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**CVSP 201-2**

**Professor Merrifield**

**THUCYDIDES – HISTORY OF THE PELOPONNESIAN WAR**

***Melian Dialogue Assignment –* March 11th, 2014**

**Pre-reading Question 1: Freedom vs. Survival**

Freedom and survival are two instinctive notions that our humanity is in constant battle with. When we struggle for survival, we are forcibly accepting its consequences such as threat; therefore, *survivals give us insight to be more cautious and aware than ever*, in order to *keep* *on surviving if we were ever to fall again*. On the other hand, I personally believe that freedom is relative and isn’t as urgent as survival is. For instance, when some person is imprisoned in a jail or stuck in a junkyard, the first goal that strikes his mind is to flee out of the place and live freely thereafter, overlooking the strong probability that his life might be at stake, due to the ramifications that his escape might entail, such as threat imposed by the criminal. Hence, the prisoner must prioritize his survival over his relative freedom by scheming a way out that guarantees his living. Assuming that the person has escaped, then his life would be always chained to that threat and thus his freedom would be compelled under its effect. Accordingly, freedom is not always materialistic (as in “behind bars”); however, it is psychological in many cases, as in the example illustrated above (“threat”). That is why I believe that survival, *in safe* *and dangerous situations*, is much more important than freedom itself, and freedom can never be attained and can never last if one didn’t ensure his survival.

**Comprehension Questions**

1. According to the Athenian envoys, questions of justice arise when the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept. In addition, they believe that justice arises when one is exposed to danger.
2. The Athenians rejected the Melians’ request to remain neutral not because of their hostility, but because their intimacy might reflect the formers’ weakness in them, while the Melians’ hatred might add to the formers’ powers.
3. The Athenians provided essentially two core arguments to convince the Melians that their submission to them brings no harm. First, they guaranteed alliance on a tribute, assured payment basis for the Melians and liberty to enjoy their property. Second, the Athenians confirmed that by conquering the *weak* Melians, the security of their empire aggrandizes and that the Melians won’t escape out of defeat or cowardliness.
4. The Melians insisted on *not* yielding to the Athenians because their allies, the Spartans, would back them up. Further, they re-suggested that being neutral friends and setting treaties together shall satisfy both parties.
5. The Athenians maintained, through their response to the Melians’ trust that the gods will protect them, a satirical attitude as they tended to undermine the role of the gods by stating that beliefs in oracles leads men astray (and to ruin). Additionally, they derived from their opinion about gods, a general law that they can rule whatever they can rule.
6. After the Athenians knew about the Melians’ refusal to yield, they commenced hostilities and underwent vigorous siege operations round the city of Melos. Then, they left a garrison behind and dropped allied troops to block the land and sea. After they took over Melos, the Athenians sentenced all men of military age they took to death and sold the women and children as slaves.

**Critical Reading Questions**

1. Athenians have based their perception of natural law on ruling whatever they can rule with force and power, so that the whole citizens of Athens abide by that natural law. Comparing this viewpoint to the human nature, this isn’t precise. If power was in everyone’s hands, then the whole world would fall apart. The real down-to-earth “law” requires that one shouldn’t *abuse* power using force, but to *use* it with fairness and intelligence to contribute to a civilized world. In addition, a just law is the law that deems all citizens *equally powerful* with *reasonable* portions of power, where power is, in this context and in the context of the human nature, *rationality* and *justice* rather than *physicality* and *injustice*.
2. Pericles describes justice according to two levels: the private and the public level. When people are in their own private time, they are all equal before the law; however, the general public assesses responsibility as a matter of ability and not membership. On the contrary, the Athenian envoys view justice as a discrepancy between the strong and the weak, and that it is by nature that one can rule whatever he *can* rule. Moreover, the envoys described the path of “justice” as one is being involved with danger and that they will become allies as soon as Athens conquers Melos. This contradicts Pericles’ view of friendship that it originates when one does good to others because the act of conquering is at all costs a harmful act to do. Thus, his funeral oration was eclipsed by the realities of human nature.
3. According to my personal perspective, the Melians should have surrendered to the Athenians, taking into consideration the convincing arguments that they provided. What adds to the necessity of surrendering is the obvious consequence of the coming war even before it was triggered by the Melians. Therefore, in such urgent circumstances, idealism won’t save the Melians. Rather, they should be more realistic and pragmatic to cope with the fact that the Athenians outpower the Melians, for Athenians rule the whole empire while the Melians are just weak islanders.