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## **Thucydides and Rationalism: A Study Beyond Rational Choice Theory.**

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*'Exiles Thucydides knew/ All that a speech can say/  
About Democracy,/ and what dictators do./ The  
elderly rubbish they talk./ To an apathetic grave;/  
Analysed all in his book,/ the enlightenment driven  
away,/ The habit-forming pain,/*  
*Mismanagement and grief:/ We must suffer them all  
again '*

**W.H. Auden, 'September 1, 1939'.**

### • ***Introduction***

This article compares two different forms of political rationalism; The well-known Rational Choice Theory and the formula deriving from the Thucydidean analysis in the Peloponnesian War, the Thucydidean Rational Choice Theory. I argue that while Rational Choice Theory is designed to analyse domestic socio-political and economic event, the Thucydidean Rational Choice Theory is the procedure for presenting international analyses instead.

Since the end of the Cold War the theoretical analysis around International Relations introduced large proportions of speculative vagueness, opening the gates of the discipline to many theoreticians that they simply disregard the fundamental rule that international politics, unlike domestic politics, evolve in a non-hierarchical environment. Therefore, different rules apply to the external than those of the internal sphere of political evolution. The Thucydidian analysis, the main pillar of the traditional paradigm, is being regarded today as an approach that has little or nothing to contribute to the exegeses of the current complex international phenomena. However, as I argue in this article, Thucydides is not only relevant today but in many cases his analysis is more comprehensive than the contemporary theoretical trends.

- ***Rational Choice Theory and Theoretical Ineptitude***

Rational Choice theory, the assumption that humans calculate actions mathematically by primarily considering costs and benefits, was, for many decades, one of the most popular theoretical pattern in Economics, however today is well received in social sciences, including the discipline of International Relations (Becker 1976; Radnitzky and Bernholz 1987; Hogarth and Reder 1987; Levy 1997; Quackenbush 2004; Guilholt 2011). One of the main reasons for this can be found in the approach that through the application of the Rational Choice Theory it is possible to predict the outbreak and the evolution of international events. The power to predict human behavior and through this to establish a forecasting pattern on future clashes and wars is the holy grail of Social Sciences. In Elinor Ostrom's words (2000: 474):

‘One of the most powerful theories used in contemporary social sciences – rational choice theory - helps us understand humans as self-interested, short term maximizers. Models of complete rationality have been highly successful in predicting marginal behavior in competitive situations in which selective pressures screen out those who do not maximize external values, such as profits in a competitive market or the probability of electoral success in party competition.’

As a matter of fact, predicting states' or leaders' decisions making is understandably very popular, although utterly preposterous, in the discipline of International Relations. For example, Alexander Wendt (1987: 340) supports the view that the interpretive propensity of Rational Choice Theory generates a coherent explanation regarding the goals, the beliefs and the self-understanding process of all the involved agents. Bueno de Mesquita and David Lalman (1992), or Baranislav Slantchev (2003) argue that a war can be predicted without uncertainty when commitment problems occur between rival states, e.g lack of trust to the official statements of the opposite side. According to Stephen Benedict Dyson (2015: 39) incentives are enough to predict and explain human behavior, while Bradley Thayer (2014) argues that rational choice theory can predict the egoistic behavior of humans and therefore the international events that derive from it.

