as to have perhaps discouraged further inquiry, is that the Athenians were imperialistic and imperial powers, by nature, go to war to conquer smaller states. The Athenians act in accordance with their words in 5.89, doing whatever they are capable of and conquering whoever they can. Much has been written about Athenian imperialism (Romilly 1979, Bruell 1974) and an in-depth investigation of it is outside the scope of this project, but it is important to understand and question the assumptions of Athenian imperialism as it relates to Athenian conduct at Melos. The Athenians clearly view most other states as inherently threatening, and perhaps more threatening than they are in fact. The Athenians have little evidence of other states' intentions, so they use the limited information that (that subjects sometimes rebel and that this was problematic in the past) and use it to predict the future. They predict that their subjects may become threatening again in the future, and the only possible guarantee (although that probability overstates its certainty) of preventing rebellion is overwhelming deterrence. This suggests that the Athenians at Melos have a deeply fearful view of the international system.

The fearful view of the international system which the Athenians at Melos give an account of is one aspect of the Athenian Thesis, which the ambassadors provide one of several perspectives on in the text. According to the Athenian Thesis, states[13] are driven by fear, honor, and interest, partly as opposed to justice. While different perspectives emphasize different

[13] One view, which I will address at greater length in the next chapter, applies this to individuals as well.

aspects of the Athenian Thesis, the ambassadors at Melos appear driven most of all by fear, specifically of rebellions but also of other, potentially hostile, states more generally.

The Athenians at Melos, despite their power, are fundamentally fearful about the international system. They are not entirely without reason in this, but as I have shown above, it leads them to make policy decisions that are only questionably in their interest. The fearful Athenian view of international relations anticipates some of the ways in which certain modern international relations realists portray the international system. In particular, the Athenians appear to be faced with what international relations scholars have called the security dilemma. In short, the security dilemma describes states as fearful of each other in large part because the actions that a state takes to provide for its own security can be interpreted as harming the security of other states (Herz 1950). An example of this from the Peloponnesian War is the Athenian insistence that some of their subject states tear down the walls of their cities. One such request was made to the city of Potidea, an Athenian subject state in northern Greece, and the resulting rebellion led, in part, to the beginning of the Peloponnesian War. Walls seem to be very clearly a provision for defense rather than offense, but they were seen by Athens as possibly useful in rebellions, as they made suppressing a rebellion much harder. Stemming from the security dilemma, contemporary international relations realists portray states as fearful due to the dangers of the international system, leading to attempts to increase their power almost without limit[14] (Mearsheimer 2014, 32). I do not challenge this description itself, and there appears to be significant evidence for it in the international system of Ancient Greece, but I argue that the power maximization that realists describe leads to irrational policies, potentially leading to

[14] Earlier realists suggested that states pursued a more limited amount of power, but as Mearsheimer notes, they say little about what that limit may be.

irrational policies which conflict with realist assumptions of perfect rationality, leading to a contradiction in some varieties of realist thought. I will return to the relationship between Thucydides and modern realism, particularly the variety of realism that focuses on the structure of the international system, in chapter eight, but it is important to note that Athens is apparently taking the security dilemma and the assumptions which they share with modern realists very seriously, and that these beliefs shape their foreign policy, leading to occasional miscalculations and, I would argue, their imperialism and eventual overreach.

The Melians argue (5.98) that, taken to its final logic, the Athenians will end up going to war with all other states in the Greek international system because they pose such a threat to all other states in the system, anticipating Hobbes' "war of all against all" which was so deeply influential to modern realists (Waltz [1959] 2001). The Athenian envoys suggest (5.99) that this war has already begun against the island states, but that states of the mainland do not yet feel threatened by the Athenians due to the predominantly maritime nature of Athenian power. Furthermore, the war is not yet "of all against all" but of all against the Athenians.

Athenian imperialism, in the view of the envoys at Melos, was directly driven by the security dilemma. The Athenians wanted to subjugate other states, and to weaken those who were already subjects, so that no state could challenge Athens, thus ensuring Athenian security. But, as we see in the case of Melos and others, Athens goes to war with relatively insignificant states that have little apparent ability to challenge Athenian hegemony. This leads to immense costs for the Athenians empire, as they try to conquer or deter any potentially threatening state, with most states viewed as potentially threatening. Athenian foreign policy is driven largely by this fear of other states.

Athenian fears are captured in the Athenian Thesis which describes the motivations for the Athenian strategy of imperialism and war against all. In this way, the Athenian Thesis leads to such a costly foreign policy that it cannot but bring ruin to Athens if it is pursued immoderately, as it is after the death of Pericles. It is also notable that this overreach occured after the death of Pericles: his realism is more moderate than that of the Athenians at Melos, and he focuses more on honor than fear. It is not, then, the Athenian Thesis itself, or realism, which lead to the ruin of Athens, but an immoderate or overly fearful foreign policy.

Yet this foreign policy based on the Athenian Thesis is pursued in large part because it is projected on other states. The Athenians fear other states because they assume that other states are like themselves, going to war with others in an attempt to ensure their own security, as the Athenian Thesis and security dilemma state that other states are compelled to do. The interests of Athens drew it into security dilemmas across the Greek world and beyond: from Sicily to Thrace to Egypt. Athenian attempts to conquer or deter every other state in the international system are decidedly unrealistic, it simply was not possible to defeat or deter every other state despite Athens' military and latent power. The overreach of Athenian imperialism could not but eventually lead to the ruin of Athens, as it eventually did when Athens mounted what was probably the largest military endeavor in Greek history with the expedition to conquer Sicily. While Kagan's assertion that the Melian expedition was a prelude to the Sicilian Expedition lacks evidence from a tactical or operational point of view, the same motivations compelled Athens to mount both endeavors and the Melian Dialogue occurs directly before the debate over the Sicilian Expedition in the text. The logic for both expeditions is the same: the Athenians hoped to conquer the Melians as part of their strategic effort to solve the security dilemma

through imperialism, and in Sicily, as Thucydides' narration says, the Athenians risked a great deal more than the pretenses called for (6.8). The words of the Athenian Thesis are backed up by their imperialistic actions.

