CHAPTER 6

Historical Inquiry and Presocratic Epistemology

The *Histories* shapes the expectations of its audience through its development of a distinctive horizon of expectation with regard to epistemic claims on truth, seeming, and likelihood.[1] At the outset of the work, Herodotus singles out the reports of the Persians and the Phoenicians on the origins of Greek and Asiatic enmity but then pivots to name he whom "I myself *know*, οἶδα αὐτός (*oida autos*), first began unjust deeds against the Greeks" (1.5.3).[2] This is an assured claim that stakes out an authoritative position. In retrospect, however, it comes as something of a surprise, as a distinctive feature of the Herodotean narrator is his reticence in expressing strong epistemic claims. This chapter investigates truth claims as a key area of Herodotus' engagement with philosophical intellectual culture and examines the contestation of accuracy and truth in light of this milieu.

In her brilliant dissection of Herodotus' voiceprint in the *Histories*, Carolyn Dewald draws attention to the only partially authoritative stance of the narrator.[3] On this reading, Herodotus assumes four distinct modes

[1] For an authoritative summary of truth claims in historiography, see Marincola (2007a), and 15–17, on Herodotus in particular. Brief assessments on truth in the *Histories* can be found in Starr (1968); Flory (1987), 49–80; and Lateiner (1989), 62–3, whose regard for Herodotus' positive conclusions on truthful *logos* is made clear by his appendix, 71, "Certainty Explicitly Achieved"; Thomas (2000), 228–35, specifically on ὀρθός; Harrison (2000), 24–9, (2004); Dewald (2002), 271, 279–81, 287–8; Cartledge and Greenwood (2002); Marincola (2007b), 60–6; Branscombe (2013), 6–11. Moles (1993), 95, is closest to my own position in his statement that, "in general, no ancient historian is more alive to the problem of truth." For truth opposed to *mythos* in the *Histories*, see Baragwanath and de Bakker (2012), 1–56; Chiasson (2012), 214–32.

[2] For a survey of the narrator's use of "knowledge" verbs, see Appendix 3.

[3] Dewald (1987); her position is reassessed in Dewald (2002), 279: "On a handful of occasions he says he knows something. But much more common than expressions of certainty are various forms of opinion, ranging from qualified belief to outright disbelief." For the narrator's unique voiceprint in the *Histories*, see Pearson (1941); Schwabl (1969); Dewald (1987), (1999), 224–33; (2002); Marincola (1987); Thomas (1993), (2000), 235–48; Fowler (1996), 76–87; Kuch (1995); Bakker (2002); de Jong (2004). For an assessment of meta-narratorial inquiry, see Christ (1994); Grethlein (2009); and most recently Branscombe (2013).

of narration: the onlooker, investigator, critic, and writer.[4] Writing on Herodotus' critical mode, Dewald exposes the notion of the historian as excavator of past "truths" as not strictly accurate. After all, he does regularly intrude upon his own account to undermine its veracity. Dewald demonstrates the way in which this is part of Herodotus' contract with the reader, who is enfranchised to undertake the work of interpreting and wrestling the truth from the text. One of the virtues of this reading is that it does not fall into the trap of interpreting Herodotus as displaying a cavalier approach to truth or a penchant for sensational fabrication.[5] Instead, Dewald points to the historian's encouragement of the reader to marvel at the difficulty of arriving at unmediated historical truth by drawing attention to unresolvable tensions in differing historical accounts, gaps in human understanding, and the lack of evidence necessary for robust truth claims.[6] The narrative emphasis is on the slippery status of knowledge. Critical claims "express the *histor*'s working experience of the fact that knowledge of the world is difficult to get, and partial and provisional at best."[7] Herodotus' *Histories* is not an authoritative account of accurate reporting but an authoritative account of the difficulty of reporting. This interpretation, which treats the narrator as dialogic, has rightly drawn attention to the inappropriateness of holding Herodotus to the standards of later historiography, which enshrines truth as its raison d'être, as in Polybius' famed declaration that "the fulfilment of history is truth" (τῆς μὲν οὖν ἱστορίας ἀλήθειαν εἶναι τέλος).[8] In discussing an analog to the Herodotean narrator, Dewald looks not to subsequent historiography but to the Homeric warrior. Like the hero, she finds that Herodotus grapples with a fearsome enemy, in this case, *logos*, rather than *erga*.[9] The presence of this struggle in the text contributes to his peculiar voiceprint.

[4] Dewald (2002), 277, revises this position slightly by affirming a unifying, single narrative voice.

[5] Cf. Starr (1968), 357, "Herodotus' delight in piquant tales often obscured his essential commitment to the truth." This position has its roots in antiquity, with the critical comments of, for example, Manetho, Plutarch, Valerius Pollio, Harpocration, and Libanius. For more on this reception of Herodotus, see Momigliano (1958); Riemann (1967); Murray (1972); and now Priestley (2014), 195–220. Modern scholarship has been similarly focused upon the extent to which the *Histories* can be verified when set against competing historical, archaeological, and epigraphical narratives. Notable in this school are Armayor (1978), (1985); West (1985); and Fehling (1989).

[6] Cf. Fowler (1996), 80, for Herodotus' discovery of the "problem of sources" as distinctive to his voiceprint.

[7] Dewald (1987), 163. A similar conclusion is reached by Hollmann (2011), 212–13, though he stresses his difference from Dewald. For pluralizing truths in the *Histories*, see de Jong (1999); Gray (2002); Griffiths (2006); Baragwanath (2008).

[8] Polyb. 34.4.2; see also Strabo 1.2.17.

[9] Dewald (1987), 147.

While I agree with Dewald's interpretation, Herodotus' regime of truth might be investigated in two additional ways. First, by the recognition that his discursive practices are not taking place in an intellectual vacuum. It is possible to interpret this continual problematization of truth as displaying an affinity with the sophistication found surrounding claims of truth and likelihood in Presocratic inquiry.[10] This context will suggest that in addition to envisioning the reader as at times continuing the investigation on a given subject, reservations on truth claims are part of a narratorial commentary on the enduring generation of new truths through truth's perpetual contestation. In this sense, the contract also consists of a willingness to accept the gaps within historical understanding. A second feature of Herodotus' distinctive voiceprint is his selective endorsement of positive truth claims. Like many of the Presocratic philosophers, truth is the criterion against which inquiry is measured, and in some instances, truth is the product of inquiry. As a rival in the marketplace of ideas, this competitive stance displays Herodotus' prowess at attaining *more* of the truth than his rivals.

The Obstacles to Truth

By the time of Herodotus' composition of the *Histories*, philosophers had been developing and debating epistemological questions for nearly a century. From the sixth century BCE, treatises on cosmology, botany, and geology emerged, and the texts written by the new *sophoi* came to challenge epic poetry's epistemic framework. A turn toward the philosophical tradition showcases a new critical view of truth claims alongside the demotion of traditional poetry's authority.[11] This vibrant intellectual

[10] *Pace* Müller (1981), 299.

[11] Homer comes under fire: DK 21 A 1.2–3; DK 22 B 21; B 42; B 56; B 105. As does Hesiod: DK 21 B 11; DK 22 B 106. On the subject of Presocratic epistemology generally, cf. especially Fränkel (1925); Lesher (1984), (1994); Hussey (1990); Detienne (1996); Tor (2017). For the understated narratorial presence in Homeric epic and hymns, see Morrison (2007), 45–8. Requests such as the one famously made by the epic poet for information from the Muses prior to the Catalogue of Ships seem to affirm that the Muses are present and know and impart all to the poet, *Il.* 2.485: ὑμεῖς γὰρ θεαί ἐστε πάρεστέ τε ἴστέ τε πάντα. However, for opposition to this, see Halliwell (2012), 36–92, who attempts to undermine the idea of the epic poet as inspired by a divine, self-predicated truth. In this, he is anticipated by Pratt (1993). Heraclitus, at DK 22 A 22, implies that the philosopher views Homer as a purveyor of fictional narrative, as does Herodotus' statement that Homer did not think the voyage of Helen to Egypt would be suitable to epic, 2.116.1. Epic's other archaic exemplar, Hesiod, provocatively gestures toward the ambiguity of truth with respect to epic song by having the Muses in the *Theogony* hymn the infamous lyrics at 27–8, for which, *vide infra*.

context provided Herodotus with new paradigms for confronting and interpreting truth claims.

