Robert Prus and Matthew Burk
University of Waterloo, Canada

Ethnographic Trailblazers: Herodotus, Thucydides and Xenophon

Abstract

While ethnographic research is often envisioned as a 19th or 20th century development in the social sciences (Wax 1971; Prus 1996), a closer examination of the classical Greek literature (circa 700-300BCE) reveals at least three authors from this era whose works have explicit and extended ethnographic qualities.

Following a consideration of "what constitutes ethnographic research," specific attention is given to the texts developed by Herodotus (c484-425BCE), Thucydides (c460-400BCE), and Xenophon (c430-340BCE). Classical Greek scholarship pertaining to the study of the human community deteriorated notably following the death of Alexander the Great (c384-323BCE) and has never been fully approximated over the intervening centuries. Thus, it is not until the 20th century that sociologists and anthropologists have more adequately rivaled the ethnographic materials developed by these early Greek scholars.

Still, there is much to be learned from these earlier sources and few contemporary social scientists appear cognizant of (a) the groundbreaking nature of the works of Herodotus, Thucydides, and Xenophon and (b) the obstacles that these earlier ethnographers faced in developing their materials. Also, lacking awareness of (c) the specific materials that these scholars developed, there is little appreciation of the particular life-worlds depicted therein or (d) the considerable value of their texts as ethnographic resources for developing more extended substantive and conceptual comparative analysis.

Providing accounts of several different peoples' life-worlds in the eastern Mediterranean arena amidst an extended account of the development of Persia as a military power and related Persian-Greek conflicts, Herodotus (*The Histories*) provides Western scholars with the earliest, sustained ethnographic materials of record. Thucydides (*History of the Peloponnesian War*) generates an extended (20 year) and remarkably detailed account of a series of wars between Athens and Sparta and others in the broader Hellenistic theater. Xenophon's *Anabasis* is a participant-observer account of a Greek military expedition into Persia.

---

1 Robert Prus is a Sociologist at the University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada N2L 3G1. A symbolic interactionist and ethnographer, Robert Prus (prus@uwaterloo.ca) has been examining the conceptual and methodological connections of American pragmatist philosophy and its sociological offshoot, symbolic interactionism, with Classical Greek and Latin scholarship. Matthew Burk (mburk9912@gmail.com) completed his BA Honours degree in Sociology at the University of Waterloo and is presently developing a MA Thesis on "Being Managed: Experiential Processes, Problematics, and Resistances."

These three authors do not exhaust the ethnographic dimensions of the classical Greek literature, but they provide some particularly compelling participant observer accounts that are supplemented by observations and open-ended inquiries.

Because the three authors considered here also approach the study of human behavior in ways that attest to the problematic, multiperspectival, reflective, negotiated, relational, and processual nature of human interaction, contemporary social scientists are apt to find instructive the rich array of materials and insights that these early ethnographers introduce within their texts. Still, these are substantial texts and readers are cautioned that we can do little more in the present statement than provide an introduction to these three authors and their works.

One should not blind oneself to a recognition of the fact that human beings in carrying on their collective life form very different kinds of worlds. To study them intelligently one has to know these worlds, and to know the worlds one has to examine them closely. No theorizing, however ingenious, and no observance of scientific protocol, however meticulous, are substitutes for developing a familiarity with what is actually going on in the sphere of life under study… The person who perceives nothing of it can know essentially nothing of it. The person who perceives it at a great distance, seeing just a little bit of it, can have correspondingly only a limited knowledge of it. The person who participates in it will have a greater knowledge of it, although if he is a naive and unobservant participant his knowledge may be very restricted and inaccurate. The participant who is very observant will have fuller and more accurate knowledge… The task of scientific study is to lift the veils that cover the area of group life that one proposes to study. (Blumer 1969: 39)

While most scholars in the social sciences are apt to acknowledge the classical Greek roots of contemporary Western thought, comparatively few have had occasion to examine the literature produced in this era (circa 700-300 BCE) in any sustained manner.[2] Thus, while appreciating that the foundations of philosophy go back at least