In the following paragraphs I argue that Rational Choice theory is not an appropriate method for International Relations analysis. First of all, it fails to produce a coherent framework of rational analysis regarding the fundamental origins of international phenomena. Human nature is not enough by itself to comprehend the perplexities of the war phenomenon. Thus, although Thucydides dedicated a large part of his analysis on human behavior he attributed the origins of war to fear [φοβος], interest [συμφέρον] and honor [τιμή] (Lebow 2006; Hanson 2010: 36; Spahn 216:74). In other words, Thucydides connects the origins of war with collective facts that derive from the organizational process of political entities, attributing to war a causal effect instead of a behavioral process. Second, it gives great emphasis on the development of post-hoc accounts of known fact which brings the analysis closer to the normative historic methodology than to dynamics of International Relations study of current event (Green and Shapiro 1996). In addition, since Rational Choice Theory is a micro-qualitative method of analysis, thus deeply influenced by the micro-economic theory (Boudon 1998), is giving more importance to the quantitative and not to the qualitative variables that may offer satisfying exegeses to war happening, as a general phenomenon or as a specific form of violent confrontation between two or more systemic elements. Throughout the related literature Rational Choice theory disregards the limitations on states' behavior in the international arena by the perpetual systemic volatility, approaching instead international politics as a normative game of a linear rise and demise. On top of that, as an economic formula of analysis Rational Choice theory fails to separate the pattern of an individual's behavior within the controlled and hierarchical domestic environment of an organized state from the behavior of a state in the international domain. This form of a-theoretical approach may produce a series of fallacies since it refrains from distinguishing the different conditions that influence the evolution of politics at the domestic and the international environment. Historical evolution reveals that these shorts of a-theoretical approaches are not suitable for a rational International Relations analysis, since they tend to disregard reality and create an idealistic and rather

utopian approach of international practices. States in the international environment function under different conditions and follow a divergent pattern of conduct than that of an individual within an organized and hierarchical collective entity. While states' conduct in the international arena is primarily determined by fear, by the survival agony, and by the dim aura of *animus dominandi*, individuals, not only after 1648 but before that too, tend not to follow their primordial instincts since the rule of law or the will of the political elite of a state are the main catalysts that regulate their conduct, their desires and their behavior at large.

Nevertheless, despite the emphatic theoretical weaknesses of Rational Choice Theory this does not imply that states do not aspire to act rationally despite various opposite views (e.g. Cousing 1988; Bamyeh 2009: 41). Interdependence theory, the empirical stipulations regarding the formation of an alliance, the prevalent ascertainment that war is used by states as a *modus operandi* to pursue their political goals through violent means, all are vital evidences that states are seeking to act rationally in order to face the difficult and demanding task to maximize their power capacity and reinforce their survival prospects (e.g. Glaser 2010; Donnelly 2000: 64-65; Mearsheimer 2009). It goes without saying that states are, or aspire to be, rational players. In Robert Keohane's (1986: 164) words:

'...states are unitary rational actors, carefully calculating costs of alternative courses of action and seeking to maximize their expected utility, although doing so under the conditions of uncertainty and without necessarily having sufficient information about alternatives or resources to conduct a full review of all possible courses of action.'

However, what Rational Choice Theory fails to take into consideration is that in order for states to act rationally they are obliged to act according to the systemic conditions that determine, to a great extent, the level of interstate relations. I argue that the emerging notional gap from the theoretical deficit of the Rational Choice Theory is being filled by the Thucydidean Rational Choice Theory instead.

- **Thucydides' Rational Analysis and the origins of War: Separating facts from pretexts**

Several scholars approach the context of the Thucydidean analysis from a surprisingly narrow behavioral angle. For example, C.D.C Reeve (1999) attributes a behavioral analysis on the Peloponnesian War in an attempt to construct a conceptual interpretation regarding the origins of war. His approach concentrates mainly on the civil war of Corcyra (e.g. Kagan 2004: 114-117) arguing that human nature is the basic cause for the outbreak of a war. He advocates that human nature is strongly influenced by greed and savagery and these combined with societal hardships lead towards the outbreak of violence. Steven Forde (2004), in addition, argues that war and conflict resolution are difficult to be conducted due to the perplexities of human nature. Reeve's and Forde's assumptions seem accurate. After all Thucydides himself (2009: 170) presents the Corcyran civil war as a direct product of human nature. Nowadays, such views are being used in order to provide exegesis for almost every civil war mainly by focusing upon the socio-political anomalies that affect the regular course of a state (e.g. Guimaraes 2001; Ayers 2005). It goes without saying that the knotty socio-political conditions in the internal of a state could lead to a civil war, especially in the case where a large number of citizens feel that their interests are not well protected by the authorities. Nowadays for example the revisionist ambience of the Arab Spring and its different, yet all toxic, versions over the MENA region reveal the importance of the human factor on the success or the failure of a state (Litsas 2013). The escalation of a civil conflict, the amount of violence that will be used in order to eradicate the resistance of the other side is primarily derived from human nature as a perpetual indirect expression of the *animus dominandi* (Morgenthau 1965: 192). However, this exclusive association between political events and human behavior, no matter how appealing may be for various analysts or for the public, does not relate to the production of a persuasive exegesis on the origins of war as an intricate political phenomenon but to the conduct of war itself. This is mainly because the origins of war derive primarily from the structure of the systemic environment and also from the states' cognitive