The poet-philosopher Xenophanes of Colophon gives early evidence for this self-awareness, drawing attention as he does to the limits of human cognition and the difficulties involved in classifying sensory information as knowledge. In one fragment, he places the following injunctions on attaining truth:

> καὶ τὸ μὲν οὖν σαφὲς οὔτις ἀνὴρ γένετ'[12] οὐδέ τις ἔσται
> εἰδὼς ἀμφὶ θεῶν τε καὶ ἄσσα λέγω περὶ πάντων·
> εἰ γὰρ καὶ τὰ μάλιστα τύχοι τετελεσμένον εἰπών,
> αὐτὸς ὅμως οὐκ οἶδε· δόκος δ' ἐπὶ πᾶσι τέτυκται.
> (DK 21 B 34)
>
> And no man has been born nor will there be one | who knows the clear truth about gods and what I say about all. | For if he happened to say what has been fulfilled to the highest degree, | he himself would nonetheless not know it, for seeming has been wrought upon all.

Xenophanes rules out the possibility of clear truth on the subjects of the divine and whatever followed in his text – potentially material on natural science.[13] A counterfactual follows: even granted that one were to speak what has come to pass, awareness of it would still elude the speaker. In the place of truth is *dokos*, potentially a coinage made by Xenophanes meaning "seeming" or "opinion," which, notably, characterizes the condition of man. The reservation in these verses hints at a form of weak skepticism or fallibilism.[14] In line with the epic poets whose Muses were only provisionally vehicles of historical truth, the philosophical poet emphasizes the problem of knowing that one knows. In opposition to this is what Xenophanes calls τὸ σαφές (*to saphes*), which conjures the sense of clarity only to rule it out.

In his pessimism on human knowledge, Xenophanes might have been justified in discarding *historie* entirely; however, another fragment qualifies this rejection: "let these things be supposed as similar to what is true" (DK

[12] Following the reading of Plut. *Quomodo adul.* 17d–e, with Laks-Most.

[13] For discussion of the fragment, see Lesher (1978), (1999); Fränkel (1993). Barnes (1979), i.136–43, rightly, in my view, concludes that some knowledge is attainable according to Xenophanes.

[14] Sext. Emp. *Pyr.* 2.8. Fränkel (1955) argues that it is not a skeptical fragment but concerned with sensory perception and sight in particular; he is decisively dismissed by Heitsch (1966). Lesher (1978) gives a detailed reading; Mogyoródi (2006), 131, holds that Xenophanes does challenge sight and taste at DK 21 A 41a and B 38. Those in support of some form of skepticism are Heitsch (1966); Barnes (1979), i.138–43; Lesher (1992); Mogyoródi (2006).

21 B 35: ταῦτα δεδοξάσθω μὲν ἐοικότα τοῖς ἐτύμοισι).[15] Xenophanes modifies the epic phrasing to express a *limited* account of truth. That is, Xenophanes' critique of man's ability to attain truth does not blossom into strong skepticism. We know from other fragments that the *sophos* was engaged in inquiry on the divine and on cosmology.[16] Elsewhere, he justified his project of inquiry as follows: "Not from the beginning did the gods reveal everything to mortals; but in time by seeking they come upon the better." (DK 21 B 18: οὔτοι ἀπ' ἀρχῆς πάντα θεοὶ θνητοῖσ' ὑπέδειξαν, ἀλλὰ χρόνῳ ζητοῦντες ἐφευρίσκουσιν ἄμεινον). If truth is out of reach, at least the diachronic human search for knowledge brings an instrumental "better."[17] The details of Xenophanes' fallibilism, and whether or not it encompassed the phenomenal world or was restricted to the divine and natural sciences, are beyond the limits of this analysis. Essential is the conclusion that the Colophonian bard challenged truth claims, bringing a weak variant of skepticism into the field of philosophical inquiry.

Nearly all subsequent Presocratic philosophers commented on truth and the difficulty of attaining it. Alcmaeon's philosophical treatise began with the admonition that the gods alone had "certainty," σαφήνειαν, while mortals "inferred from signs," τεκμαίρεσθαι (DK 24 B 1). Heraclitus yields some evidence for a pessimistic view of man's ability to identify truth with the forensic metaphor that "men are poor defendants of the true" (ἄνθρωποι κακοὶ ἀληθινῶν ἀντίδικοι).[18] But it is Parmenides' *On Nature*, contemporaneous with Heraclitus' work, that is the most comprehensive meditation on second-order concerns about truth, falsehood, and seeming.[19] In the nearly 150 lines of the hexameter poem that survive, a philosophical treatise unfolds in the form of a meeting of two individuals,

[15] According to Arist. *Metaph.* Γ 5, 1010a5, the comic writer Epicharmus parodied Xenophanes' distinction between the true and the likely. This is playing on Hes. *Theog.* 27 and Hom. *Od.* 19.203, for which, *vide infra*; see Bryan (2012), 12 n. 30, for bibliography on the allusion.

[16] E.g., DK 21 B 27; B 28; B 29; B 30; B 31; B 33.

[17] Barnes (1979), i.142, suggests that due to the inexhaustible amount of sensory knowledge and the limited nature of human life, a strong conception of truth had to be abandoned. The point remains unclear either because of the obscurity of the philosopher or an accident of preservation. For the limits of human life in the speech of Solon to Croesus, see pp. 2, 32.

[18] DK 22 B 133. For a discussion of the epistemological vocabulary used by Heraclitus, see Lesher (1983), *passim*.

[19] For the titles of Presocratic texts as later inventions, see Chapter 4 n. 10. It is probable that Parmenides wrote his single philosophical treatise in the second quarter of the fifth century, cf. Pl. *Parm.* 127a–c. This dating is preferable to that of Diog. Laert. 9.23, who gives an earlier *floruit* based on the unreliable Apollodorus. For a discussion of Parmenides' life and dating, see Guthrie (1965), 1–3. For the relationship between Xenophanes and Parmenides, see Fränkel (1955), 348–9; Heitsch (1966), 235; Lesher (1992), 157, 183; Mogyoródi (2006), 149–57; see also Palmer (2009),

an unnamed Youth, who begins the narration, and a female divinity, whose two-part discourse constitutes nearly all of the fragments we possess. In her address, the goddess explains that there are two routes of inquiry, διζήσιος (*dizesios*), of truth and opinion:

> χρεὼ δέ σε πάντα πυθέσθαι
> ἠμὲν ἀληθείης εὐπειθέος ἀτρεκὲς[20] ἦτορ
> ἠδὲ βροτῶν Δόξας, ταῖς οὐκ ἔνι πίστις ἀληθής.
>
> (DK 28 B 1.28–30)
>
> "You must learn everything,
> the exact heart of convincing truth
> and the suppositions of mortals, in which there is no true credence."

She then develops this theme of avenues of inquiry through an extended metaphor of travel.[21] The first path she refers to as "is." The goddess identifies it as the "exact heart of persuasive truth" and throughout the poem uses what had been the rare, marked form found in Homer, ἀλήθεια (*aletheia*).[22] This usage either anticipates or agrees with the increasing rarity of other Homeric terms for truth in the fifth century.[23] The second

328–36, on the implications of reading Parmenides as responding to Xenophanes, with bibliography at 124 n. 1.

[20] N.b. ἀτρεκές: Simplicius gives the variant εὐκυκλέος ἀτρεμές instead of εὐπειθέος ἀτρεκές; Proclus, εὐφεγγέος ἀτρεμές; see Kurfess (2014), for the controversy.

[21] On the quest for knowledge: DK 28 B 1.28; B 8.16–19; B 8.50–2; for inquiry in Parmenides, see B 2.2; B 6.3; B 7.2; B 8.6.

[22] In the epic tradition, ἐτεός, ἔτυμος, ἐτήτυμος, ἀληθής, ἀληθείη, ἀτρεκής, ἀτρεκέως, νημερτέως, and νημερτής all refer to what is real, true, or genuine. Above all, the synonyms ἐτεός, ἔτυμος, ἐτήτυμος predominate. Levet (1976), 32, shows they account for 50% of truth-terms in the *Iliad* and 26.5% in the *Odyssey*. According to Chantraine, the etymology arises from εἰμί (the ancient interpretation) or ἐτάζω. A different family of words has, however, monopolized discussion of epic truth-terms: ἀληθής/ἀλήθεια. These are the rarest terms for truth in Homer: in the *Iliad* 11%; *Odyssey* 15.5%. Levet (1976), 33, contrasts Herodotus, who is at 60.5%, a relatively low percentage in comparison with Sophocles (85%), Euripides (75.5%), and Aristophanes (79%). As to their meaning, Heidegger's etymological reading remains influential, deriving *aletheia* from *leth-/lanthano*, where α-λήθη is read as "not-forgetting," a relation that puts truth next to memory in contradistinction to oblivion. For more recent scholarship, see the authoritative research of Cole (1983), 8, "*alētheia* is that which is involved in, or results from, a transmission of information that excludes *lēthē*, whether in the form of forgetfulness, failure to notice, or ignoring." For discussions on truth vocabulary in Homer, see Luther (1935); Boeder (1959); Detienne (1960); Heitsch (1962); Krischer (1965); Starr (1968); Adkins (1972); Kahn (1973), 363–6; Levet (1976); and Cole (1983). For *aletheia* and Parmenides' philosophical program, see above all Cherubin (2009). Mourelatos (2008), 63, holds that truth in philosophy moves from Homer's truth (bare facts), to a conception of truth as genuine, real, and authentic. See too Curd (1998), 25–7, 178; Papadis (2005).