---

[2] Whereas I (RP) have for some time designated the "Classical Greek era" as circa 700-300BCE as a convenient, practical reference point, readers may appreciate the insightful commentary provided by a classicist, Beert Verstraete. I have adopted it verbatim from a more extended set of commentaries he has kindly provided on my work:

A very general comment. You specify the time-span 700-300 BCE for the so-classical period of Greek civilization. Since the 19th century, classicists generally specify this period as 480-323 BCE—the former the date of the decisive naval battle in which the Greeks (mainly the Athenians) won a huge victory over the invading Persians, and the latter the date of the death of Alexander the Great, which is generally regarded as the beginning of the so-called Hellenistic period. This "Classical Age" is the period when the city-state of Athens enjoyed cultural pre-eminence in the Greek world, as well as imperial pre-eminence until the end of the Great Athenian-Spartan War of 431-404 BCE. However, your broader and more approximate dating has a lot of merit. By 700 BCE, literacy (albeit on a very small scale) had been reintroduced into the Greek world, with the introduction of a new alphabetic script unique to the Greeks. By this date, the works of Homer and Hesiod (probably composed originally in oral form) may have been already put into writing and were beginning to circulate as such,

to the time of Socrates (c469-399BCE), Plato (c420-348BCE), and Aristotle (c384-322BCE),[3] most social scientists seem inclined to envision the study of human knowing and acting as a much more recent, 19th and 20th century development.[4] Relatedly, although scholars in the humanities (especially in classics, philosophy, and religious studies), are generally much more familiar with the early Greek literature than those in the social sciences, those in the humanities seldom have drawn more substantial linkages between classical Greek scholarship and the social sciences.

In what follows, we will make the argument that three classical Greek scholars, namely Herodotus (c484-425BCE), Thucydides (c460-400 BCE), and Xenophon (c430-340 BCE) not only deserve to be recognized as ethnographers on a contemporary plane, but that their works also can contribute in direct and sustained manners to the development of concepts essential to the study (and knowledge) of human group life.[5]

These authors assume different methodological tacts and their texts are of differing emphasis and qualities, but each has much to offer to the students of human lived experience. For those who are not familiar with the works of these three authors, it is instructive to observe that the texts considered here (Herodotus, *The Histories*; Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*; and Xenophon, *Anabasis*) are complex, articulate, thoughtful, and extensively developed statements.[6]

---

although some classicists put the date of written composition and circulation much later, well into the 6th century BCE. By 700 BCE, too, most of the Greeks had adopted many of the other features characteristic of classical Greek civilization, above all the "polis" (city-state) form of political organization; the Olympic Games had already been founded in 776 BCE. 300 BCE is a good approximate date for the beginning of the Hellenistic Age, the end of which most classicists put in 31 or 30 BCE, when Octavian (later the first Roman emperor Augustus), with his decisive defeat of the Egyptian queen Cleopatra and her Roman consort (and arch-rival of Octavian) Mark Antony once and for all, at least for a period of more than four centuries, incorporated the entire Hellenistic world of the eastern Mediterranean and the Near East into the Roman Empire.

[3] As well, too, given the very uneven, often disjointed flows of scholarship over the millennia, amidst all sorts of political transitions, religious and moral emphases, and natural disasters, as well as wide ranges of intellectual intrigues, it would be mistaken to assume that scholarship has developed in a particularly consistent, cumulative, or effective manner in the intervening centuries. While some interim scholars (e.g., Marcus Tullius Cicero, Thomas Aquinas, Francis Bacon, Thomas Hobbes) have re-engaged the classics (particularly some texts from Aristotle) in ways that resonate with various aspects of contemporary pragmatist social science, these ventures do not match the contributions of classical Greek scholarship. Unfortunately, as well, these classical Greek texts have receded into the intellectual background amidst other fluxes and flows experienced by Western academics.