Yet the Melian Dialogue suggests that, at least to some extent, Athenian fears and thus the perspective on Athenian Thesis (and realism) seen at Melos are off-base. The Melians did not threaten Athens in 416, nor could they realistically have done so in the foreseeable future. There is no reason to doubt the sincerity of the Melian offer of friendship with both and enmity to neither, nor is there reason to doubt that the Melians would ever renege on this offer and begin to threaten the Athenians for at least as long as the Athenian empire lasted. Yet the Athenians continue to view the Melians as threatening in large part because they have projected their own thesis onto the Melians. This Athenian projection of the Athenian Thesis onto others is most apparent from their statement in 5.90, in which they state that the Melians themselves know that the "superior do what they are capable of, and the weak make way." Yet while the Athenians (who are superior here) do as they are able to, the Melians do not make way.

While the Melians do hope to preserve their interests (and honor) by resisting the Athenians, it is the extension of the Athenian Thesis -- the deference of the weak to the strong -- that is here shown to be untrue in the deeds of the Melians. There are two ways of viewing this discrepancy between the words of the Athenians and the deeds of the Melians. Ober and Perry's study of the Melian Dialogue under the conditions of prospect theory is more helpful for understanding the behavior of the Athenians here than it is for understanding the Melian refusal to submit. They argue (2014, 218-219) that in addition to the Melians acting irrationally, that the famously realist Athenians were themselves irrational.

The Melians overestimated their probability of success in war and therefore the expected utility of going to war, but the Athenians could have adjusted the terms of their ultimatum, especially upon seeing that the Melian resistance was not mere posturing and that they were willing to go to war on the basis of their belief that fortune would favor them. Ober and Perry focus on this Athenian refusal to adjust in the face of determined Melian resistance as evidence of Athenian irrationality (219).

I argue that the Athenian frustration here is symptomatic of more fundamental problem with Athenian foreign policy and the Athenian Thesis as it is seen at Melos. Athenian foreign policy here proceeded directly from the Athenian Thesis, and it is not accidental that the Athenians projected their thesis upon all other states, and Diodotus projects it onto all humans in the Mytilenian Dialogue, as I will discuss at greater length in the next chapter. Indeed, the Athenians at Melos claim that the Spartans and even the gods act in accordance with it. Yet, as we have seen, the perception of all other states as threatening that follows directly from the Athenian thesis as stated at Melos compels the Athenians to go to war, eventually overreaching.

This necessity for or compulsion to empire is, the Athenians suggest, a law of nature. They claim that their Thesis and the dominion of the strong predated them (5.105) and, as mentioned above, is a law to which even the gods are subject to. Yet on the one hand, following this law leads directly to the downfall of Athens with the Sicilian Expedition, and on the other, the Melians violate this law by refusing to submit to the Athenians.

Yet the Athenian frustration with the obstinacy of the Melians is also a sign of the Athenians own obstinacy. Just as the Melians are largely unmoved by the Athenians' arguments, the Athenians' are unmoved by the Melians' arguments. The Athenians had a not-unwarranted

confidence in their military power. Especially at this point in the war, after an Athenian rout of the Spartans at Pylos, forcing the Spartans to conclude a peace agreement, it is easy to see why the Athenians would have considered their victory against the Melians to be inevitable. Yet they trust in the balance of military power without taking seriously the Melian arguments about the importance of fortune just as the Melians refuse to take seriously Athenian arguments about the preeminence of power in international affairs. In this way, the Athenians are just as inflexible and unwilling to examine the facts as the Melians are.

The Athenian conduct of the war which ensues after the Melians reject the ultimatum gives further proof of the inflexibility of the Athenians in the face of new information. Thucydides devotes much less attention to the siege of Melos than he does to the dialogue which preceded it. This may appear to be either an authorial decision made in hopes of portraying the eventual Melian defeat as a tragedy, matter-of-factly telling the story of Athens' genocide against the Melian people. It could also be in recognition of the fact that Melos, the siege, and its eventual defeat was, simply put, politically insignificant, having little effect on the course of the larger war.[15] Yet it is notable that the Melians back up their words with a determined attempt to resist the Athenians, and even more notable that they have some limited success early in the siege. Seeing that the Melian arguments were not entirely off-base could have made the Athenians reconsider their expectations of an easy victory. Indeed it probably should have caused such a reconsideration. Following a limited defeat by a Melian raid, and more importantly, a defeat which was likely surprising given the balance of power, the Athenians probably should have adjusted their expectations and therefore their demands (Reiter 2009). On

[15] This would make Thucydides decision to include the Melian Dialogue itself to be more important and suggest that it is, indeed, a very important passage to understanding the war.

the one hand, such a reconsideration would have been costly to the Athenians: admitting that a relatively weak state could realistically resist Athenian imperialism would damage Athenian honor, and harming the very credibility in the eyes of their subjects which they went to war to enhance. On the other hand, refusing to reconsider their demands or consider more seriously the Melian arguments provides even further evidence of the Athenians' inflexibility and the ideological nature of the Athenian Thesis as it is stated at Melos.

I have endeavored to determine the causes of Melian resistance to Athenian imperialism first, and then to examine Athenian imperialism on its own because the conduct of the Athenians is strategic in the sense that it takes into account the expected actions of others. Athenian imperialism, as we see in the Melian Dialogue, is driven by an expectation that other states will act in accordance with the law of nature that the Athenians state: that states rule as they are capable.[16] To understand the Melian violation of this law calls into question the interpretation of the Athenian Thesis, or at least the Athenian Thesis as it is stated by the envoys to Melos. In turn, questioning the Athenian Thesis at Melos leads to a critique of modern realism, which has been so deeply influenced by Thucydides.

[16] While an in-depth comparison between Thucydides and Hobbes is outside the scope of this project, an interesting topic for future research would be to compare Hobbes' natural laws with the one stated by the Athenians at Melos.

Chapter Seven: Implications for Thucydides Interpretation

In light of my findings that the Melians rejected the Athenian ultimatum due to a misestimation of their probability of winning, and more importantly, that both sides were unwilling to adjust their expectations, it is necessary to reexamine the Athenian Thesis, its role in the text, and what it should mean to the reader. To do this, I will first examine different versions of the Athenian Thesis that are stated by several different speakers in the text, and I will examine how these can be reinterpreted upon having understood the Melian Dialogue more fully. This will not be an exhaustive investigation of the Athenian Thesis, as that would be outside the scope of this project -- this project is about the Melian Dialogue, not the text as a whole. Instead, it is a first step, intended to both inspire and inform future research on Thucydides. In particular, I will examine the speech of the Athenian ambassadors to the congress of the Peloponnesians at Sparta, Pericles' Funeral Oration, and the speech of Diodotus in the Mytilenian Debate. I have chosen these speeches due to their influence on scholars of Thucydides and political theory more generally, and because they show the diversity of perspectives, even among a relatively narrow group of speakers, on the Athenian Thesis.