[23] Just once does Parmenides use the Homeric ἐτήτυμος, at DK 28 B 8.18; in this respect, Parmenides presages the fourth-century eclipse of the multiplicity of truth terms in archaic *epos* in favor of *aletheia*. Neologisms balance their decline, as is evident in Heraclitus' dictum at DK 22 B 133, noted above, or in Democritus at DK 68 B 225, ἀληθομυθέειν χρεών, οὐ πολυλογέειν ("one must speak truth, not prattle on"). Democritus is an exception, as he does use ἐτεός, though generally in

route is that of "the opinions of mortals." This comprises forty extant lines of sophisticated theory on cosmology, astronomy, theology, sensation, biology, and embryology. The goddess stresses the importance of the two paths of inquiry several times in the poem and continuously connects the former with truth. As in Xenophanes, questions of epistemology in relation to inquiry come to the fore for Parmenides' divine mouthpiece. Yet it is crucial not to gloss over the fact that the Youth must learn *doxa* as well: "all the same, you will also learn these things, how opinions | would have to be acceptable always traversing everything." (B 1.54–5). However we interpret the relationship between the two sections of the poem, the *Way of Truth* and the *Doxa* – and this remains one of the most hotly contested questions in Presocratic philosophy[24] – *On Nature* does appear to achieve its objective of instructing the Youth in both fields of inquiry: truth and seeming. Parmenides' proffering of seeming and being as avenues of philosophical inquiry will have a long legacy.

Among fifth-century philosophers, epistemology and reservations on the ability to attain truth remain a fixture of the discourse.[25] Empedocles

order to argue that it is an impossible standard for human perception, cf. DK 68 B 6; B 7; B 9; B 10. However, at B 125 he asserts the positive attributes of reality as ἐτεῇ δὲ ἄτομα καὶ κενόν, "in reality atom and void." Sext. Emp. *Pyr.* 1.214 clarifies: ὁ Δημόκριτος λέγῃ "ἐτεῇ δὲ ἄτομα καὶ κενόν." "ἐτεῇ' μὲν γὰρ λέγει ἀντὶ τοῦ 'ἀληθείᾳ" ("Democritus says 'in reality atoms and void.' He says 'reality' instead of 'truth'"); cf. too, 68 A 49. At B 117 ἀλήθεια and ἐτεός appear synonymous as a standard out of human reach.

[24] On the problematic epistemological stance of the *Doxa* in relation to the *Aletheia*, KRS 262 is succinct: "Why [Parmenides' cosmology] was included in the poem remains a mystery: the goddess seeks to save the phenomena so far as is possible, but she knows and tells us that the project is impossible." For a less aporetic discussion, the classic treatment is Guthrie (1965), 50–7, who argues for deep cleavage between the *Way of Truth* and *Seeming*. Owen (1960), 54, equally famously, holds that its inclusion serves as a "dialectical" effort on the part of the author and brings the reader to the closest possible approximation of truth that can be achieved with such evidence. Hussey (1990), argues against Guthrie. Curd (1998), 104–10, similarly relegates deceptive dualistic astronomical and embryological assertions to the realm of supposition rather than truth. Cosgrove (2014), generally favors Guthrie's interpretation. Tor (2017), 163–221, argues that Doxastic things can be construed correctly and incorrectly by mortals, who must think in these terms, although Doxastic things should not be mistaken for approaching reality, i.e., what-is. Cherubin (2017), holds that the *Way of Truth* makes use of language and concepts in the *Doxa*, a fact that throws doubt on the status of each path of inquiry. Meanwhile, Rossetti (2017), posits that Parmenides is a polymath whose philosophy of nature is as true as his philosophy of being, even if they are not compatible. Alternatively, Sattler (2020), 119–23, maintains that Parmenides' cosmology is simply a "resource for being sceptical" about other cosmologies (120), not a reflection of what-is in any way.

[25] Parmenides' successors continued to be preoccupied with the status of truth: Protagoras is said to have written an Ἀλήθεια and Antiphon a περὶ τῆς Ἀληθείας. The prominence of weak skepticism is acknowledged as a feature of this period by later skeptics, e.g., Cic. *Acad.* 1.44, where Socrates allegedly admitted the difficulty of reaching truth along with Democritus, Anaxagoras, and Empedocles. Cf. Diog. Laert. 9.66.

speaks of the "narrow resources diffused through the limbs" that hinder human cognition (DK 31 B 2).[26] The diminution of the senses as a route to truth is also present in Anaxagoras, who treated them as insufficient due to their "feebleness": ὑπ' ἀφαυρότητος αὐτῶν οὐ δυνατοί ἐσμεν κρίνειν τἀληθές (DK 59 B 21) and instead offered *logos* as the criterion.[27] In the fragments of Democritus, the fraught relationship of truth to perception is highlighted repeatedly, as in, for example, "although it will be clear that in truth to know what sort of thing each thing is is intractable" (DK 68 B 8: καίτοι δῆλον ἔσται, ὅτι ἐτεῇ οἷον ἕκαστον γιγνώσκειν ἐν ἀπόρῳ ἐστί). His language innovates in returning to the epic term for truth, ἐτεός (*eteos*), but is otherwise remarkably consistent with the general reluctance of earlier philosophy to underwrite truth claims via sense perception.[28]

From this brief sketch of the evidence on the explicit reflections of Presocratic philosophy on epistemology, it should be clear that access to truth was of serious philosophical interest in the period and seriously challenged. Challenging the conditions for truth posed questions of the natural world and the conclusions able to be drawn from it. This negative and positive project of philosophical inquiry will be valuable for contextualizing Herodotus' voiceprint in the *Histories*.

Problematizing Truth Claims in the *Histories*

The *Histories* has been censured as arbitrary in its preference for "truth" in select passages and what is "probable" or even simply what is "said" in others.[29] In the context of Presocratic debates on verification and its complications, such equivocal claims become more intelligible. Problematizing truth claims often occurs in the *Histories* in the use of conditional statements: in speaking of the Phoenicians' actions toward the priestesses, the narrator conjectures "if truly (εἰ ἀληθέως) the Phoenicians sold these women, one to Libya, one to Greece" (2.56.1), then one would

[26] DK 31 B 2.5–9, for Empedocles' comments on the difficulty of acquiring knowledge. He is more optimistic at B 3.9–13; B 4; B 110.1–5.

[27] For Anaxagoras' response to Parmenides' challenge, see Kahn (1989); Furth (1991); Sisko (2003); Palmer (2009), 225–59.

[28] For Democritus' epistemology, see Lee (2005), 181–250.

