Herodotus’ Story of Croesus and Solon

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Herodotus was a Greek historian, writer, and geographer, he was also considered as the first writer who systematically treated historical topics. He was named as the father of history, because he wrote on the topics of history with a more comprehensive approach. The analytical methodology was his apparatuses for investigation. He introduced analytical reasoning in his writings and tried to figure out the cause and effects of different events on the bases of events that occurred in the distant past. Herodotus wrote a book called Histories. The word Historie is a Greek word that means investigation. He wrote the History of Persian wars and highlighted the importance of these wars for future development. According to Herodotus, the purpose of his Histories was to write on the great works of Greeks, so that these works would not be forgotten.

Herodotus was a historian who did not always put forward, his views directly. He mostly deployed his descriptions to specify his opinions. In the story of Solon and Croesus, Herodotus puts forward his views in two different ways. He expressed his opinions directly by providing an analytical statement. He also narrated his thinking indirectly and implicitly by using literary strategies. Solon made three major points in front of King Croesus. First, he argued that the gods were always jealous of the human race and they tried to create difficulties and problems for humans. Secondly, Solon claimed that human happiness could not be stable because the gods were not happy with humans and they would try to destabilize their happiness. Finally, Solon put forward the idea that humanity could not become happy, until he ended his life in a good manner.

Solon did not directly explain the characteristics of a happy end to one's life. He used the examples of three different persons to explain his philosophy of a happy ending. Tellus was an old man who lived in Athens. He had his family and was economically well off. Tellus helped Athens in the battle and fought the war with courage and bravery. He died in the battle and buried with love and honor. Solon declared it a happy ending because he lived a moderate life and died with courage. He earned the public’s love and respect. Solon also described the stories of Cleobis and Biton as an example of a happy ending. They both died in a temple at a very young age, as a result of their mother’s prayer. Solon declared their lives less competed as compared to the life of Tellus (Shapiro 1996). But all of these three shared one similarity which was the happy ending of life. They all died soon after the completion of a life goal and succeeded to get love and respect from the public. In Solon's point of view, a happy end of life meant a death in the company of your friends and family. In this way, a man could live longer in the hearts of others. In Solon's point of view, the gods were jealous of the happiness of Croesus. Herodotus did not directly give his point of view, over the matter of jealousy. Instead, he used the views of Solon to express himself. Herodotus narrated the story of the downfall of Croesus, soon after the speech of Solon (Pelling 2006). This fact indicated that Herodotus indirectly shared the views of Solon.

Herodotus indirectly and implicitly advocated the views of Solon. Croesus exceeded the limits of human happiness and invited the god’s jealousy that could destabilize him. He ignored the advice of Solon and considered himself as the happiest person among them all. After some time, there was a series of incidents that took place and became a source of Croesus's downfall. Herodotus implicitly put forward the Greek traditional mythology that gods were not like the excessive amount of happiness with a person and they cursed the person who tried to cross the human limits. There was divine jealousy that became the source of Croesus's downfall. Solon advised the Croesus not to judge any person’s happiness without considering the end of life. This was the end of life that determined the quality and happiness of a human (Kindt 2006). The human fortunate was unstable and it changed over time. Regardless of the quality of life a person spent, he could only be considered as a happy person if he got a good end. Herodotus agreed with Solon's view that a person could get a good end only if he spent life in moderate means and accomplished his greatest achievement. A person’s death could be considered as good only if he got permanent honor and respect from society.

In his investigation of Persian wars, he started his work chronologically. He first stated the hostilities that had existed between East and West in the distant past. Then he followed these hostilities down to the time of conflict. He tried to explain the nature of the clash by investigating the past relationship between the two parties. Herodotus included astronomy, folktales, geography, and ethnography in the subject of history and wrote an extraordinary work for literature that had yet to be completed in its exceptionality. Herodotus made his writings interesting and entertaining for the readers by including the traditional folk stories and practices of ancient cultures.

Herodotus named Persians as Eastern nations and Greek as the Western nation. The war between Persians and Greeks was declared as the war between the so-called East and West. Herodotus explored the bone of contention between the two nations and found the reasons of a missing event. The Phoenician traders stole a Greek woman that gave birth to hostility among the nations. Herodotus claimed that the conflict between East and West had deep roots in time and space. Herodotus could be seen as the first writer who tried to explore and explain the relationship of Greeks with the far beyond nations and territories. He considered himself at the center of the world and analyze the geography of other nations as compared to the location of Greece. He considered Delphi as the center of the earth and the equator passed through the mountains of Delphi and Taurus. The Equator divided the world into two symmetric halves. Herodotus’s knowledge of geography was inversely proportionate to the distance of that specific place from central Greece.

India was considered the most distant nation known to the Greeks. Herodotus explained the differences between the so-called eastern and western cultures. The Greeks could never eat the dead bodies of their forefathers. While many tribes in India consume their dead parents. Arabia was considered as the land of ancient and secretive spices. The male goat was the most common domestic animal in Arabia that was used to get milk and meat. The Greeks never like it because of its unbearable smell. The Greeks did not have direct and easy access to the East. There were fold stories that became part of history. Most of the Arabian and Eastern stories reached Greece by the Phoenicians. Phoenicians were traders and they used to move between East and West. In the same way, Ethiopia was considered as the land of gold. Ethiopian land was full of wooden trees. The Greeks assumed that the Ethiopian people were very tall and they lived very long lives. Libya was explored by the Greeks around the mid of 8th century BC and it was considered as the land of wild animals. Herodotus assumed certain characteristics of the Eastern lands and people. Eastern people were considered very backward in the use of technology as compared to the technological advancement in Greece. They live on raw foods like milk and meat from different animals. Their lands were full of different types of wild creatures. Herodotus compared Eastern culture with the culture of Greeks. He admired some cultural norms of the East but mostly he declared Eastern culture as abnormal and against true human nature. He studied different societies like Egypt, India, Arabia, Lydia, and Palestine. Most of their population lived in small groups and tribes. Each tribe had its socio-cultural norms.

Herodotus was the writer and philosopher who did not always put his views directly forward. Sometimes he used an analytical approach for providing his point of view and sometimes he used indirect and implicit approaches for the advancement of his views. In the story of Croesus and Solon, he indirectly spread the thoughts of Solon. Implicitly, he agreed with all three of the claims of Solon. He indirectly agreed that gods were jealous of humankind and they tried to disrupt their happiness. Due to this divine hostility of gods, human happiness was very unstable and vulnerable. Just like a man's happiness, human life was also unstable. In an unstable life, no one could judge the other person's happiness level throughout his life. It was the end of a human that decided the true nature of human life. A good end could be considered as a good and happy life and vice versa. It increased the respect and honor of a person in society.

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