recognition that their survival cannot be achieved through peaceful means only but, whenever this is necessary or convenient, through the use of raw violence as well. I share the view that mankind is by nature competitive but not naturally warlike (e.g. Blaker 2007:18; Fry & Soderberg 2014) therefore I support the thesis that wars do not derive from the human's inclination to violence. They are products of power politics that refer to the protection of the interests of the state in the international sphere, establishing a causal link between the origins and the causes of war.

The first significant ascertainment regarding Thucydides work is that he was the first who offered a well-balanced rational explanation regarding the phenomenon of war (Platias & Coliopoulos 2010). Through the way he focused upon the war between Sparta and Athens he managed to differentiate between the pretext of the conflict and the political origin of it. For example, the Epidamnus' and Potidea's episodes functioned as the trigger points for the outbreak of war between Sparta and Athens (Price 2001: 274-277), thus called by Thucydides himself as first [Πρώτα Αίτια] and not primary causes [Κύρια Αίτια]. The primary causes of the Peloponnesian War, according to Thucydides, can be found in the hegemonic planning of Athens to enter in Peloponnesus, the Spartan principal zone of influence and the security dilemma that this produced to the Spartan decision making process (Copeland 2000: 210-211). Nowadays, analysts who pay great attention to the domestic political developments that occur in states that are involved in wars and they ignore the systemic balance of power or the prevailing systemic polarity seem unfit to distinguish between pretexts and origins of a conflict. For example, the most ordinary analysis that concerns the causes of the American-Iraqi War in 2003 was that it had been conducted with the sole purpose of passing the control of the Iraqi oil deposits on to the United States. Alan Greenspan (2008: 463), for instance, a prominent financial guru and former chairman of U.S Federal Reserve publicly acknowledged that:

‘I am saddened that it is politically inconvenient to acknowledge what every one knows: the Iraq war is largely about oil.’

Nevertheless, such an argument undermines the systemic complexity of the multipolar era that followed the brief period of an incomplete post-Cold War unipolar system and produced a less clearly defined international structure with multiple non-state actors, such as jihadist groups etc. In addition, Greenspan seems to disregard the emergence of the Thucydidean fear [Φόβος] that prevailed over everything else in the American decision making process due to the fact that 9/11 was the first hit in American ground since 1812. It is important to bear in mind that according to the Thucydidean analysis, fear is not just one of the main origins of war but also one of the prime factors that influence rational choice. Evidently, the majority of the analysts that approached critically the post 9/11 events in Afghanistan and Iraq seem to disregard Thucydides and prefer the normative, yet less meticulous, Rational Choice Theory path.

Unlike many contemporary IR analysts who disregard the effect of the systemic balance of power in political developments between or within states, Thucydides approached the systemic balance of power of his era with great insight and analytical clarity, acknowledging its rigorous bipolar nature. Adding to this, he recorded the major qualitative differences between the Athenian and the Spartan way of exercising their hegemony over the rest of the Greek city-states. Consequently, after assessing the capacity of power that each of the two great powers held at that time, Thucydides presented the collision between Athens and Sparta as a grand political development that it did not only affect the internal socio-political features of the two directly involved actors but it also affected directly the systemic structure of that era too. As he pointed out in his introduction:

“Thucydides, an Athenian, wrote this history of the war fought against each other by the Peloponnesians and the Athenians. He began his work right at the outbreak, reckoning that this would be a major war and more momentous than any previous conflict. There were two grounds for this belief: both sides were at the full height of their power and their resource for war, and he saw the rest of the Greeks allying with one or the other...” (Thucydides 2009: 3).