[29] E.g., Lateiner (1989), 57, "His modes of determining historical truth and of distinguishing the knowable from the probable, the improbable, and the demonstrably false, and his techniques for separating deceptive and self-justifying statements from objective ones are pre-formal, in that no theorist of historiography preceded him and provided rules." And again at, 245 n. 1, "Herodotus clearly was no formal epistemologist." For a critique of Herodotus as capricious, see Moles (1993), 95.

have landed among the Thesprotians in Greece. In his discussion of the floating island of Chemmis, Herodotus does not reject the marvel out of hand, but expresses wonder if it is true (2.156.2). Similarly, he carefully qualifies the story of the Ethiopian spring with water smelling of violets, leaving a glistening oil on those who bathe in it, unable to support anything floating in it: "If it is truly what it is said to be" (3.23.3), then Herodotus speculates that it would have to be the cause of the uniquely long lives enjoyed by the Ethiopians. The Alcmaeonids freed Athens – but a note of uncertainty is sounded since they did so *if* the men bribing Delphi were indeed Alcmaeonids (6.123.2). This refrain of the provisional nature of conclusions that can be derived from the past highlights, as Presocratic thinkers did, the difficulty of achieving certainty in human inquiry.[30]

The standard for *historie* is often "truth," but the *Histories* frequently uses the term ἀτρεκής (*atrekes*), meaning "strict" or "precise."[31] As we saw above, in Parmenides it seems to have been connected to ἀλήθεια. On rare occasions, Herodotus affirms something positive with ἀτρεκέως, as in his discussion of the ethnography of the Persians, which is, significantly, divided between the narrator's own knowledge and hearsay (1.140.1–2), and in his guarantee of Greek knowledge of Egyptian history after the settlement of Greeks in Egypt by Psammetichus (2.154.4). Much more regularly, however, it reveals the limits of the narrator's knowledge with the phrase, οὐκ ἔχω ἀτρεκέως εἰπεῖν ("I am unable to say precisely").[32] At times, the lack of narratorial understanding widens into an expression of the limits of contemporary human knowledge: "the region to the east of the Bald Men is known accurately, as it is inhabited by the Issedonians, however, that which is to the north is not known . . . unless we refer to the things said about them" (4.25.2).

Likelihood also plays a role in thinking about truth – as well as falsehood – in the *Histories*. In the description of Kyrauis, an island whose mud is said to produce gold-dust when surveyed with feathers smeared with pitch, Herodotus is ambivalent about the marvel, stating that he

[30] Cf. Xenophanes' statements on his old age and travels throughout Greece at DK 21 B 8, which are qualified with the reserved conditional "if I know to speak truly about these things" (εἴπερ ἐγὼ περὶ τῶνδ' οἶδα λέγειν ἐτύμως).

[31] By way of comparison, Thucydides uses *akribeia*, "precision" or "accuracy." See Thomas (2017), 575–6, for a view on its connection with the Hippocratic medical tradition.

[32] DK 68 B 9: ἡμεῖς δὲ τῷ μὲν ἐόντι οὐδὲν ἀτρεκὲς συνίεμεν ("Truly we grasp nothing exact"). Cf. Diog. Ap. DK 64 B 5.17. The formula οὐκ ἔχω ἀτρεκέως is very common: 1.172.1; 2.103.2; 2.167.1; 3.115.1; 3.116.1; 4.81.1; 4.187.2; 4.187.3; 7.54.3; 7.152.1; 8.87.1; 9.18.2; 9.84.2. He uses "no one knows exactly" (οὐδεὶς οἶδε ἀτρεκέως) for universal uncertainty, 4.16.1; 4.25.1.

writes what he has heard. Still, he adds an analogous experience in which he says he has seen a myrtle branch affixed to a pole draw up pitch from a pool of water. This leads to the inference, "So the story that comes from the island that lies off Libya seems alike to the truth" (4.195.4: οὕτω ὦν καὶ τὰ ἀπὸ τῆς νήσου τῆς ἐπὶ Λιβύῃ κειμένης οἰκότα ἐστὶ ἀληθείῃ). This readily conjures up the fallibilism of Xenophanes, for whom things should be supposed as "alike to true" (ἐοικότα τοῖς ἐτύμοισι), given the provisional nature of human wisdom. For Herodotus, analogical reasoning is a powerful means for approaching – if not arriving at – epistemic certainty.[33] As for Xenophanes, approximating the truth suggests a value to οἰκότα in the work that *historie* is doing. Herodotus' expression of qualified conviction accepts that what is likely is significant to human understanding, not simply what is true. This finds confirmation in another marvel, on the alleged relay of offerings from the land of the Hyperboreans to the island of Delos. The Hyperboreans bring offerings tied in wheat straw to the borders of their territory with the Scythians, who convey them to their neighbors, and so they make their way to the Adriatic Sea and southward to Dodona, and then Euboea, and Tinos, before they arrive at their destination in Delos. This improbable transfer finds tepid verification, as Herodotus relates, "by myself I know a thing done similar to these offerings" (4.33.5: οἶδα δὲ αὐτὸς τούτοισι τοῖσι ἱροῖσι τόδε ποιεύμενον προσφερές), namely, that Thracian and Paionian female worshippers of Artemis the Queen also make their offerings with wheat straw.[34] He continues by insisting that he "knows" (οἶδα) these women make their offerings this way.

In his fragment on likelihood and truth, Xenophanes himself was reworking the Homeric and Hesiodic formulation according to which lies can be spoken like the truth. In the *Odyssey*, for example, the trickster figure Odysseus "spoke many lies alike to the truth" (*Od.* 19.203: ἴσκε ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγων ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα). In the *Theogony*, the Muses say "we know how to speak many falsehoods like the truth, and we know, again, when we wish, how to speak the truth" (*Theog.* 27–8: ἴδμεν ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγειν ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα | ἴδμεν δ', εὖτ'ἐθέλωμεν, ἀληθέα γηρύσασθαι). Herodotus playfully alludes to these passages in the context of another trickster, the Scionian diver, Scyllias. After enriching himself among the Persians, Scyllias defects to the Greeks, although how he does so elicits the guarded reservation that "I cannot say exactly, but I marvel if

[33] For analogical reasoning, see Lloyd (1966).
[34] See Smyth 1209a, for emphatic αὐτός as "by myself" or "unaided."

what is said is true" (8.8.2: οὐκ ἔχω εἰπεῖν ἀτρεκέως, θωμάζω δὲ εἰ τὰ λεγόμενα ἐστὶ ἀληθέα).[35] He continues by explaining that recounting episodes from the life of this Scyllias demands great care because "now there are some things about this man that are very like lies, and others that are true" (8.8.3: λέγεται μέν νυν καὶ ἄλλα ψευδέσι ἴκελα περὶ τοῦ ἀνδρὸς τούτου, τὰ δὲ μετεξέτερα ἀληθέα). Here, the allusion to the *Theogony* is activated, as the opposition between narrative approximations of truth and falsehood is maintained. In the *Theogony*, these lines are often construed as highlighting the Muses' creative control over their source material and its reception. The narratives on Scyllias by contrast flag the way in which inquiry requires human distinguishing between truth and falsehood, even if this is always an ongoing negotiation. Moreover, Herodotus reworks an important element of the Hesiodic Muses' proclamation in his statement that stories about Scyllias are "alike to lies" rather than the Hesiodic "lies alike to truth." This formulation gestures toward the complexity of truth, which can be deformed into appearing akin to falsehood. That is, impressions of falsehood must be carefully processed given the protean nature of truth. This represents a variation on Xenophanes, for whom truth in the mortal sphere is always uncertain.[36] As these passages indicate, the *Histories*' awareness of the value of likelihood to historical inquiry operates within a Presocratic sphere of discussion on epistemology.[37]

The eyes and the ears have been prominent in scholarly discussion of the empiricism associated with early Greek *historie*.[38] Herodotus is willing to admit the senses as viable routes to knowledge with greater regularity than some Presocratic thinkers.[39] However, his use of "eyesight" and "hearing" are usually coded to second-hand testimony and first-hand autopsy, rather than a simple ranking of sensory organs. With this restricted

[35] Thomas (2018) well treats the inclusion of false stories in Herodotus as a deflation of their heroic mythicization.

[36] Hdt. 1.192.4, for the ignorance of the narratee as a motivation not to report the exact truth. For an alternative, but not incompatible position, see Darbo-Peschanksi (1987), 164–89.

[37] Cf. the very self-conscious presentation in Hecataeus' proem, where he affirms his own *opinion* of the truth, *FGrH* 1 F 1a: τάδε γράφω, ὡς μοι δοκεῖ ἀληθέα εἶναι. ("I write these things as they seem to me to be true.") Fowler (2006), 98, connects Herodotus to Hecataeus, "Like Herodotus after him (but not, say, Herodotus' contemporary, Protagoras), Hecataeus considered truth a monistic concept, and probability an absolute criterion." But it is clear that the ethnographer could be read alongside philosophical bards such as Xenophanes – see DK 22 B 40, where Heraclitus links the two. The apparently shared background of "anti-traditionalism" has suggested to some that Xenophanes was instrumental in the rationalizing tendencies of Hecataeus, cf. Bertelli (2001), 94.

[38] Darbo-Peschanski (1987), 84–101; Hartog (1988), 260–73. See Hdt. 2.99.1.