The Congress at Sparta

The first perspective on the Athenian Thesis is given by a group of unnamed Athenian ambassadors to a congress at Sparta, convened as the peace between Athens and Sparta was breaking down. Due to a civil war, different factions in the city of Epidamnus appealed to different third-party states for assistance. One side enlists the help of Corinth, an ally of Sparta,

while the other side receives help from Corcyra, which was aligned with neither Sparta nor Athens. After an initial battle between the two sides and an aggressive shipbuilding project by Corinth, the Corcyraeans ask for assistance from Athens (1.24-31). The Athenians agree to a limited alliance with the Corcyraeans, to assist in defense rather than offense, but after Athenian ships are involved in a battle between the Corinthians and Corcyraeans, the Corinthians allege that the Athenians have broken their truce with the Spartan alliance (of which, as I mentioned above, the Corinthians are a part). The Corinthians make arguments to this effect at a congress of the Spartans, saying that the Spartans must go to war with the Athenians. A group of Athenian ambassadors who were in the city on unrelated business argue that the Spartans should not so hastily decide to go to war but should consider the situation at greater length (1.72). Thucydides states (and this claim is supported by the Athenians' speech) that the ambassadors hope to make their state's power clear to the Spartans, and in doing so, to deter the Spartans from going to war (1.72). This goal is much like that of the Athenians at Melos, and the theoretical aspects of the two speeches have much in common, although there are also key differences.

The first part of the Athenian's speech recounts the Athenian victory over the Persian invasion about fifty years earlier. In particular, the Athenians focus on the size of their naval forces, the ingenuity of Themistocles, the Athenian commander at the time, and the courage with which they fought (1.74). These are all ways of showing the capability and resolve of Athens. The Athenians go on to argue that they do not treat their subjects unjustly, (1.77) and conclude by arguing that war would be calamitous for both sides (1.78). Overall, the Athenians do much to argue that their state is powerful and that war would be costly, but they do little to challenge the

claim made by the Corinthians, famously cited as a cause of the war, that Athens actively challenges Sparta for hegemony of Greece.

While the immediate issue of the balance of power between Athens and Sparta is important, it is the theoretical claims in the speech that are more relevant to my project. In particular, this speech is the first time that the Athenian Thesis is stated clearly, first in 1.75: that Athens, and by extension other states, are driven by fear, honor, and interest (although this third drive is translated as profit by Hobbes). Importantly, justice is absent from this statement, although Athenian claims that they have treated their subjects fairly would suggest that justice is not entirely alien to Athenian policy. The Athenians also make a claim that anticipates the law that the ambassadors at Melos claim to act in accordance with. In 1.76, they claim that the strong always dominate the weak, and that their empire is merely in accordance with this tendency throughout time. Throughout the speech, the Athenians claim that their dominion over other states is natural and that they have treated their subjects as justly as they could given the circumstances. Perhaps more controversially to their audience, the Athenians claim that the Spartans would have acted similarly in the same situation, and that they treat other states even less fairly. The core of the Athenian Thesis lies in these assertions: that states are driven by fear, honor, and interest, that justice is a secondary or unimportant concern for foreign policy, and that this applies to all states. The Athenian Thesis is extended by the ambassadors at Melos specifically in the importance they assign to justice. The Athenians at Sparta, as I have noted above, take great pains to show that they have treated their subjects fairly, specifically by allowing them to settle disputes in the courts according to laws, and respecting the decisions of these trials. To the Athenians at Melos, however, power is all that matters: they insist that the

Melians confine their arguments to interest rather than justice, which deeply conflicts with the principles of the courts which disputes previously went to. In place of justice, and the equality of all states under the law, the Athenians at Melos resort to power to compel other states. While there was discontent among Athenian subjects even before the speech of the ambassadors at Sparta, the speakers claim that such discontentment would have been much worse had Athens resorted to force and ignored law in their dealings with subjects (1.77). This aspect of the speech should not be overstated, as the Athenians at Sparta do not claim that justice is necessary for their foreign policy, but it is clear that acting in accordance with justice furthers their interest.

This contrast between the Athenians at Sparta and the ambassadors at Melos is perhaps most enlightening when viewed in the context of Athenian imperialism and overreach. The discarding of justice (even though its application had always been limited) coincides with actions that eventually harm Athens. The harm does not come directly from the fact of Athens' having acted unjustly, but discarding justice entirely leads to a strategy of unlimited expansion that is pursued immoderately and could not have led to any other outcome than eventual collapse.

Pericles' Funeral Oration and the Athenian Thesis

Athenian law mandated a ceremony during wars to honor those who have died in battle, with a public speech being an important part of the ceremony. Pericles, one of the most important Athenian political figures, gives this speech at the end of the first year of the war. Although his speech does not explicitly reference the Athenian Thesis, it is one of the most important, well-known, and influential passages in the text, and is therefore important for understanding Thucydides in greater depth.

The most apparent difference between the Funeral Oration (2.35-46) and the Melian Dialogue is that the Funeral Oration focuses predominantly on the domestic politics of Athens, praising the Athenians as individuals and ultimately joining this with praise of the Athenian state. As Orwin notes, (particularly 18-19) Pericles presents the end (the *telos*) of Athens as honor for the city itself and for those who, through their efforts and sacrifices, make the honor of the city their own and make their own honor that of the city. Orwin also argues that the project of empire was freely chosen by Athens, although the evidence for this claim is more apparent in Pericles' speech in 2.60 than in the Funeral Oration. Setting aside the subtle differences in perspective between Pericles' different speeches,[17] two key differences emerge between Pericles' vision of Athenian Imperialism and the view espoused by the envoys at Melos. First, the empire was driven by honor rather than fear.[18] Second, the Athenian empire in Pericles' view was a freely chosen endeavor.

Perhaps the main way in which Pericles' Funeral Oration espouses and elucidates the Athenian Thesis is its focus on honor as the central goal of the Athenian imperial project. It is notable that honor, here is more in line with its traditional definition -- glory -- than credibility, respectability, or deference, as the envoys to Melos take honor to be, as do scholars applying the concept to modern international relations. This honor is not only the end of the Athenian project (in Pericles' view) but also the reward to the citizens who participate in protecting and furthering that project. As Pericles says, (2.43) "for having everyone given his body to the commonwealth

[17] These differences are important, but they are outside the scope of this project. In particular, it is possible that Pericles' less-laudatory statements on the empire in his last speech should be given more weight than they traditionally have been as the Funeral Oration was subject to numerous constraints on account of tradition and its occasion.

