

# Greece in the Fifth Century B.C.



# Thucydides' Melian Dialogue

***Athenians.*** For ourselves, we shall not trouble you with specious pretenses—either of how we have the right to our empire because we overthrew the Mede, or how we are now attacking you because of wrong you have done us—and make a long speech, which would not be believed; and in return we hope that you, instead of thinking to influence us by saying that you did not join Sparta, although their colonists, or that you have done us no wrong, will aim at what is feasible, holding in view the real sentiments of us both; for you know as well as we do that **right**, as the world goes, **is in question only between equals in power**, while the **strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must**.

***Melians.*** Since you enjoin us to **let right alone and talk only of interest**, we think it is expedient that you should not destroy what is our common protection, the privilege of being allowed in danger to invoke what is fair and right.... And **you are as much interested in this as any**, as your fall would be a signal for the heaviest vengeance and an example for the world to mediate upon.

***Melians.*** Well then, if you risk so much to retain your empire, and your subjects to get rid of it, it is surely **great baseness and cowardice** in us who are still free not to try everything that can be tried before submitting to you.

***Athenians.*** Not if you are well advised, the **contest not being an equal one**, with honor as the prize and shame as the penalty, but **a question of self-preservation** and of not resisting those who are stronger than you....

**Melians.** You may be sure that we are as well aware as you of the difficulty of contending against your power and fortune, unless the terms be equal. But we trust that the gods may grant us fortune as good as yours, since we are just men fighting against unjust, and that what we want in power will be made up by the alliance with the Spartans, who are bound, if only for very shame, to come to the aid of their kindred. Our confidence, therefore is not so utterly irrational.

**Athenians.** When you speak of the favor if the gods, we may fairly hope for that as yourselves, neither our pretensions nor our conduct being in any way contrary to what men believe of the gods, or practice among themselves. Of the gods we believe, and of men we know, that by a necessary law of their nature they rule whenever they can. And it is not as if we were the first to make this law, or act upon it when made: we found it existing before us, and shall leave it to exist forever after us; all we do is make use of it, knowing that you and everybody else, having the same power as we have, would do the same as we do.... But when we come to your notion about Sparta, which leads you to believe that shame will make them help you, here we bless your simplicity but do not envy your folly.... Of all the men we know they are the most conspicuous in considering what is agreeable honorable, and what is expedient just. Such a way of thinking does not promise much for the safety which you now unreasonably count upon.

# Morgethau on International Morality

This fragmentation of a formerly cohesive international society into a multiplicity of morally self-sufficient national communities, which have ceased to operate within a common framework of moral precepts, is but the outward symptom of profound change that in recent times has **transformed the relations between universal moral precepts and the particular systems of national ethics**. ...

Nations no longer oppose each other... within a framework of shared beliefs and common values, which imposes effective limitations upon the ends and means of their struggle for power. They oppose each other now as the standard-bearers of ethical systems, each of them of national origin and **each of them claiming and aspiring to provide a supranational framework of moral standards which all other nations ought to accept** and within which their foreign policies ought to operate.

Thus the stage is set for a contest among nations whose stakes are no longer their relative positions within a political and moral system accepted by all, but the ability to **impose upon other contestants a new universal political and moral system recreated in the image of the victorious nation's political and moral convictions**.

# Pacifism

