

## Multiple Motives in Herodotus and Thucydides

Thucydides famously attributes to historical actors motivations that he cannot have known. These attributions have attracted much scholarly comment, especially because Thucydides lays such stress on his careful method. Schneider convincingly argued that Thucydides believed that motivations could frequently be inferred from actions (Schneider 37–54). Scholars have debated both the reliability of the attributions and their significance for Thucydidean method, often apologetically (see citations in Tamiolaki 2013). Motives in Herodotus have received less attention, because he does not present himself with Thucydidean rigor, although Lang showed similarities as well as contrasts in their use of participial motive indicators, while Baragwanath's excellent study has brought new sophistication to questions about motives in Herodotus, suggesting that historical actors' real motives are less noble than those they themselves offer.

So far, however, scholarship has not used attribution theory within social psychology in the analysis of attributions in the historians or systematically looked at the folk psychology that lies behind them. This paper will look at some examples of multiple motivation cited in Tamiolaki 2013, in the light of attribution theory as presented in Malle 2004, in an attempt to show how the different reasons interact. One finding of social psychology is obviously relevant throughout: people provide explanations for behavior that is surprising in some way. We rarely ask why people follow familiar social scripts.

Herodotus gives three reasons why Croesus attacked Cyrus:

Ἐστρατεύετο δὲ ὁ Κροῖσος ἐπὶ τὴν Καππαδοκίην τῶνδε εἵνεκα, καὶ γῆς ἰμέρω  
προσκτήσασθαι πρὸς τὴν ἑωυτοῦ μοῖραν βουλόμενος, καὶ μάλιστα τῷ χρηστηρίῳ  
πίσυνος ἐὼν καὶ τείσασθαι θέλων ὑπὲρ Ἀστυάγεος Κῦρον.

Herodotus presents three reasons without explicitly explaining how they relate to each other, but they are obviously of different kinds. Trust in the oracle is what Malle calls an Enabling Factor. Herodotus assumes that even if Croesus wanted to attack Cyrus, he would not do so unless he thought that he would be successful. The other two motives are marked as desires by βουλόμενος and θέλων, but they, too, can easily be understood as functioning at different levels: more territory is a motive of personal benefit, while revenge is a justification. This type of reason is more often given by actors than by observers (Malle 2004, 141–2); Herodotus may want his audience to see this as a rationalization, especially since Croesus is under no personal obligation to avenge Astyages.

We may compare Thucydides' account of the Athenian execution of Aristeus and those with him without trial:

οἱ ἀφικομένων δὲ αὐτῶν δείσαντες οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι τὸν Ἀριστέα μὴ αὔθις σφᾶς ἔτι πλείω  
κακουργῆ διαφυγῶν, ὅτι καὶ πρὸ τούτων τὰ τῆς Ποτειδαίας καὶ τῶν ἐπὶ Θράκης πάντα  
ἐφαίνετο πράξας, ἀκρίτους καὶ βουλομένους ἔστιν ἃ εἰπεῖν αὐθημερὸν ἀπέκτειναν  
πάντας καὶ ἐς φάραγγα ἐσέβαλον, δικαιοῦντες τοῖς αὐτοῖς ἀμύνεσθαι οἷσπερ καὶ οἱ  
Λακεδαιμόνιοι ὑπῆρξαν, τοὺς ἐμπόρους οὓς ἔλαβον Ἀθηναίων καὶ τῶν συμμάχων ἐν  
ὄλκασι περὶ Πελοπόννησον πλέοντας ἀποκτείναντες καὶ ἐς φάραγγας ἐσβαλόντες.  
πάντας γὰρ δὴ κατ' ἀρχὰς τοῦ πολέμου Λακεδαιμόνιοι ὅσους λάβοιεν ἐν τῇ θαλάσῃ  
ὡς πολεμίους διέφθειρον, τοὺς μετὰ Ἀθηναίων συμπολεμοῦντας καὶ τοὺς μηδὲ μεθ'  
ἐτέρων. (4.67.4)

Their reason is given with δείσαντες, while the justification (here explicit), δικαιοῦντες, is an Enabling Factor.

When Thucydides gives multiple reasons, these often belong to different explanatory categories. So at 4.108.7 he explains why the Lacedaemonians did not give Brasidas the support he requested. Because Brasidas had been so successful, the reader could be surprised that his request was rejected, so a motive is called for:

οἱ δὲ Λακεδαιμόνιοι τὰ μὲν καὶ φθόνῳ ἀπὸ τῶν πρώτων ἀνδρῶν οὐχ ὑπηρετήσαν  
αὐτῷ, τὰ δὲ καὶ βουλόμενοι μᾶλλον τοὺς τε ἄνδρας τοὺς ἐκ τῆς νήσου κομίσασθαι καὶ  
τὸν πόλεμον καταλῦσαι.

The envy of the Spartan elite could be categorized as what Malle 2004, 90–92, calls a “Causal History of Reason,” in this case a trait. Their envy would make them tend to deny any request from Brasidas unless they had powerful reasons to grant it. It is an ongoing factor in the background. The second reason is their preference for a different policy. βουλόμενοι here does not indicate an irrational desire; they probably believe that this is the most advantageous move for Sparta. Observers often join Causal Histories with a specific reason (Malle 104-5).

The multiple motives conform to common attribution practices.

### Bibliography

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