[18] An important caveat here is that Pericles and the envoys would agree that giving up the empire would lead to ruin.

they receive in place thereof an undecaying commendation and a most remarkable sepulchre not wherein they are buried so much as wherein their glory is laid up upon all occasions both of speech and action to be remembered forever." Clearly, the undecaying commendation of which Pericles speaks is the glory and honor given to those who have acted virtuously, or in a way deserving of commendation, and that action, in this case, being self-sacrifice for the city. Yet their glory is not solely their own, and is shared with the city to which they sacrificed themselves and to their compatriots.

This is starkly different from the view of the state's ends that is espoused by the ambassadors to Melos: the end of the empire, in their view, is security. There is little glory or honor for the individual in the Athens of the envoys at Melos: the individual is simply a cog in the machine that works to ensure the city's security. The individual does not fight for glory but out of fear. Indeed, viewed through the lens of the Funeral Oration, it is the Melians, not the Athenians, who achieve the fullest expression of themselves, who achieve a life of glory. The Melians knowingly run risks on the behalf of their city, just as Pericles exhorts the Athenians to do. Pericles' words in 2.42 could apply to the Melians of 416 just as much as it did the Athenians of 431: "for their principal desire was not wealth but revenge on their enemies, which esteeming the most honorable cause of danger, they made account through it both to accomplish their revenge and to purchase wealth withal; putting the uncertainty of success to the account of their hope," this parallel is especially true in light of my finding that the Melians rejected the ultimatum rationally but not without view to their own interest, even if their expectations were distorted. The Melians did indeed value honor, even if they did not value it to the point of devaluing their own lives, as Lebow appeared to argue.

The Athenians at Melos, on the other hand, argue that there is no shame in taking precisely the opposite course of action as previous generations of Athenians had, "for this is not for you a contest between equals about manly goodness, to avoid incurring shame; but instead the deliberation is about survival, about how to avoid having to stand against those who are by far stronger." The Athenians, here, deny that there is honor in the course of action that they propose to the Melians (that is, surrender) precisely because to resist would be foolish and therefore not honorable. Strauss appears to concur with the Athenians here, (189) but there is a similarity between the decision of the Melians to resist the Athenians and the decision of the Athenians to resist the Persians generations earlier. The difference is not essential to the motivation for the decision but to the inventiveness or effectiveness with which they pursued their ends.

A second important aspect of the difference between the Athenians at Melos and Pericles is that Pericles, at least in the Funeral Oration, viewed the empire as begun of their own volition, while to the envoys at Melos, it is a necessity taken on out of fear. Of course, this is closely related to the other difference between Pericles and the Athenians at Melos that I have identified, but it makes even clearer what some scholars (see Orwin 1994, 28, although he does not agree with this view uncritically) have seen as the decline of Athens from its Periclean peak. Just as the individual Athenian is lowered from near-apotheosis in Pericles' speech to simply a tool of the state as implied by the envoys to Melos, the Athenian project is lowered. From its heights in the Funeral Oration, in which it is a freely chosen leadership, and one earned through virtue, it is lowered to being a merely necessary condition for security, which is in turn often cited as a

necessary condition for human flourishing (as in Hobbes' view). The Athenian empire becomes a means to security, rather than a means to glory.

To some scholars, (Lebow and Kelly 2001) this shift in the goals of the empire is reflected in a shift from *hegemonia* (leadership) to *arkhe* (rule). This shift suggests that there is also a change in Athenian conduct to other states. There is less evidence for this in the text, despite Pericles' assertions in the Funeral Oration that Athens acquired the empire (the friends of which he speaks in 2.40) through liberality rather than power. I view this assertion as at least partly disingenuous and a necessity of his rhetorical setting,[19] although by 416 the Athenians have abandoned even euphemizing their empire.

The shift from Athenian conduct internationally at the beginning of the war to the time of the Melian Dialogue, if such a shift exists, appears to be a shift from a policy of moderation to a policy of unlimited aims. To some extent, this shift is caused, or at least accompanied, by a change in leadership from Pericles to the demagogue Cleon and then Alcibiades. The moderation espoused by Pericles is most apparent in 2.40, and although the entire chapter can be viewed as a tribute to the moderation of Athens and the Athenians, the city's moderation in foreign policy is clear from his statement, "for in this also we excel others, daring to undertake as much as any and yet examining what we undertake; whereas other men ignorance makes them dare, and consideration dastards." The Athenians, then, are not driven by an unmoderated desire for gain but by a calmly calculated expectation that daring is the best course of action. They neither avoid daring nor rush headlong into ill-conceived ventures. The Athenian expedition to Melos may not

[19] My view is strengthened by his less laudatory statements about the empire in his later speech, alongside his apparent admission near the end of 2.41 that Athens has done ill as well as good (a statement which Hobbes translated with an exceptional lack of fidelity to the text in comparison with his translation elsewhere).

be as risky as the later expedition to Sicily, but that does not mean that it is well-conceived. Indeed, as I have endeavored to show, the siege of Melos is decidedly immoderate and could not but have led to war against the rest of the world and overreach (indeed, the Athenian ambassadors argue that such a war had already partly begun).

This aspect of Periclean Athens, however, presents a contrast to the Melians. The Melian decision to resist is decidedly immoderate and based on a mistaken estimate of what the probable outcome would be. To understand this, it is necessary to understand that Athens' character, and the moderation which Pericles praises, were inextricably linked to Athens' domestic politics and democratic system. Pericles points to deliberation as the cause of Athens' moderation, and deliberation was the central feature of the Athenian political system. In the case of Athens and its moderation, the picture is more complicated. Pericles' praise of Athenian moderation may have been disingenuous or mistaken: the Corinthians, in their speech to the congress of the Peloponnesians at Sparta, portray the Athenians as decidedly immoderate, and as I have noted, there was little moderation to be seen in the conduct of Athens after the death of Pericles. Overall, Athens' moderation or immoderation is a potential area for future research, but all the same there was certainly a reversal both of fortune and of conduct from the Athens of Pericles and the Athens represented at Melos.