[39] For Herodotus and sense perception, see Müller (1981) and pp. 2–3, 6–8, 9–10.

meaning in mind, the *Histories* does treat the senses as susceptible to deception. Reservations on hearsay go back to the Gyges and Candaules episode, when the Lydian ruler extends the invitation to see his wife naked, with "the ears are less trustworthy than the eyes" (1.8.2). This does not entail, of course, that the eyes are reliable. They are only *more* so than hearsay. The diminution of hearsay is echoed by the narrator in the context of the quality of the knowledge concerning the land beyond the Issedonians, which Aristeas even only knew of by hearsay. Herodotus continues by qualifying, "So much as we were able to reach certainty[40] by hearsay, as far as is possible, all has been said" (4.16.2). On the labyrinth in Egypt above the lake Moeris, he explains, "So I speak about the rooms below taking what I know from hearsay (ἀκοῇ), but the upper area that is greater than human deeds, I saw myself" (2.148.6: αὐτοὶ ὡρῶμεν). Hearsay arising from the Egyptians on the life of Rhampsinitus earns a special disclaimer: "Now about the things said by the Egyptians, to whomever these things are credible, let him use them (λεγομένοισι χράσθω ὅτεῳ τὰ τοιαῦτα πιθανά ἐστι). It is my fixed rule through the entire narrative that I write what has been said by each individual, by hearsay" (2.123.1).

Compare, for example, his treatment with Homer's exchange between Aeneas and Achilles: "we know one another's family, we know one another's parents, having heard the stories of mortal men spoken of former times" (*Il.* 20.203–4: ἴδμεν δ' ἀλλήλων γενεήν, ἴδμεν δὲ τοκῆας | πρόκλυτ' ἀκούοντες ἔπεα θνητῶν ἀνθρώπων).[41] In Homer, hearsay and the general agreement of men can underwrite knowledge. Herodotus' treatment of *akoe* is more circumspect and offers only the possibility of oral reports' truthfulness. His intrusions qualifying truth claims become part of the narrative contract and cultivate a skeptical audience.[42] They are also markers of authority, as one is exposed to the "problem of sources," as Robert Fowler memorably phrased it, and thus, the problem of reporting truthfully.[43] In this way, Herodotus is able to proclaim his own prowess in

[40] Wilson (2015), 74, omits ἀτρεκέως because it appears earlier in the passage. I reject this reading on the grounds that Hdt. does repeat this term, e.g., 1.140.1 and 1.140.2, 3.115.1 and 3.116.1, 4.187.2 and 4.187.3.

[41] See also Hom. *Od.* 11.363–7. According to Hussey (1990), 17, skepticism occurs in Homer when discussing: (1) the remote past including the heroic age; (2) the distant future; (3) secrets of Fate and the plans of the gods.

[42] Dewald (1987), 167. Cf. Marincola (1997), 7, for the intrusive Herodotean narrator.

[43] Fowler (1996), 86.

handling his sources, in contrast with his more credulous or ill-informed peers.

The Obligation to Truth and What-Is

The rarity of the instances in which the narrator confirms a *logos* as reliable must be contextualized as linked to the high standard maintained for truth claims amid Herodotus' philosophical contemporaries. Focusing solely upon Herodotus' reticence in making truth claims, however, neglects the select instances in which the *Histories* instead endorses an account or detail as true. As we saw above, *sophoi* display an obligation to seeming *and* truth.

Autopsy is often connected to ἀλήθεια, σαφής, and in select cases, ἀτρεκέως.[44] When Herodotus desires to know "something clear" (σαφές τι) about Heracles' genealogy, he is satisfied after traveling to Tyre and Thasos: "What I have learned shows clearly that Heracles is an ancient divinity" (2.44.5: τὰ μέν νυν ἱστορημένα δηλοῖ σαφέως παλαιὸν θεὸν Ἡρακλέα ἐόντα). Similarly, he affirms that the pillars he saw in Ionia were of Sesostris, rather than Memnon as some conjectured (εἰκάζουσί); in this "they were far from the truth" (2.106.5: τῆς ἀληθείης ἀπολελειμμένοι). In both cases, autopsy lends itself to verified knowledge. The expectation of reporting truthfully as an eyewitness is reinforced by a metanarrative passage in which Darius believes that his court ethnographer, Scylax of Caryanda, will relate his findings on India *truthfully* (4.44.1), which directs the expectations of Herodotus' audience to his similar ideal in composing ethnography.[45]

Truth may be accessible beyond autopsy through counterfactual reasoning.[46] The claim that receives the most attention is Herodotus' provocative affirmation that the Athenians were in truth responsible for the Greek victory during the Greco-Persian Wars. This is maintained not on the basis of Herodotus' sight but through a series of counterfactual historical hypotheticals: "Here by necessity (ἀναγκαίῃ) I am constrained to

[44] However, sight is commonly associated in the *Histories* not with vision but with dreams. Decoding this "sight" is notoriously difficult. Powell s.v. ὄψις, which occurs 79 times in the text; 46 of those instances are in reference to dreams, many of which are riddling, e.g. 1.38.2; 1.39.1; 1.107.2; 1.108.1–2; 1.120.1; 1.209–10; 2.139.2; 2.141.3; 3.65.4; 3.124; 5.56.2; 6.107–8; 7.12; 7.15; 7.18–19.

[45] Alternatively, Montiglio (2005), 143–4, makes a case for Herodotus' conception of truth as a literal report or catalog, on the model of Homeric epic.

[46] For explicit truth claims and narratorial certainty, see Hdt. 1.14.2; 1.95; 1.116.5; 1.140; 2.44; 2.154.4; 3.80.1; 4.152.3; 5.54.1; 5.88.1; 6.37.2; 6.43.3; 6.50.3; 6.124.2; 7.139.5; 7.214.3; 9.11.3. See Appendix 3 for additional discussion of this subject.

offer an opinion that will provoke resentment (ἐπίφθονον) among most people, but one that, nevertheless, appears to me to be true (μοι φαίνεται εἶναι ἀληθὲς), and I will not hold back" (7.139.1). In ring composition, the narrator reinforces this, stating that, "Now if someone were to say that the Athenians became the deliverers of Greece he would not miss the mark of the truth (τἀληθέος)" (7.139.5).[47] The repeated declarations emphasize his serious commitment to the controversial claim.

The structure of the argument is often passed over, but it is meaningful, as it echoes that of forensic oratory.[48] There are parallels with, for example, Gorgias' *Palamedes*. In this defense speech, Palamedes forestalls the invidiousness associated with self-praise by expressly handling the delicate subject:

> I therefore request of you that, if I remind you of the things done well by me in some way, no one resent my words (μηδένα φθονῆσαι τοῖς λεγομένοις), but consider that one who faces terrible and false accusations must (ἀναγκαῖον) also tell you, knowledgeable as you are, something of his true good acts (τῶν ἀληθῶν ἀγαθῶν). (DK 82 B 11a.28)

What precedes this claim is similar:

> Judges, I wish to say something to you about myself that may cause resentment, but that is true (ἐπίφθονον μὲν ἀληθὲς δέ), which would not be suitable for one who is not a defendant, but which is appropriate for one who is a defendant. (B 11a.28)

Herodotus' language situates his claims about Athens in the agonistic climate of the defendant on trial, which reinforces the contentiousness of his assertions. Countless scholars have commented upon this passage and registered its importance in the narrative of the causal chain leading to the defeat of the Persians during the war, and its stress on truth should tell against the notion of a narrator ambivalent concerning truth claims.[49]

[47] On this passage, see Kleinknecht (1940), who interpreted Herodotus' argumentation as arising from an Ionian philosophical and medical milieu. See also Evans (1979). Demand (1987), 746, is on the right track, barring the view of Herodotus as a "layman": "It should therefore offer us valuable insight into the way in which development in causal argument by professionals (sophists, natural scientists, and doctors) were adapted and used by an intelligent and informed 'layman.'"

[48] As noted by Demand (1987), 755–8. Analogous is Herodotus' insistence on the truth of the Constitutional Debate, 3.80.1; confirmed at 6.43.3, where again, logical inference has a strong hold on truth claims.

[49] For political readings, see Immerwahr (1966), 216–18; Fornara (1971), 45–58, 80–1; Lateiner (1989), 95–6; Marincola (1997), 173, examines the rhetoric of truth as a means of legitimating a historian's praise; and Baragwanath (2008), 227–31, thoughtfully treats it in the context of shifting motives. It seems to me that the brief statement in Thomas (2000), 190, that, "he attempts to

The ideal standard is truth, though it is a subjective one, μοι φαίνεται εἶναι ἀληθὲς ("it seems to me to be true"), with the infinitive following φαίνεται stressing the qualified nature of the proposition's truth content.[50] The conclusion, in which Herodotus presents another counterfactual with a hypothetical proponent of the view that the Athenians were Greece's saviors, includes the apodosis "he would not miss the mark" (οὐκ ἂν ἁμαρτάνοι) of the truth. Here too, the rhetoric of truth is cautious, as Herodotus attempts to win over an audience resistant to the argument in defense of Athens' role.

