APPENDIX 1

Tolerance or Relativism?

Chapter 2 argued that the *Histories* espouses cultural relativism and that each culture's *nomoi* are coherent and valid for it to practice. It might be objected, however, that the *Histories* merely displays a tolerance for the variety of *nomoi* found in diverse human cultures. One who judges certain cultural norms correct can still be tolerant of those she disagrees with. The tolerance argument would entail that Herodotus holds that there are objectively correct *nomoi* but that he declines to pass negative judgment on those that are wrong. For example, Herodotus might be willing to register the diversity of human *nomoi*, while not viewing these differences as desirable.

An impediment to the position that Herodotus is a cultural absolutist is that there is no hint of what "right" custom might be. I am not aware of any dogmatic statements coming from Herodotus regarding cultural practices that are correct for all societies. More to the point, the *locus classicus* for identifying cultural relativism (or tolerance) in the *Histories* includes a quotation from Pindar (3.38.4) that actively works against cultural absolutism and for a position of relativism. The words "*Nomos*, king of all" are followed in the Pindaric fragment by "of mortals and immortals" (θνατῶν τε καὶ ἀθανάτων). These lyrics rework Zeus' position as "king of all, mortals and immortals." In Homer, the formula is Zeus "father of men and gods" (πατὴρ ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν). Already in the early fifth century, Heraclitus capitalized on the association in his fragment, "war is the father of all, the king of all" (B 53: πόλεμος πάντων μὲν πατήρ ἐστι, πάντων δὲ βασιλεύς). A verse of Corrina's has been credibly restored along these lines as well: Δεὺς πατεὶ[ρ πάντω]ν βασιλεύς.[1] In the *Cratylus*, Zeus' name is etymologized by Socrates as the "lifegiver" (396a: αἴτιος μᾶλλον τοῦ ζῆν), who is "ruler and king of all" (ἄρχων τε καὶ βασιλεὺς τῶν πάντων). Similarly, the Aristotelian *de Mundo* calls Zeus "king, ruler of all" (*Mu.*

[1] F 1a.13 *PMG*.

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401b: Ζεὺς βασιλεύς, Ζεὺς ἀρχὸς ἁπάντων). *Nomos*, then, is a stand-in for Zeus. This is corroborated by its ability to "make just" (δικαιῶν) actions traditionally deemed unjust. Zeus' connection with justice (δίκη) is, of course, persistent from early epic onward.[2] Pindar's startling personification of *Nomos* elevates it to a principle akin to cosmic order. In its context in the *Histories*, this suggests that it is not just the case that there are simply a variety of *nomoi* in the world but that these *nomoi* are part of a structure of underlying stability. The evocation of Zeus and his divine authority over all beings does not simply imply a tolerance for the diversity of human *nomoi*; it indicates a sanction, a validity, to this variety. By including the lyric, and explicitly calling attention to Pindar's correctness in formulating it as he does (Herodotus says it was composed "rightly," ὀρθῶς), the *Histories* imports the association with divine regulation into the context of the nomological marketplace and Darius' findings on the range of *nomoi* and the tenacity with which they are held. This is not to suggest that Herodotus (or Pindar) is making a literal apotheosis of *nomos*; there is no evidence to support that extreme claim. Instead, the intertext acts as a capstone to the argument by pointing to the validity of different cultural systems through the formula descriptive of Zeus' rule.

An additional obstacle to those favoring tolerance over relativism is the perspective that the text adopts at 3.38. In a classic paper on relativism and tolerance, Geoffrey Harrison reasoned that the relativist assumes an external perspective, that of the observer. By contrast, one who is tolerant adopts an internal perspective within a given system.[3] Tolerance is the position taken by a participant. As Harrison states, "tolerance . . . must be from *some* point of view."[4] It is for this reason significant that from the beginning of the hypothetical experiment, Herodotus invites an observer perspective: "For if someone were to put a proposition before all men . . . ordering" (3.38.1: εἰ γάρ τις προθείη πᾶσι ἀνθρώποισι . . . κελεύων).[5] Then, when Darius arranges his actual experiment with the Callatian Indians and the Greeks, he too assumes an outsider's gaze, as one who follows neither custom. Both cases cultivate the point of view of an observer who sees more than the cultural agents in each experiment. In the madness of Cambyses episode, tolerance would be the response of a cultural agent internal to the experiment of the nomological marketplace or the testing of burial practices. Instead, we find third-party figures. I suggest that these spectators, by standing outside of the cultural system

[2] E.g., Hes. *Op.* 239. [3] Harrison (1976). [4] Harrison (1976), 132.
[5] Cf. 7.152.2, where the observer is not included.

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under examination, illustrate the way in which they are equally valid. This is reinforced by the neutral stance of the narrator, himself a Greek. According to the example of the Greeks in Darius' court, Herodotus should reject the practices of those outside of Greece. Yet he does no such thing and instead acts like an onlooker of Greek and Callatian *nomoi* with Darius, offering up no ammunition for the cultural absolutist.

A further passage that speaks against the argument that cultural absolutism lurks within the *Histories* can be found in the description of Cambyses' abuse of the body of Amasis (3.16). Cambyses ordered the burning of Amasis, an act that is said to contravene both Egyptian and Persian funerary custom. Here, Herodotus emboldens the reader to interpret Cambyses' actions as sacrilegious by situating them within Egyptian and Persian cultural traditions (3.16.3), since from a Greek standpoint Cambyses' deed might have been mistaken as a cremation burial. Again, one is positioned beyond Hellenic perspectives on funerary practices, as they are outlined in Darius' experiment, by treating the Persian and Egyptian injunction against cremation neutrally.[6] This episode challenges rather than confirms Greek notions as to what is non-normative and blameworthy.

In his introduction of the Egyptian *logos* that is Book 2, Herodotus explains that he is reluctant to relate stories that he has heard concerning the divine, "considering that all men know equally about these things" (2.3.2: νομίζων πάντας ἀνθρώπους ἴσον περὶ αὐτῶν ἐπίστασθαι). Regarding these traditions, Herodotus is not tolerant of Egyptian narratives on the divine, while believing his own correct. He offers a transcultural acceptance of man's stories about the gods. Whether we interpret this as a claim to knowledge or, as I prefer, a wry remark on man's real ignorance in matters of the divine makes no difference. In either case, different national traditions about the gods are on the same footing. Like *nomoi*, these stories are coherent within their own cultural systems.

The case for the madness of Cambyses starts off by highlighting the relationship between exposure to diverse *nomoi* and respect for these practices. As ruler of the Egyptians, Cambyses is made an observer of foreign customs but fails to become tolerant and instead laughs at cultural difference. Tolerance is flagged as the response of a practitioner of norms faced with alternative customs. However, the observers – of the

[6] A variation on this theme occurs in Xerxes' abuse of the corpse of Leonidas. Herodotus relates that this was clear proof of the extreme hatred Xerxes held for him because the Persians as a people in particular honor men noble in war, 7.238.

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nomological marketplace and of the experiment on the Callatian Indians and Greeks – move the argument in a new direction, where what is right for a given people need not be what is right for one's own. Pindar's quotation affirms that cultural diversity is part of the nature of the world order.

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