I have so far presented Pericles' account of Athenian imperialism uncritically, or at least much less critically that I have the version of Athenian imperialism seen at Melos. Pericles raises an interesting set of questions, many of which have been addressed by other scholars in the vast literature on Athenian imperialism which I have mentioned above. Perhaps the most important question is also the simplest: should we believe Pericles' praises of Athenian imperialism? While

it enriched Athens, it ultimately led the city to ruin. Perhaps more pressingly, can anything be praiseworthy that subjugates and enslaves so many? This is perhaps the key to understanding the realism of Pericles. Pericles does not (as Orwin notes, 18) tie the empire to any cause higher than the glory and wealth of Athens, although he argues that these are themselves lofty aims. This stands in contrast to Spartan claims (repeated most notably by Brasidas) to fight for the freedom of the Greeks.[20]

So while Pericles's realism is expounded more subtly than that of the ambassadors to Melos, it is apparent that is still very much a realist, and in this I differ with others who have questioned the received knowledge of the realism in Thucydides' text (Lebow 2001). Yet, as I have endeavored to show, there are different versions of this realism expounded by different speakers in the text. Although Pericles appears to concur with the Athenians at Melos in the relative absence of morality in his view of international relations, his aims are loftier than theirs and the individual (and individual honor) play a greater role. To put this another way, and at the risk of introducing an anachronism, Periclean realism is in line with Machiavelli's while the realism seen at Melos is closer to that of modern structural realist scholars (such as Mearsheimer).

Diodotus, the Mytilenian Debate, and the Power of Justice

Another key passage in the text is the Mytilenian Debate, in which Diodotus argues (3.42-48) against the course of action proposed by the demagogue Cleon. The Mytilenian Debate follows the revolt of Mytilene, one of the two most powerful Athenian subjects states and one of the few

[20] These claims must not be accepted uncritically. The Athenian envoys to Melos have a point when they say that the Spartans are as self-interested as anyone else. This point is strengthened by the Spartan's own domestic politics and their conduct towards others, such as at Plataea.

which retained an independent military rather than paying tribute to the Athenian alliance. Not long after Athenians laid siege to Mytilene, the city began to run low on resources and also accepted that assistance which was promised by the Spartans was not forthcoming. In this perplexity, the Mytilenian commoners revolted and the Mytilenian leaders were forced to surrender to the Athenians (3.27-28). The Athenian assembly, as punishment for the rebellion, vote to put all the adult men of Mytilene to death. On the next day, the Athenian assembly put the issue to another vote because many Athenians viewed the sentence as unnecessarily cruel to the Mytilenians who did not actively participate in the rebellion. Cleon argues in support of the previous day's decree, while Diodotus argues that only the leaders of the rebellion should be executed.

Diodotus argues for his policy solely from the grounds of interest rather than morality. I will return to this later, but for now, it is important to note this because it makes Diodotus' argument a clearly realist one. He argues not from the point of view that it is wrong to kill those who may have done little wrong, but that such a policy is harmful to the interests of Athens. A powerful part of Diodotus' argument, as I will show, is that it combines realism with justice, even though his speech conspicuously ignores justice.

Diodotus starts (3.42) with what is effectively a defense of free speech, is response to Cleon's accusation (3.38) that other speakers hope to deceive the assembly for personal gain. Diodotus refutes Cleon's arguments against democracy and, more importantly, deliberation. There is a parallel here between Diodotus' defense of deliberation and Pericles' arguments that deliberation is the root of Athens' greatness. This in turn contrasts with the opening lines of the Athenians at Melos, who suggest that deliberation before the people can allow the people to be

deceived and led to act foolishly.[21] There is much more to say about the relation of domestic politics to foreign policy, especially in Thucydides' text, and it is perhaps no accident that the oligarchs of Melos (as opposed to the people) misestimated their chances of victory so terribly.

Diodotus proceeds from his arguments about domestic politics to laying out his account of realism and the Athenian Thesis. He makes his claim to ignore justice in 3.44: "I would never advise to have them put to death unless it be for our profit, [nor yet would I pardon them,] though they were pardonable, unless it be good for the commonwealth." In a text with as much death and atrocity as Thucydides', it is easy to lose sight of how shocking a statement this is. Diodotus expresses a complete disregard for acting according to justice, and says that he will advocate in accordance with Athens' interest either for or against a killing that amounts to genocide. While it is heartening that he argues that the Mytilenian should be spared, it is chilling that he disavow any concern as to whether their killing is unjust.

Yet alongside the fact that Diodotus makes an amoral argument, I argue that his disavowal of concerns of justice is an elaborate apophasis[22] designed to counter Cleon's claim (3.38) that whoever argues for sparing the Mytilenians will do so from a position of justice. By employing this apophasis, Diodotus sidesteps Cleon's attempt to build a straw man, bypassing Cleon's arguments about justice in favor of an argument about interest. Even more importantly, Diodotus takes advantage of the justice of sparing the Mytilenians, which is so apparent that he need not discuss it at length. He highlights (3.47) that relatively few Mytilenians actively took part in the rebellion, and as soon as they were able, the people (as opposed to the elite) rebelled against the rebellion, handing over the city to Athens. The injustice of killing someone who has

[21] I have discussed these comments at greater length above.
[22] Apophasis is a rhetorical device which Merriam-Webster defines as "the raising of an issue by claiming not to mention it."

themselves done no wrong is self-evident, and by highlighting that relatively few Mytilenians were complicit in the rebellion, Diodotus highlights what an injustice it would be to kill them, even though he has claimed to ignore justice.

Justice, then, has a power despite the Athenian Thesis' conspicuous amorality. This is perhaps more clear (albeit paradoxically) from the Melian Dialogue than any other part of the text. The Athenian envoys take seriously Diodotus' disavowal of justice: at the beginning of the debate, directly following their criticism of democracy, the Athenians tell the Melians (5.87) they have come only to discuss what is in the best interest of the Melians themselves, and they refuse to discuss anything else at all. Unlike Diodotus and his apophasis, the Athenians here mean exactly what they say, and proceed in accordance with their stated agenda. As Strauss notes (186) the Melians accept this restriction, but do not follow it. No amount of amoral Athenian realism can convince the Melians to fully abandon their attachment to justice. Indeed, it is precisely because of their beliefs about justice that the Melians reject the Athenian ultimatum. The Melians' belief that the gods will save them proceeds directly from their belief that they are just and the Athenians are unjust. In this way, the Melians are reminiscent of Diodotus in their unification of justice and interest (albeit with different results). The arguments of the Athenians are ineffective because they neglect justice, just as Cleon's arguments failed in proving the justice or the interest of his course of action, instead attempting to incite the assembly with accusations against the Mytilenians.[23]

Strauss claims, (190) and it is easy to agree with him, that "there is no debate in Thucydides work in which the Spartan or Melian view defeats the Athenian view." By the

[23] Although his ability to persuade many Athenians suggests the power of these emotional appeals and of Cleon's demagoguery.