A key innovation in the discussion of truth is Parmenides' elevation of the participle of the verb "to be," *eon*, "what-is," as an avenue for epistemological discussion.[51] The first part of the goddess' revelation in the treatise is fixed squarely on *eon*. Its meaning as either an absolute "what-is" or a complement in the sense of "what is x" continues to inspire fierce debate in modern scholarship.[52] The goddess explicitly rejects the consideration of τό γε μὴ ἐόν (B 2.7); she avers that τὸ ἐόν cannot be cut from holding onto τὸ ἐόν (B 4); what-is (ἐόν) is ungenerated, indestructible, complete, single-born, stable, without end (B 8). This discussion as a whole constitutes "thought about truth" (B 8.50–1: νόημα | ἀμφὶς ἀληθείης), as opposed to opinion.

The effect of Parmenides' *On Nature* on subsequent debates on human knowledge cannot be underestimated. Melissus of Samos, for example, presented himself as an inheritor of the tradition of Parmenides. He exemplifies the continuing investigation into "to be" and its relation to epistemic claims:[53]

justify an unpopular view that the Athenians did the most to defeat the Persians," proceeding by "logical argument" and "likelihood" is correct, though it does not situate this in terms of a wider rhetoric of truth claims in the *Histories*.

[50] Herodotus states that he is reporting a variant several times in the *Histories*, 2.123.1; 3.9.2; 7.152.3, and closely distinguishes this from narratorial endorsement. Thomas (2000), 214, is compelling in her statement that "it is clear that the principle of 'saying what has been said' is very far from all that Herodotus is interested in, when it comes to other people's views."

[51] Most scholars now agree that Parmenides' use of the verb involves a mixture of the existential and predicative senses of εἶναι. This is also the case for Homer, e.g., Folit-Weinberg (2022), 172–3, 181–2. Earlier, it was interpreted as the so-called veridical εἰμί in particular by Kahn (1966), (1969), (1973). He argues, to my view unpersuasively, that this usage is evident as far back as Homer, stating facts, propositions, or statements to be "true" or such as "is the case," e.g., Hom. *Il.* 24.373: οὕτω πῃ τάδε γ' ἐστὶ φίλον τέκος ὡς ἀγορεύεις. These observations are modified for Parmenides by Brown (1994); Curd (1998); and Mourelatos (2008). Benardete (1977) and Matthen (1983) reject Kahn's arguments for Parmenides. See Warren (2007), 16–19, 104, for the broad dissemination of Parmenides in the fifth century; cf. Palmer (1999), for the influence of Parmenides into the fourth century.

[52] Gallop (1984), 42.

[53] See also Anaxagoras at DK 59 B 3.

> Well then, it is clear that we were not seeing correctly and that those things do not correctly seem to be many (ὅτι οὐκ ὀρθῶς ἑωρῶμεν οὐδὲ ἐκεῖνα πολλὰ ὀρθῶς δοκεῖ εἶναι); for they would not change if they were true (εἰ ἀληθῆ ἦν), but each one would be exactly as it seemed to be. For nothing is stronger than what truly is (τοῦ . . . ἐόντος ἀληθινοῦ). (DK 30 B 8.5)

Evidently, Melissus is grappling with the first part of Parmenides' treatise. His judgment in this fragment suggests that the phenomenal world represents a multiplicity that is itself not fixed, but changes, and, therefore, fails to meet the conditions of "what-is." For Melissus, humans incorrectly identify true what-is with objects of impermanence.

This relation of truth and what-is came to still greater prominence. The so-called veridical use of the verb "to be" as "true" is found in fifth-century Hippocratic literature, the dramas of Aristophanes and Euripides, and Thucydides' *History*.[54] The concepts became entangled enough that by the fourth century one of the ways in which Aristotle could define the verb "to be" was as indicating what is true (*Metaph*. Δ 7, 1017a31). Herodotus too uses veridical εἰμί in its neuter participle form. According to J. E. Powell, Herodotus uses τὸ ἐόν on fifteen occasions with the meaning "truth."[55] This is significant; he makes use of this veridical meaning more than any other extant author.[56] Given the term's prominence in philosophical debates on the proper subject of inquiry and the underlying nature of reality, Herodotus' handling merits examination.

The use of τὸ ἐόν as truth is present in the programmatic dialogue between Solon and Croesus at the start of the *Histories*.[57] The Lydian court at Sardis evokes the intellectual climate of fifth-century Athens, attracting as it does all of the leading philosophers of Greece. Croesus' imminent fall is prefaced by a virtuoso monologue on human happiness by the Athenian lover-of-wisdom (φιλοσοφέων), Solon. Important for our purposes is the interpretative frame that the narrator provides for this monologue:

[54] Hippoc. *Morb. Sacr*. 20: αἱ δὲ φρένες ἄλλως ὄνομα ἔχουσι τῇ τύχῃ κεκτημένον καὶ τῷ νόμῳ, τῷ δ' ἐόντι οὔκ, οὐδὲ τῇ φύσει ("The diaphragm simply has a name that is acquired by chance and convention, but not in truth nor by nature"); cf. Ar. *Nub*. 86; Ar. *Ran*. 1052, Eur. *El*. 346. The frozen adverbial forms in the dative become commonplace in Attic prose: cf. Th. 4.28.2; 8.92.11. A potentially early philosophical usage may be in Protagoras' *The Overthrowing Arguments*, or *Truth*, see Pl. *Tht*. 152a2–4 = DK 80 B 1. It is also found in Pl. *Crat*. 385b.

[55] In fact, there are fourteen instances of veridical εἰμί in the *Histories*. These are best translated as "true," "true reality," "what-is" – and are all absolute or attributive participles. See Powell s.v. τὸ ἐόν, "the truth," though he neglects ἐόντως, 7.143.6. In every case it is connected with *logos*, or language, with the exception of 7.209.1, where intellection is concerned rather than speech. Cf. the preference for the substantive participial use in Parmenides, e.g. DK 28 B 2.7, 4.2, 8.7, 8.12.

[56] Kahn (1973), 352. [57] For a discussion of this passage, see pp. 1–5.

> "So now a desire has come over me to ask you whether there is some individual you have seen who is the most fortunate of all." He asked these things, expecting to be the most blessed of men. But Solon, not flattering him at all but using the truth (τῷ ἐόντι χρησάμενος), says . . . . (1.30.2–3)

This question sets in motion Solon's positive account of well-being through two historical exempla and a series of ethical reflections on the condition of man. Solon's truth-to-power approach solidifies his position as "wise advisor" and has the effect of frustrating the Lydian king with its frank rejection of his aspirations. The guarantee of Solon's content as drawing upon "what-is" or, better, "truth" (τῷ ἐόντι) is seldom noted.[58] This may be implicitly focalized by Solon or an authorial comment; in either case, it is contrasted with the flattering and deceptive language of those who often populate dynastic courts in the *Histories*.[59] Croesus' status as absolute ruler endangers truth, but Solon rebuffs the seal of approval that the king seeks. The reference to Solon as a "lover of wisdom" corroborates the narratorial guarantee of his discourse as true, as it drives home the authority of the Athenian sage's response.

Given the association of τὸ ἐόν with a philosophical register, an innovation of the *Histories* is its applying it to the speech of a mortal philosopher, rather than a divinity as in Parmenides. He also departs from the preceding intellectual milieu in using τὸ ἐόν in reference to questions of human flourishing. Instead of evoking any specific philosopher, the language underwrites historiography's efficacy in enunciating universal moral truths much as philosophers aimed to do. But in tying Solon's words on the human condition of life as characterized by peaks and valleys, the unchanging nature of τὸ ἐόν is reconceived.[60]

The narrator redeploys this locution at the close of the Croesus-*logos* and the start of Cyrus' biography. Herodotus announces this new trajectory with the words:[61]

> ἐπιδίζηται δὲ δὴ τὸ ἐνθεῦτεν ἡμῖν ὁ λόγος τόν τε Κῦρον ὅστις ἐὼν τὴν Κροίσου ἀρχὴν κατεῖλε, καὶ τοὺς Πέρσας ὅτεῳ τρόπῳ ἠγήσαντο τῆς

[58] Stein 1.30: "τὸ ἐὸν 'die Wahrheit'"; Sheets (1993), 1.30, simply translates it "truth"; How-Wells and Asheri-Lloyd-Corcella neglect it entirely. A potential contemporary philosophical model for Herodotus may be Anaxagoras, cf. DK 59 A 30, as discussed at pp. 3–4.