His reference to the Athenian and the Spartan power offers a direct link between the origins of the Peloponnesian War and the capabilities of the two great powers of that time. Power and the quest of more of it, according to Thucydides, is the main source of organized violence and not the psychological profiles of the Athenian and the Spartan leaderships or the different collective ideological norms that penetrated the socio-political structure of the two city-states, as many analysts today would have most likely argued. For example, Steven Forde (2004: 178) concludes that Thucydides's analysis over the origins of the Peloponnesian War brings out the inability of both Athens and Sparta to compromise their narcissistic ego and communicate successfully their mutual insecurities. Perhaps such an ascertainment is accurate, yet it is implicitly restricted and thus it fails to offer the big picture of such a mega event that shaped the balance of power of the Greek world for many decades after its conclusion. Without a doubt, open channels of communication and an efficient use of diplomacy are two elements capable of delaying a conflict, but not sufficient to eliminate the outbreak of war, as for example the Munich Agreement of 1938 and what followed afterwards reveal without doubt.

Robert Gilpin (1988: 592) attributes the level of stability of a system to the capability of the hegemonic actors to impose their will to the others, and thus preserve the existing systemic balance of power. However, Gilpin is not the first to rationally approach the dynamics of change in the context of international relations. Thucydides argues that after the end of the Persian Wars and the defeat of the mighty Persian Empire by the united Greek army Sparta rose as the leading actor of the post-war status quo. Athens' refusal to accept the Spartan's primacy and its continuous attempts to challenge the political influence of the latter to the rest of the Greek world led to the Peloponnesian War. In his words:

“All these operations of the Greeks in my account — against each other and against the barbarians — took place in the period of roughly fifty years between the retreat of Xerxes and the beginning of this war. In this period the Athenians consolidated their

empire and made great advances in their own independent power. The Spartans could see what was happening, but made only little attempt to prevent it and were inactive for most of the time. They had never been quick to go to war without immediate compulsion, and they were to some extent hampered by wars closer to home: but now the growth of Athenian power was unmistakable, and the Athenians were making inroads on Sparta's allies. At this point, then, the Spartans could tolerate it no longer, and decided that they must go on the attack with all their energies and, if possible, destroy the power of Athens by undertaking this war' (Thucydides 2009: 56).

Apparently, the Peloponnesian War could not have been avoided because it was not simply the accumulation of a series of random events between Sparta and Athens that efficient diplomacy could have remedy in one way or another, but it was a calculated Spartan decision in order to prevent the well-organized Athenian effort to power maximizing. Sparta decided to wage war against Athens not as a result of personal hate of its leadership towards Pericles' city-state, but as a rational political move in order to preserve its hegemonic primacy in the Greek world. At this point, Thucydides, well before Clausewitz, presents war as a continuation of politics through other means. Thus, his theoretical inventiveness has lead notable scholars to claim that he was the first to develop a cognizant cosmic theory of causality, based on profound and not trivial political origins, while he was also the first to distinguish between the factual causes of war and various dubious points that function diachronically as micro-political ploys (e.g. Hornblower 2000: 191; Zagorin 2005: 90). Throughout his analysis on the Peloponnesian War Thucydides edifies us that the decision regarding the avoidance or the conduct of a war should not be made through a circumstantial analysis of the contemporary facts, but through an extensive evaluation of the political aims and intentions of the other side. War is a continuous tit for tat of profound vigor and compassion. A high power game that intentions, hopes or objections have little to do, as it will be shown in the following paragraph, with the well-known episode of the Melian Dialogue.