Spartan and Athenian view, he means justice and interest respectively, and it is notable that the Spartans often adopt the "Athenian view" and some Athenians (like Cleon) adopt the "Spartan view." But this view is too simple to be entirely accurate. The Melians themselves may not win the debate, but they do not lose it either, even if they lose the battle which follows it. The most powerful arguments in the text are neither arguments from justice nor arguments from interest: the most effective arguments in the text are those which unify justice and interest, whether this union is real (as it is in the Mytilenian Debate) or imagined (as it is by the Melians).

Yet all the same, interest wins out over justice when the two do come into conflict, as becomes clear from the last section of Diodotus' speech (starting in 3.46). It is notable that Diodotus speaks primarily of individuals as a way of speaking about the behavior of states. In doing so, he makes an assumption which has been repeated by many political theorists and scholars, that states are unitary actors with behavior which is largely comparable to that of states. This view is held by modern realists (Mearsheimer, for example, largely appears to view states as "black boxes") and by their predecessors (such as Hobbes). Although I have questioned this assumption above, I do not think that doing so here would add much useful insight, and it would be a digression from the topic at hand. Diodotus says (3.45) that individuals and, by extension, states transgress in large part because to do so is natural to them. As he notes, individuals continue to break laws even though the punishment for doing so is death. He suggests that progressively harsher penalties were instituted in attempts to deter individuals from doing wrong, but that each progressively harsher penalty, up to and including death, has still been ignored by some criminals. His account of humans as risk-seeking is reminiscent of at least one aspect of prospect theory, although Ober and Perry do not mention Diodotus' speech. Yet while prospect

theory suggests that people will run undue risks only in some situations, Diodotus describes those in all situations as willing to take disproportionate risks for their own gain: “poverty will always add boldness to necessity; and wealth, covetousness to pride and contempt. And the other [middle] fortunes, they also through human passion, according as they are severally subject to some insuperable one or another, impel men to danger.” For all who Diodotus mentions here, the crimes are self-serving, and the crimes are committed because of risk-seeking behavior that results from numerous sources.

This transfers fairly closely to the Melian Dialogue. The Melians boldly resist the Athenians, and do so in the expectation that they may protect their own interest. Yet Ober and Perry argue that the Melians’ expectation of protecting their interests through going to war is not so much an expectation as it is a hope, and Diodotus’ speech has significant applications here. Diodotus portrays individuals and states as fundamentally risk-acceptant in large part due to hope. He says, “encouraged by hope, men hazard themselves” (3.45) and goes on to argue that a combination of hope and desire are the root cause of most risky endeavors, with crimes being an especially important example of such endeavors. In Diodotus’ account, the hope of a favorable outcome is treated as an expectation. This has important parallels in some parts of prospect theory, with individuals making risky decisions due to the hope of a favorable outcome rather than the expectation of such an outcome. Even when the expected costs of some action outweigh the potential benefits, or an action carries a likelihood of serious punishments, Diodotus argues that individuals will still take risks in the hope that these risks will bring benefits. Hope is central to Lebows conclusion that deterrence and compellence are ineffective: states have hopes for favorable outcomes, and they can make estimates of expected outcomes in accordance with these

hopes rather than facts. This leads to risk-acceptance due to a discounting of negative outcomes and an overweighting of hoped-for outcomes. The Melians and their hope of defeating the Athenians are well-described by Diodotus' account of hope. Their hope of defeating the Athenians influenced their expectations of the probability of such an outcome in war. Despite knowing that rejecting the ultimatum was risky, took this course of action and attribute it to their hopes as well as their beliefs about the divine and fortune.

This account of hope has important parallels to the Athenians' statement in 5.103, where they say to the Melians: "nor should you wish to become like the many, who, when it is possible to be saved by human means, react by abandoning hopes in what is evident and turn to the unevident, ruined by divination and oracles and all such things accompanied by hopes." Here, the Athenians highlight the same aspect of hope that is identified by Diodotus, that hopes can lead actors to make risky decisions that are not in their best interest, because hope can sometimes distort perceptions of fact.

On the other hand, Diodotus' characterization of a wealthy criminal fairly accurately describes Athens: covetousness added to pride and contempt. We have seen Athenian pride and contempt in the speech of Pericles, and we see covetousness added to this in the Melian Dialogue. The crime of Athens, which leads to its downfall, is as I have argued above: imperialism to the extent of overreaching, although this is a result of fear perhaps as much as covetousness. The Melian decision-making process is aptly described by Diodotus' statements later in 3.45, in which he argues that trust in fortune can lead to undue risks-taking. Diodotus argues that no possible punishment is possible to compel humans to act according to laws, as even the harshest of all punishments has still failed. The roots of this are in the Athenian Thesis:

humans (and, by extension, states) seek to maximize their gains of honor and interest, and seek to minimize the things that they fear. Diodotus suggests the connection between this aspect of the Athenian Thesis and the natural law of the Athenians at Melos, that the strong rule where they can. Yet while the Athenians present this law uncritically, Diodotus presents it in the context of a discourse about crime and criminals. This is less notable as a statement about justice (given Diodotus' realism) than it is as a statement that the law stated by the Athenians at Melos leads to folly (of which crime is a type).

Diodotus concludes his speech by arguing that the best way to make Mytilene useful to Athens is to spare the Mytilenians. As I have shown above, this takes advantage of the human self-interestedness which Diodotus had just pointed out, but not without the help of justice, which makes the argument particularly forceful in a way that the Athenian arguments to the Melians -- in their language of power politics which is even more ignorant of justice than Diodotus claims to be -- cannot hope to be. So while the Athenian Thesis of fear, honor, and interest as the concerns which drive humanity is certainly helpful, its extension at Melos into the natural law cited by the envoys is on shakier ground, and justice still has a certain importance.

