

**CLASSICAL POLITICAL THOUGHT
DEMOCRACY IN ATHENS AND AMERICA
POLITICAL SCIENCE 315
MICRO-ESSAY #3**

Write a 750-900 word essay on the following question. Your essay is due in the Google doc by 4 PM on MONDAY March 4.

Be sure to include your name and a title (not on a separate page). Please single space, print your essay on both sides of a single sheet of paper, and include at least one claim-objection-rejoinder sequence.

When the Corinthians visited Sparta in July 432 BCE, the Potedeans (a Corinthian colony) were being sieged by Athens and Megara (a Spartan ally) was being subject to an Athenian economic boycott (the Megarian Decree). Sparta invited her allies to discuss a potential war with Athens, and Thucydides makes clear that the Spartans feared the growing power of Athens. When some visiting Athenians spoke at the meeting, they defended Athenian actions by noting that their state was motivated by the “three of the strongest motives” which drive all nations to go to war: “fear, honor, and interest” (1.76).

Ever since, realist scholars have produced powerful analyses of war by viewing it through the prism of these three motives. At the same time, constructivist scholars have emphasized that Thucydides sets the discussion of the three motives in the dynamic context of the changing identity of Athens. Pericles in his Funeral Oration describes an Athens whose honor lies in both “merit” (2.37; 2.41) and “vengeance” (2.42). The true meaning of honor soon becomes a matter of debate at Athens.

Within the year, the plague hits Athens and, Thucydides tells us, “perseverance in what men called honor was popular with none” (2.53). Pericles, who soon dies of the plague himself, makes one last speech in defense of Athenian greatness and its honor. He urges the Athenians to keep fighting for “you cannot decline the burdens of empire and still expect to share its honors” (2.62). This, however, begs the question, what precisely is its honor?

Two years later, in the debate between Cleon and Diodotus, both men speak of Athenian honor and both think it is vitally at stake in the decision over Mytilene. In their speeches, the proximate audience is the Athenian assembly (ecclesia). It will decide, either “to put to death ... only the prisoners at Athens” or “the whole adult population of Mytilene, and to make slaves of the women and children” (3.26). The larger audience for these speeches is all of Hellas; it is, indeed, all of us readers in posterity who Thucydides is writing for; we must decide whether Athenian honor—its claims to power and glory—is justified.

Given all this, write an essay addressing this question: **Which view of honor, Cleon’s vengeance or Diodotus’s merit, is more in line with the overall ideal of Athens praised by Pericles?** You can provisionally define honor as a claim to be acting justly.