- **Thucydides' Rational Choice and the Melian Dialogue**

The Melian dialogue plays a pivotal role in the theory of International Relations as a landmark of the perpetual battle between morality and power in the process of the decision making in politics. The narrative evolves in the following way. Mighty Athens demands from weak Melos to abandon the Spartan alliance and bandwagon with it instead. The Melians, after many rhetorical maneuvering, reject the Athenian ultimatum and this had as a result the destruction of Melos and the annihilation of its citizens by the Athenian forces.

Undoubtedly, this well-known episode of the Peloponnesian War has much to offer regarding the moral and political strife between the weaker element with all the limitations regarding the level of an independent decision-making and the powerful element with all the raw egotism that power may generate during times of high tension in international politics. The Melian dialogue can be seen as the archetypical venue where primordial instincts such as survival and protecting its own freedom collide with power and the will to dominate in order to preserve its prominent position in the international system. In addition, the dialogue between the Athenian delegation and Melos' leaders proves that justice in international politics can only be determined by the power capacity of a state and not by the normative interpretation of a superficial right or wrong. As the Athenians declare with notable severity to the Melians:

‘You know as well as we do that when we are talking on the human plane questions of justice only arise when there is equal power to compel: in terms of practicality the dominant exact what they can and the weak concede what they must’ (Thucydides 2009: 302)

In addition, the Melian dialogue brings forward the Thucydidean Rational Choice Theory. It reveals the core of the political essence that penetrates international order; when claims for justice that are coming from a state in the case of a dispute with another one are not being accompanied by an effective power ability to act as an efficient deterrent mechanism, then moral claims cannot protect it.

History is full of paradigms of states that entirely failed because they did not have the required power capacity to withstand systemic antagonism with Melos being the most characteristic case of all. Someone might look at the Greek-Turkish relations today. While Turkey continuously pushes Greece in the Aegean Sea putting under question the existing status quo, Greece adopts quite successfully the role of modern Melos facing Turkish provocative acts just by citing paragraphs from international law. It goes without saying that Turkey has not been deterred by Athens' practices since international law by itself had never stopped any act of aggression. On the contrary, Athens transmits signals of weakness that simply stimulate further Turkish hawkishness.

On top of that, the Melian dialogue constitutes an ideal theoretical case for the decision making of going into a war. As soon as the two delegates met the Athenians revealed to the Melians that an attack against them is not their primary objective since their goal is to lead them into the Athenian military coalition:

‘Right now we want to make clear to you that we are here in the interests of our own empire, yes, but what we shall say is designed to save your own city. Our desire is to take you under our rule without trouble: it is in both our interests that you should survive’ (Thucydides 2009: 302).

At this point is obvious that primarily the Athenian plan was to achieve a political victory against Melos without a fight. Most probably, the Athenians did not want to fight Melos because a destroyed Melos would not have been able to contribute to their military efforts against Sparta. On the contrary, if Melos was to enter the Athenian alliance then this would have damaged Sparta's prestige to the rest of the Hellenic world since it would have communicated both to allies and foes that the mighty Spartan hard power proved to be insufficient to keep Melos away from Athenian allure. Melos, mainly due to its size, held an insignificant role in the Peloponnesian League, i.e. the alliance structure under Sparta's control, therefore its unrefined strategic value for Athens was minimal. However, if Melos was willing

to break free from Spartan control and accept the role of an Athenian trophy then this development would have enhanced the Athenian soft power prestige and glory instead (Eckstein 2006: 64).

Yet, this prospect neither disorientated the Athenian decision making process nor it created any kind of dilemmas regarding the parallel advantages that it could gain from a possible Melian refusal to comply with the ultimatum. As the Athenians argued, having already expressed their wish to settle the whole matter without a fight, a possible war and the expected outcome in their favor would have boosted their hard power prestige within their alliance network. Therefore, when the Melians rejected the Athenian ultimatum by offering them their neutrality the Athenians replied in the following way:

“Your friendship is more dangerous to us than your hostility. To our subjects friendship indicates a weakness on our part, but hatred is a sign of our strength” (Thucydides 2006: 303).