As I have shown, there are numerous perspectives within Thucydides' text as to how to properly understand realism. The text does not speak with one voice. Yet the realism of Pericles and of Diodotus is not only higher for the individual but allows for a much greater place to be given to justice than the realism of the ambassadors to Melos. Each of the three also appears to view a different one of the three drives as paramount. Pericles stresses the honor of Athens, as derived from its empire, Diodotus traces the cause of crime to be immoderate devotion to

self-interest, and the Athenians at Melos point to fear as the motivation for their actions. I do not attempt to rank these motivations, nor do I think such an effort would be faithful to the text, but I suggest that the actions of the Melians were closer to those described by Diodotus than to the natural law described by the Athenian envoys.

Chapter Eight: Significance for International Relations

The Melians and Athenians had different estimated probabilities of the outcome of war, which led to their inability to make an agreement (or bargain) over Melos' independence to avert war. Such interactions are described by the bargaining model of war, most notably laid out by Fearon (1995). Using the bargaining model's framework, the interaction between the Melians and Athenians occurs under incomplete information and this lack of information is the cause for divergent estimations and therefore war.

Fearon, summarizing previous research, suggests three possible ways in which conflicting expectations of the outcome of war can be explained. First, "emotional commitments could irrationally bias leaders' military estimates." The Melian Dialogue provides some evidence that this was the case, as the Melians held to a belief that the justice of their cause would lead to fortune or the gods favoring their side. Given that there is little evidence for this proposition, their belief had to be this sort of emotional commitment. Second, Fearon argues that the sheer complexity and unpredictability of battle can lead to different estimated probabilities of outcomes. This explanation appears less applicable to the Melian case. Athens clearly outmatched Melos in military power, as it had shown not long before by fighting Sparta, previously the most powerful state in Greece, to a standstill and then winning a decisive victory over the Spartans at Pylos, forcing the Spartans to make peace. Third, states may have private information that they have an incentive to hide or misrepresent. Fearon sums up the rationalist consensus when he says that "only the third explanation qualifies as an account of how rationally led states could have conflicting estimates of the probability of winning a war."

As the title of Fearon's paper ("Rationalist Explanations for War") would suggest, the bargaining model of war primarily examines international relations from a rationalist perspective, although Fearon points out that different perspectives exist. The central tenet of rationalism in international relations is that states make decisions based on calculations of whether a given outcome is in their material self-interest, and most importantly, that they choose whichever course of action has the highest expected payoff. Realism is closely related to rationalism, and there are different perspectives within the realist theoretical tradition. At its most basic, realism claims that states are driven by material interest and a desire for power rather than considerations of justice, especially in the absence of any external actor or institution which can reliably provide protection or redress for grievances. Furthermore, Thucydides is highly influential to the realist theoretical tradition (Kagan 1969, Waltz 1979) and is often considered the founder of realism. More recent realists, called neorealists or structural realists, focus on the international system and its anarchic nature as the source of state's power-seeking behavior. I have already briefly discussed this in the context of the security dilemma, but in short, neorealists argue that the international system is one of self-help, so states maximize their power in hopes of also maximizing their security. Earlier realists focused more on human nature as the root of states' power-seeking behavior. Bounded rationality claims that states act rationally, as defined by rationalism, but only to an extent, that there are important distortions to the decision-making process which can produce outcomes that cannot be called rational. Prospect theory is an example of this, although there are other theoretical approaches to bounded rationality.

Before analyzing whether the Melians acted rationally or not, it is necessary to explore the relationship between realism and rationalism in greater depth. Rationalism is an important part of realist international relations theory, especially for more recent theorists who accept the structural variety of realism, attributing wars to the security dilemma. Mearsheimer (2014) is an example of this sort of realist, and explicitly assumes that states are rational (31). Even before contemporary structural realists, rationalism and realism have had a close relationship. Waltz, ([1954] 2001) is one example (especially chapter seven) while Schelling ([1966] 2008) is one example of the numerous scholars whose work is both realist and rationalist, although some of his more recent work diverged from these theoretical frameworks. To refine realism so that it more effectively describes and predicts the behavior of states, I question whether states are indeed rational. In this case, such questioning takes the form of determining whether emotional commitments or rational incentives to maintain incomplete information are to blame for the Melian decision to go to war.

In the Melian Dialogue, the Athenians can be seen trying to "show their hand" to the Melians, letting the weaker state in on their private information that fortune does not favor the just over the unjust (and in fact, that the gods themselves rule as they are able to). Although the outcome of the siege of Melos would suggest that this view is correct, it is not realistically Fearon, summarizing Harsanyi, repeats the claim that "given identical information, truly rational agents should reason to the same conclusions about the probability of one uncertain outcome or another." The Melians and Athenians have roughly identical information, yet reach widely divergent conclusions about the probabilities of outcomes. This claim then, fails to explain the

causes of war between the Athenians and Melians, and suggests that either the Athenians or Melians were not perfectly rational.

An explanation that does not rely on assumptions of rationality must then be made to understand the causes of war between the Athenians and Melians. I argue that the first explanation for incomplete information (emotional commitments) is the one that best fits the Melian Dialogue. There has been significant research within international relations on emotional commitments or beliefs. Mercer (2010) defines emotional beliefs as "one where emotion constitutes and strengthens a belief and which makes possible a generalization about an actor that involves certainty beyond evidence."[24] At least one side in the Melian Dialogue must have had such a belief about fortune (either it does or does not favor those who act according to justice). Although both may have had emotional beliefs which led to different estimates of the probabilities of outcomes, I only examine the possibility that the Melians had, and held to, an emotionally committed belief because I have examined their decision-making in greater depth. The Melians quite clearly have an emotional belief about the nature of fortune and the divine. This is most apparent in 5.104, when the Melians say "nevertheless we have faith that we will not be inferior in that fortune that is from the gods, because we are making our stand as pious men against unjust men," with the Melians' reliance on faith being the strongest evidence that their belief is indeed emotional, as it is held with a fidelity that defies the evidence that perfect rationality would require. This line concludes with "so our boldness is not in every way irrational." But it is far from rational; at best, this belief is boundedly rational.

[24] There is some similarity between this definition and that of heuristics, examined in the context of prospect theory by Kahneman and Tversky. Prospect theoretic heuristics could be part of a revised account of how prospect theory explains international conflict, but it is beyond the scope of this project, in part because Ober and Perry did not discuss it at length in their application of prospect theory to the Melian dialogue.