[59] The emphasis of Pelling (2006), 152, is different but not incompatible with my own, "Solon's type of argument is expressively roundabout. He warns Croesus of the dangers, but very tactfully."

[60] For a Heraclitean interpretation of Herodotus' rise and fall schema, see Nestle (1908), 9; A. Lloyd (1990); as noted in Thomas (2000), 17.

[61] On the structure of 1.95 as a second proem, see Lateiner (1989), 40. It is in this passage that the narrative begins to track Persian expansion, which will be the overarching path for the rest of the *Histories*.

> Ἀσίης. ὡς ὧν Περσέων μετεξέτεροι λέγουσι, οἱ μὴ βουλόμενοι σεμνοῦν τὰ περὶ Κῦρον ἀλλὰ τὸν ἐόντα λέγειν λόγον, κατὰ ταῦτα γράψω, ἐπιστάμενος περὶ Κύρου καὶ τριφασίας ἄλλας λόγων ὁδοὺς φῆναι. (1.95.1)
>
> From here on out our narrative goes on to inquire into Cyrus, who he was who destroyed the empire of Croesus, and into the Persians, in what manner they ruled over Asia. I will write in accordance with these things what some of the Persians relate, those not willing to exalt the circumstances surrounding Cyrus, but who wish to say the true story, although I know three other paths of stories to disclose.

From the start of the *Histories*, Herodotus described his narrative progression using the language of spatial metaphors. In this passage too, in what might be considered a second proem, he returns to the spatial metaphor and broadens it, using the language of the "path of *logos*" in order to explain the *Histories*' shift from its first major *logos* into its second.[62]

It is worth observing the kind of grammar of truth the narrator appeals to in crafting the forward momentum of the text. In fact, the pronouncement stands out as distinctive; Herodotus seldom vouches for the intentions of his interlocutors.[63] Yet here, he notes that his oral sources are those willing to speak the true *logos* rather than to exalt (σεμνοῦν) Cyrus' history. This is comparable to Solon's unwillingness to flatter the Lydian ruler. Rejecting those wishing to deform Cyrus' life leads the narrator to follow those speaking the "true" or "real" *logos*.[64] In this case, the term underwrites the correspondence of historical inquiry to reality, shoring the Cyrus *logos* up against objections of fabrication.

The engagement may even be more targeted. Several elements within the passage evoke Parmenides: first, the verb of inquiring, ἐπιδίζημαι

[62] E.g., 1.5.3 προβήσομαι ἐς τὸ πρόσω τοῦ λόγου. ὁμοίως σμικρὰ καὶ μεγάλα ἄστεα ἀνθρώπων ἐπεξιών. Cf. also 1.11.2; 1.117.2; 2.20.1; 2.115.3. For the "hodological" nature of narrative, see Becker (1937); on the imagery in Homer and Pindar, see Ford (1992), 41–9. On Herodotus, see Dewald (1987), 149, 166; Payen (1997), 334–8; Nagy (1990), 236–7, who aligns Herodotus with Odysseus; Hartog (2001), 346–54; Montiglio (2005), 136–9; Purves (2010), 123, 145–8, who also connects Herodotus to Odysseus; and lately, Wood (2016); Barker (2021). For road imagery in Parmenides, see now Folit-Weinberg (2022). "Wandering" is associated with falsehood or *aporia*, see Hdt. 2.115.3; 6.37.2. Cf. the wandering of Parmenides' two-headed humans and wandering more broadly, DK 28 B 6.5–6, 8.28, 8.54, 10.4, 14, 16.1.

[63] Though see 3.2 and 3.16.5–7. This passage speaks against Verdin (1971), 228, "Nowhere does [Herodotus] appear to have linked the genuineness of his evidence directly to its authority." The fabrications remain, importantly, paths of inquiry – a fact that fits with the narratorial penchant to "say what has been said." On the sources of it, see Immerwahr (1966), 162 n. 35; Murray (2001), 38.

[64] As noted above at p. 167, the *Histories* begins purposefully as well, 1.5.3. Lateiner (1989), 60, finds that Herodotus withholds information three times: in this passage, in 1.177, and 1.214.5. On his method of including and excluding variants, see Immerwahr (1966), 55–6; Lateiner (1989), 76–90.

(*epidizemai*), is closely associated with the regular term of Presocratic "inquiry," δίζησις (*dizesis*). This noun and its verbal forms are prominent in Parmenides' *On Nature*, and the Elean philosopher apparently coined the prior.[65] Intriguingly, it is more frequent in the *Histories* than ἱστορέω (*historeo*), the verb with which Herodotus' inquiry is more readily associated.[66] Next, those individuals willing to speak τὸν ἐοντα λόγον are transmitted, with a hodological metaphor of roads of narrative-not-taken concluding the passage. These words recall the message of Parmenides' goddess (DK 28 B 2.2), who informs her audience of the "only roads of inquiry" (ὁδοὶ μοῦναι διζήσιός): "it is" (ἔστιν), which is pronounced the "path of persuasion, for it attends on truth" (B 2.4: Πειθοῦς ἐστι κέλευθος, Ἀληθείῃ γὰρ ὀπηδεῖ).[67] The other "path" (B 2.6: ἀταρπόν), "is-not," is left unspoken.

The Elean philosopher repeats τὸ ἐόν five times in the surviving fragments. As Mourelatos notes, "ἀλήθεια and τὸ ἐόν are equivalent in Parmenides. It will often be useful to refer to these two indifferently."[68] Herodotus' text similarly divides into a *logos* that literally "is" and those paths that are devoted to veiling truth by ornamenting reality. These three routes veer away from the single, true road that Herodotus ultimately recounts.[69]

The monologic path of truth that Solon and the narrator traverse pulls against the ambivalence that is elsewhere displayed in the discussion of truth claims in the *Histories*. Nor is this singular truth restricted to these

[65] DK 28 B 2.2; B 6.3; B 7.2; B 8.6. N.b., δίζησθαι is also found in Heraclitus, DK 22 B 22; B 101.

[66] Kahn (1969), 705: "[Parmenides'] term for 'inquiry' may be regarded as a poetic equivalent for the Ionian word for scientific investigation (ἱστορίη)." For Herodotus, see Powell s.v. ἱστορέω, which occurs in seventeen passages; ἱστορίη, five; δίζημαι, twenty-nine. This vocabulary is also found in Homer, e.g., *Od.* 11.100.

[67] For the "road of inquiry" metaphor in Parmenides, see DK 28 B 6.9; 7.2. See also Xenophanes DK 21 B 7, who prefaces an anecdote on Pythagoras with the following: "Now again I will traverse another *logos*, and I will demonstrate the path" (νῦν αὖτ' ἄλλον ἔπειμι λόγον, δείξω δὲ κέλευθον). For an alternative reading, see Darbo-Peschanski (2007), 82–91, who has also noted the unusual collocation, λόγος ἐών in the *Histories*. On her interpretation, the apparent similarity to philosophical language is superficial. Instead, Darbo-Peschanski interprets Herodotus' locution as giving one of two definitions: (1) first, "true opinion," or alternatively, (2) πᾶς λόγος "the whole discourse." For her, it is only one among other potentially valid discourses, with final adjudication resting with the narratee: cf. Whitmarsh (2013), 60. For evidence that challenges this reading, see, e.g., Hdt. 5.50.2; 5.106.4.

[68] Mourelatos (2008), 67. Palmer (2009), 107, notes, "τὸ ἐόν, becomes, alongside ἀληθείη, or 'true reality,' one of the goddess's preferred means of referring to the object of her principal discourse." Cherubin (2009), 63, "the road associated with *alētheia* goes far beyond what is required to support truth, unconcealment, or both together."