This is a fundamental point in the Thucydidean rational choice theory. In an antagonistic international environment and at times of high volatility it is more important for a state to generate fear to its competitors and foes in order to be respected by its allies than vice versa. Consider for example the British position back in 1938 when instead of decisively facing Hitler in the international fora London chose to appease him. In 1939, only France and Britain from all the European powers were willing to stand up against Nazis’ aggression, a dreadful result that had mainly to do with London’s discredit in the eyes of friends and foes.

In order to prove to their allies that they were able and willing to safeguard their interests, the Athenians were ready to ply Melos as an example of what a state may suffer in case it disregarded the will of Athens. Not every state is able or willing to pursue with the use of violence in order to resolve a dispute in international arena. This is either due to lack of power, confidence or due to internal volatile socio-political stability. Successful states, no matter their size or capacity, are able and willing elements in constant state of awareness to promote or protect their interests (Frazer & Hutchings 2008). Thucydides successfully points out that a state with a profound desire to play a leading role in

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101, boulevard Raspail, 75006 Paris – France Tel: +33(0)1 47 20 00 94 – Fax: +33 (0)1 47 20 81 89 Website: [www.ags.edu](http://www.ags.edu) (Please cite this paper as the following: Spyridon N. Litsas (2018). Thucydides and Rationalism: A Study Beyond Rational Choice Theory. *The Journal of International Relations, Peace and Development Studies*. Volume 4.

the international arena should always be prepared to prove that is able and willing to mobilize its hard-power mechanism in order to achieve its goals. This kind of behavior derives from the fact that hegemonic states have constantly to prove that are capable of defending their own status. Think of Athens against Melos, imperial Rome against Carthage and the United States against the Taliban regime immediately after 9/11. In the uncomfortable case where a hegemonic state appears unable or unwilling to make use of its hard power in order to achieve a publicly proclaimed political goal then the first casualty will be its prestige as well and then its status in the international arena. Thucydides is the first one that understood deeply the importance that states are giving in in sustaining their prestige, not as an expression of pathological vanity (Fettweis 2013) but as a mean to preserve their position in the international scale of power.

Finally, through the Athenian reply to the Melians can be identified the need of a hegemonic power to demonstrate and at the same to confirm its power to its own citizens. The Athenian response to the Melians did not only aim at promoting its might to allies and foes. It also intended to communicate to the Athenians back home that their sacrifices during the war period against Sparta were not in vain and that their city-state was able and willing to impose its interests the rest of the Hellenic world. The Athenian military expedition against Melos in order to prove to its citizens that was able and willing to safeguard the state's leading position in the international arena by reinforcing its prestige, manifests the direct connection between the decision making process and the public expectations as well. It is not clear enough which element generates the other's reaction. Nevertheless, is clear that the state aims to satisfy the citizens' morale and the latter to reward the state with their consent during difficult times. It was Thucydides who connected war engagement with the public support that a government enjoys back home. Nowadays, this Thucydidian reasoning can be seen in the concept of democratic accountability which is weighing heavily on the way an organized state functions under considerable internal or external pressure, nevertheless both tyrannical or oligarchic

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101, boulevard Raspail, 75006 Paris – France Tel: +33(0)1 47 20 00 94 – Fax: +33 (0)1 47 20 81 89 Website: [www.ags.edu](http://www.ags.edu) (Please cite this paper as the following: Spyridon N. Litsas (2018). Thucydides and Rationalism: A Study Beyond Rational Choice Theory. *The Journal of International Relations, Peace and Development Studies*. Volume 4.

governments have to comply with this as well in order to avoid violent uprisings during periods of high volatility. For example, the Arab Spring effect that spreads out all over the M.E.N.A region proves the importance of social support for the preservation of a regime, no matter if this is democratic or not. It becomes evident that Thucydides did not consider politics and especially war as processes that are taking place in void. On the contrary, he gave a great importance to the prestige of the state and to its significance internationally or domestically.