Perhaps the most concerning problems of realism for modern international relations scholars are practical rather than theoretical. First is the tendency that realism can lead to a policy like that of the Athenians at Melos, which can lead to potential overreach and collapse, and the problem that realism can often lead to unconvincing rhetoric, a particularly salient issue in a democracy (like ours and like Athens') in which foreign policy decisions are made by elected representatives and require the direct or indirect consent of voters.

The first issue is seen in the regular and uncritical realist repetitions of the Athenian mantra that the strong rule as they are able to and the weak give way. This is seen perhaps most importantly in the work of Kagan (1995) and also (but less centrally) Mearsheimer.

The second issue is noted by Mearsheimer, although he apparently does not consider it to be a serious problem, given that realism has been the prevailing international relations theory among foreign policy elites since the beginning of the Cold War. But it is a problem all the same, and one which realists must come to grips with. A theory need not be received wisdom to provide an accurate and useful description of the international system, but it must be at least somewhat acceptable to the public if elites hope to make the case for policies based on it. As Mearsheimer says, "realism is a hard sell" (23). But the foreign policies of classical Athens and the modern United States suggest that such a sell is not entirely impossible. I argue that realism, despite specifically not supporting justice as a foreign policy goal, can sometimes support ends which are just. Yet the ends of foreign policy and their justice are important to voters and this justice must be a part of the case that realists make. Diodotus, and the importance of justice to his rhetoric, suggest that justice can indeed support realist policies and that justice is not altogether foreign from realism. Such rhetoric suggests that while interest, in addition to fear and honor, is

indeed important, many people value justice and that while justice may not be easy to explain in terms of perfectly rational utility-maximization, it is still important.[25]

There is extensive literature in international relations on bounded rationality and emotional beliefs such as these, and while that literature is helpful, reviewing and analyzing it at length would not greatly strengthen the evidence that I have already provided to suggest that Melian expectations relied on emotional beliefs and were boundedly, rather than perfectly, rational. For realism and rationalism to explain and predict the behavior of states, rationalism must either revise its assumptions to better reflect cases such as this, or realism must revise its assumptions to be more in line with the actual character of states. The evidence in Thucydides' text provides evidence that such a reworking of realism could have great analytical and explanatory power as it supports the realist claim that states care about their own interests above all else. This is seen in the Melians' belief that their decision to reject the ultimatum was made in accordance with their interests, rather than simply the belief that they must always act according to their view of justice. Yet the form of realism which assumes rationality is incomplete, and I hope to outline a research agenda and review literature which holds potential for such a reworking of realism that is less vulnerable to critiques on the ground that its assumption of rationality is inaccurate.

[25] One argument for the importance of justice is that it is a valuable good which individuals want to secure as if it were in their interest. This is certainly a possibility, but it still conflicts with realist ideas about the relative unimportance of justice and is not uncontroversial, as evidenced by actions which are viewed as just being interpreted as conflicting with some of the tenets of utility maximization (Guth and Kocher 2013)

Conclusion: Toward a New Classical Realism

The universality of realism is confirmed by the Melians, whose actions, as I have shown, were in line with their interests, and that their expectations may have been incorrect but that they chose their policy rationally, given their expectations. It is clear then, that even if the law of the Athenians at Melos is incorrect, the Athenian Thesis -- and realism -- are not simply Athenian. But as I have shown from the examples of Pericles and Diodotus, there is more than one way to understand realism. The question then, is how realism should be understood and acted upon.

Luckily for realism, there are numerous different interpretations of this theory both within Thucydides' text and in international relations more generally which could lead to better descriptions of the international system as well as prescriptions for policy. Early realists, who focused on human nature, are less vulnerable to the argument that states and individuals can act irrationally (or, at best, boundedly rationally). As noted by Kahler, (1998, 924) early realists were less attached to rationality than their more recent colleagues. Even Schelling, in a book which otherwises appears to assume perfectly rational actors, suggests that states do not conduct their business according to strict rationality. Speaking of a nuclear deterrence between NATO and the Soviet Union, he says, "true, there is a sense in which anything done coolly, deliberately, on schedule, by plan, upon reflection, in accordance with rules and formulae, and pursuant to a calculus is rational but it is in a very limited sense." (Schelling [1966] 2008, 183) To early realists and those who influenced them, reason was much less than perfect. Waltz (although not himself one of these human nature realists) sums up their beliefs about the causes of war: "wars result from selfishness, from misdirected aggressive impulses, from stupidity." Conflict, in this

view, is a result of a flawed human nature rather than conflicts between rational actors. The last of the attributes listed by Waltz appears to be Strauss' explanation for the war between the Athenians and Melians.

Within Thucydides' text, Pericles and Diodotus present perspectives on realism which, although they are distinct from each other in important ways, pay attention to human nature and the individual, including occasional irrationalities, in a way that the ambassadors at Melos and modern neorealists do not. The realism presented by Pericles and Diodotus is more limited than that of the ambassadors at Melos. They hold to the Athenian Thesis that fear, honor, and interest are paramount, but they do not take this thesis to the conclusion that the ambassadors at Melos reach: that all states, acting rationally, maximize their power so that they may preserve their security. On the other hand, this sort of realism can be more complex and lead to less reliable predictions of real-world events. This stems from its reliance on human nature to explain the behavior of states, and human nature is complex and hard to determine, as evidenced by numerous and sometimes deeply contradictory accounts of it from different philosophers and affscholars. Importantly, Diodotus' argument is not wholly ignorant to concerns of justice. It is easy to portray realism as ignorant, or at least agnostic, about justice, but interest, fear and honor being the paramount concerns of foreign policy do not necessarily mean that justice is unimportant. Indeed, security is necessary for a state to structure its internal politics in accordance with its wishes, or more importantly, in accordance with justice. Excluding justice from policy and focusing only on maximizing power can lead states to overreach as Athens did and eventually collapse.

To avoid this collapse, states must understand the international system and how to navigate it. I have shown that the Melian Dialogue presents an interaction between states that violates a major assumption of neorealism. I do not mean to argue that states are always irrational, but that departures from rationality exist and must be accounted for. As such, states that order their international affairs in accordance with neorealism will sometimes make decisions that turn out in ways that they did not expect, and can harm their own interests with such miscalculations, just as Athens did. Future research can build on this case study and refine realism so that it more effectively describes international relations and produces policy prescriptions which prove more beneficial for states. A starting place for this research, as I have shown, can be found by returning to earlier realist work which relies less on the unrealistic assumptions of rationality that neorealists hold closely.

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