

**CLASSICAL POLITICAL THOUGHT
DEMOCRACY IN ATHENS AND AMERICA
POLITICAL SCIENCE 315
MICRO-ESSAY #4**

Write a 750-900 word essay on the following question. Your essay is due in the Google folder by 4pm on MONDAY April 1. Be sure to include a title, single space, and include at least one claim-objection-rejoinder sequence. Also, be sure to define your terms carefully (e.g., realist and constructivist), and use evidence from our texts to support any and all points.

Write an essay analyzing whether Thucydides presents the Peloponnesian War mainly as a realist who views the war—and power struggles among competing nations more generally—as inevitable or mainly as a constructivist who presents a tragedy with lessons that, if learned, could prevent what is avoidable?

Lebow argues that the realist view of Thucydides—in which he presents the Peloponnesian War as an inevitable consequence of the growth in Athenian power (1.23-- is a serious misreading. He claims that Thucydides sees all the justifications for going to war offered by Athens and Sparta as “prophasis” or mere rationales. Looking more carefully, and using Sophistic dialectic, Thucydides wants the reader to uncover “a deeper truth” (APSR 549).

Lebow argues that Thucydides “is undeniably a constructivist” (APSR 558), but also that “Thucydides is both a realist and a constructivist” (559). He concedes that Thucydides’ emphasis on human nature (“phusis”) could be read as driving self-defeating, anarchic, and war-inviting behavior.

But Lebow is more persuaded that Thucydides wants the reader to see the unstable environment of plague and stasis as the ultimate and “fundamental cause” of the War (558). Lebow highlights, for example, Thucydides’ repetition of the *ate*, *harmartia*, *nemesis* pattern under which it is the missteps of leaders that leads to war. Seen in its broadest terms, Lebow argues, the Peloponnesian War is explained primarily by the rapid modernization and “breakdown of conventions” in the Greek world (558).