However, the most crucial point in the Melian dialogue regarding state's rational choice theory can be found in the Athenian ratio behind the final decision to attack Melos. War, in every shape or form, is a complex phenomenon that prevails in the international arena as an appalling political necessity in order to protect or expand the interests of the state that chooses to follow this specific steep path. In the Melian dialogue Thucydides presents the conceptual antithesis that emerges between an irrational decision-making process and a rational one regarding the use of violence. The Melians support the argument that war adopts unpredictable outcomes in a clear attempt to deter psychologically the Athenians. By referring to the unpredictability of war, the Melians aim at persuading the Athenian side to accept their proposal of neutrality instead of going into the unknown that may lead to a military defeat. On top of that, they pursue their rhetoric by praising the moral superiority of the weaker element when is facing a more powerful adversary. According to the Melians:

“But we know that wars sometimes take on a more impartial fortune which belies any discrepancy in numbers” (Thucydides 2006: 304).

The Athenian's response places the decision making process on a more rational base. With an impressive clarity they presented the arguments that determined their final decision to attack Melos:

“Hope counsels risk. When men with other resources besides hope employ her, she can harm but not destroy. But those who stake their all (and hope is spendthrift) only recognize her for what she is when they are ruined and she has left them no further chance to act on their realization. You are weak and one throw from destruction. Do not

let yourselves fall into this trap. Do not do what so many others do under pressure: human means can still save them, but when visible hopes recede they turn to the invisible — divination, oracles, and other such sources of disastrous optimism.” (Thucydides 2006: 304).

At this point is evident that the Athenians fully conceived the self-help nature of the international system. Only when a state takes all the necessary measures to face the systemic hazards and challenges by utilizing its own capabilities then survival prospects can be more feasible than vice versa (Mearsheimer 2003: 32-33; Layne 2004: 104-105). As Thucydides shows first, power and all the methods involved in its maximization are the determinant factors for the implementation of rationalism in international politics. A state that neglects its self-help policies by adopting a metaphysical conviction that it will survive the perils of international politics due to its good fortune or because of a favorable divine intervention then is bound to be punished for its irrationality and just because of its ontological weakness.

- **Conclusion**

In the previous paragraphs I argued that the Rational Choice Theory was not the first theoretical attempt trying to explain and evaluate states’ conduct. On the contrary, the first one was Thucydides who presented a realistic approach to rationalism in his analysis on the Peloponnesian War.

While the Rational Choice Theory is a theoretical approach derived from economics, Thucydides’ theoretical stance refers directly to the perplexities of international politics. As it had been argued, the main theoretical weakness of Rational Choice Theory is that it fails to distinguish in its analysis the internal domain of a state from the external environment. This erroneous connection usually does not help the analyst to segregate the origins of a war from various pretexts that can either exist and create inter-state tension or can be equally fabricated in order to bring the war closer. The Thucydidian Rational Choice Theory is a theoretical approach that methodically examines the origins of war, offering a series of realists analyses that refer to the big picture of international politics.

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101, boulevard Raspail, 75006 Paris – France Tel: +33(0)1 47 20 00 94 – Fax: +33 (0)1 47 20 81 89 Website: [www.ags.edu](http://www.ags.edu) (Please cite this paper as the following: Spyridon N. Litsas (2018). Thucydides and Rationalism: A Study Beyond Rational Choice Theory. *The Journal of International Relations, Peace and Development Studies*. Volume 4.



Thucydides is the first theorist who understood the perplexities of the war phenomenon and the difficulties that a rational decision-making regarding the implementation of war requires, since he followed a multi-causal pattern of thinking as Ilias Kouskouvelis accurately argues (2017). Those meticulous diagnoses, regarding the true nature of war and the decision making process, away from any kind of ideological convictions, is probably his most notable contribution in the theory of International Relations on the whole and these should be studied carefully by the present and future leaders of the globe, at least by those who genuinely believe in rationalism and are realists too.

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