[69] Asheri-Lloyd-Corcella s.v. 1.95: "The three types of story rejected by Herodotus 'exalted' or 'departed from the truth in order to exalt' ... the king, either by emphasizing supernatural elements (see 122,3) or by portraying Cyrus' parents as 'great kings' of Ansan (as the official Achaemenid version)."

two passages. Rulers know that truth is unstable in their court, and this is precisely what Histiaeus relies on in his counterfactual deception of Darius: if the Great King heard "the truth" (τὸ ἐόν) from his Ionian subjects – and Histiaeus pretends to be dubious of this – then Darius is all the more to blame for the unrest in Miletus since it is he who removed Histiaeus from his seat of power there (5.106.4). Artemisia is one of the few willing to extend her "real" (ἐοῦσαν) judgment to Xerxes, because she has proven to be working in his best interest (8.68.α1). Alternatively, when the *sophos* Deioces flips the script on tyranny and insinuates himself in the political system by practicing the straightest justice, he does so by gaining a reputation for passing judgment in accordance with "the truth," τὸ ἐόν (1.97.1). Astyages' court compels the cowherd who saved Cyrus' life to stop lying and so he revealed "the true story" τὸν ἐόντα λόγον (1.116.5). Speaking truth to power has its downsides, as when the narrator chastises another *sophos*, Aristagoras, for reporting to the Spartan ruler Cleomenes the true length of the journey against the Persians. He ought not to have spoken "the truth" (τὸ ἐόν), Herodotus drily observes.

While Herodotus need not faithfully interpret Parmenides' fraught use of the verb "be," he does creatively refigure philosophical language for his own historical purposes, in this case, to carve out a discourse of epistemological rigor that had been set out by his contemporaries in intellectual culture.[70] In deploying language familiar from the Eleatic philosophical tradition, he stretches the philosophical referent of "what-is" or "truth" with respect to inquiry and does so in order to draw upon the authority that this language inspired in the broader fifth-century discussion of inquiry. Forking the potentialities of narrative and choosing the path of the true *logos* puts the *Histories* in the realm of the *sophos*, with a control assumed over truth claims that counterbalances the ambivalent treatment that they receive elsewhere.

The Limits of Human Understanding

In the *Histories*, it is significant that truthful narrative is seldom described as the outcome of an effortful process undertaken by the narrator. As we saw above, the Persian subjugation of Lydia by Cyrus spurred a statement

[70] Herodotus does not represent a privileged interpreter of Parmenides' poem, and we cannot retrieve an essentialist "true" interpretation of Parmenides from Herodotus any more than we can from reading Plato's *Parmenides*, *pace* Frank (2014).

on source material with Herodotus' decision to record the "true" *logos* in the face of alternative, non-authoritative paths of narrative. Because these three paths do not merit recounting, the audience is left without a clear understanding of the principles of selection that Herodotus operates with. Instead, we are presented with the polished results of the inquiry, in a process akin to that associated with his successor, Thucydides. More often than hailing the achievement of truth, Herodotus' metacommentary on the status of his source material demonstrates the difficulty of correctly identifying the truthful account of the past. It has been suggested that this enfranchises the reader to continue the work of inquiry in the wake of the historian. However, in many passages the ambivalence about epistemic certainty does not encourage readerly adjudication; instead, it highlights the limits of human knowledge and acculturates the audience to admit these limits and to embrace a fallibilist view of the past as not fully knowable.

In some instances, uncertainty is necessary because the past has been lost to the historical record. So Herodotus cannot relate what the false oracles reported to Croesus, since no one speaks of this (1.47.2); nor can he give the response given to Croesus by the other true oracle, that of Amphiaraus, "for it is not said" (1.49: οὐ γὰρ ὦν οὐδὲ τοῦτο λέγεται). The number of warriors in the Persian army from each nation is not related by any men (7.60.1); nor is the amount awarded to the best of the Greek victors at Plataea (9.81.2). Of the price the Mytileneans expected to receive for delivering up Pactyas, Herodotus confesses, "I am unable to say it accurately" (1.160.2: οὐ γὰρ ἔχω τοῦτό γε εἰπεῖν ἀτρεκέως), since the deal fell apart.

Frequently, conviction is restricted due to the frontiers of contemporary human knowledge. "No one can say" clearly or accurately what comes after the course of the Nile reaches the Deserters (2.31); what is beyond Scythia (4.16.1); north of the Bald Men (4.25.1); north of the Thracians (5.9.1); the precise number of female bakers, concubines, eunuchs, or animals in the train of the Persian army (7.187.1). A similar willingness to historicize contemporary knowledge is present in the common formula "of those we know" (τῶν ἡμεῖς ἴδμεν), which bridges the audience's and the narrator's epistemic community. We are informed that Pausanias carried off the greatest victory "of those which we know" (9.64.1), and that the Satrians are the only group "as far as we know" (7.111.1: ὅσον ἡμεῖς ἴδμεν) among the Thracians who never submitted to anyone but remained free "up to my time" (τὸ μέχρι ἐμεῦ). These conditions do not invite the audience to fill in the gaps left by the work of the Herodotean narrator so much as they

underscore the provisional nature of the human community's grasp of the past. It is this fragility that the introduction of the work thematizes in Herodotus' bid to maintain a hold on the past to keep it from fading into obscurity (1.p).

Ambiguity over human action further drives the uncertainty of truth content in history. As Herodotus describes the Spartan king Cleomenes' attack against Argos and the bribery charges brought against him after it, he wavers on the authenticity of Cleomenes' defense. Cleomenes defends himself by saying that he did not conquer Argos because an oracle had revealed to him that he could not do so. Herodotus is unable to adjudicate the truth or falsehood of this justification (6.82.1: οὔτε εἰ ψευδόμενος οὔτε εἰ ἀληθέα λέγων, ἔχω σαφηνέως εἶπαι), although the king does convince the Spartans. Motivation is another obscuring factor, as when Herodotus cannot say for certain whether a portion of Sesostris' army was left along the Phasis intentionally in a colonial effort or because the men deserted (2.103.2). Nor can Herodotus confirm whether Xerxes' decision to cast a cup, a bowl, and a sword into the Hellespont serves as an offering to the Sun or as penitence for his earlier scourging of the Hellespont (7.54.3). Later, it is left unclear whether the Persian cavalry attack the Phocians who were fighting alongside Xerxes at the behest of the Thessalians or on the orders of Mardonius – Herodotus cannot say (9.18.2). It is difficult to imagine precisely what additional inquiry the reader or audience is being asked to invest in resolving these claims definitively in the absence of extratextual evidence.

The uncertainty involved in Herodotus' reconstructing of the past cultivates a reader who is invited to weigh alternative and at times diametrically opposed narratives. After Pausanias conceived of his aim to become a tyrant of Greece, the Spartan king became betrothed to the daughter of the Persian Megabates, a cousin of Darius. Herodotus qualifies this with, "if the story is true" (5.32: εἰ δὴ ἀληθής γέ ἐστι ὁ λόγος), drawing one to evaluate the episode as true or as baseless rumor, without tilting the scale to one side. A similar effect is achieved in the description of the catalyst behind the death of the tyrant of Samos, Polycrates. Some say his murderer, the Persian Oroites, was egged on by a reproach against his record in not having brought Samos over to the Great King; others recount that an envoy from Oroites had been slighted by the tyrant and that this was the cause of his death. The narrator offers no help: "these two causes" (3.122.1: αἰτίαι μὲν δὴ αὗται διφάσιαι) are given and "it is possible for one to believe whichever of them he wishes" (πάρεστι δὲ πείθεσθαι

ὁκοτέρῃ τις βούλεται αὐτέων).[71] There is something very peculiar indeed in a hero's wrestling for truthful *logos* and ending by pinning down this ambivalent dictum. It not only dramatizes the fact that knowledge of the world is hard to get, as Dewald has persuasively argued, but advances an almost aporetic approach to select facts constituting the past.

Conclusion

Beginning in the sixth century, Presocratic thinkers reimagined their relationship to truth and authority, drawing attention to the privileged sphere of the divine in comparison with the weaker claims of men to epistemic certainty. For humans, there are serious obstacles to a true understanding of the nature of reality, as the provisional truth-status awarded to human inquiry by philosophers such as Xenophanes and Parmenides attests. In this respect, Herodotus' experimental text and its preoccupation with the difficulty of achieving truth in the historical record appears to be in dialogue with intellectual culture. In light of this, his repeated narratorial interventions are less peculiar than they may initially seem.

The *Histories* does not espouse a post-truth philosophy, however, in which all opinions are always equally valid and true. Even if its standards are seldom met, monologic truth remains the ideal criterion against which narrative is measured. By domesticating the participle τὸ ἐόν as a referent applicable to the past, Herodotus creatively co-opts philosophical language for his own purposes. Monologic truth, however, does not nullify the conclusions of those who have detected a wider ambivalence surrounding truth claims in the *Histories*. Like Xenophanes, the *Histories* is intent upon attaining a "better" record of historical action, not simply a true one.

[71] Cf. 2.123.1, 2.146.1, 5.45.2.