[4] There are some important exceptions. Thus, Bogardus (1960), Gouldner (1965), Becker and Barnes (1978), and Bryant (1996) all locate the roots of sociological analysis in classical Greek thought. For some more specific linkages of American pragmatist philosophy and the classical Greek literature, see Prus (2003a, 2004, 2006, 2007a,b,c, 2008a,b,c, 2009a, 2010).

[5] This paper represents part of a larger pragmatist study of human knowing and acting from the early Greeks to the present time. The larger project traverses an array of scholarly endeavors including poetics, rhetoric, theology, history, education, politics, and philosophy (Prus 2003, 2004, 2006, 2007a,b,c, 2008a,b,c, 2009a; Puddephatt and Prus 2007).

[6] While this is an analytical paper in many respects, we attempted to approach the three authors in much the same way that one might approach other participants in an ethnographic inquiry. Although unable to make direct inquiries of our sources, we tried to listen to what Herodotus, Thucydides, and Xenophon had to tell us in much the same way that we might listen to contemporary speakers. Fortunately, as well, the classical Greeks are exceptionally articulate on their own and frequently provide extended explanations regarding the matters at hand. Moreover, once readers begin to examine these materials in earnest, receptive terms they are apt to find that the texts of these three Greek authors may be read in ways that are not so different from the manners in which one might examine contemporary ethnographies.

It also may be instructive to appreciate that these statements very much appear to have been developed for the sake of sharing the products of one's scholarship with others. Hence, in contrast to those contemporaries who might engage scholarly endeavor primarily as a means of generating doctoral dissertations, producing publications for academic advancement, or pursuing financial compensation, these scholars seem primarily concerned about extending the parameters of human knowing.

At the risk of disappointing some readers, it should be observed that all three of these texts are substantial pieces of work on their own and we will be unable to provide adequate reviews of any of these texts within the confines of the present paper. Indeed, we can do little more at present than provide an introduction to these works. Nevertheless, in contrast to most other ethnographic material that is only available in an immediate text or paper of the sort published here, readers can more readily access translations of the three classical Greek texts featured here in most university libraries and on the Internet. Moreover, even though we worked with English translations, one can find translations of these texts in several European languages. Accordingly, we very much encourage readers, especially those who may be skeptical of our claims, to examine these materials at length, on their own.

In part, the more limited attention given to these texts in this immediate statement is prompted by the necessity of asking an important baseline question; namely, "*What is an ethnography?*" Or, relatedly, when and how might one define a statement as more, or less, ethnographic in essence. Although often taken for granted by those embarking on ethnographic research, this is an important consideration and is especially relevant to the present project if we are to establish the claim that three pieces of work developed over 2000 years ago deserve to be acknowledged as ethnographies on a more enduring plane. At the same time, this statement also provides consequential reference points for assessing the ethnographic viability of materials produced on a more contemporary plane.

Defining Ethnographic Ventures

Although social scientists generally have lost track of much of the Greek heritage from which the foundations of their own scholarship have been derived, it might be observed that the terms "ethnology" and "ethnography" are derived from the Greek; *ethnos* (people), *logos* (talk or thought), and *graphi* (image or representation), as are the related referents, *historien* (to inquire) and *historia* (the subject of inquiry).

Thus, while the term history is often invoked to refer to chronological accounts of things that have happened in the past, it may be appreciated that (a) the emphasis on inquiry is the more productive scholarly focus and (b) ethnographic works represent some of the most valuable historical documents to which future scholars have access.[7] As well, insofar as ethnographic materials are developed in ways that are explicitly and thoroughly attentive to human knowing and acting, these materials also lend themselves to (c) valuable transsituational and transhistorical comparative analyses.

Still, some people may be surprised, if not more overtly puzzled, to see the recognition accorded to three scholars who lived over 2000 years ago as ethnographers in a more contemporary sense. This is because of a pervasive

---

[7] One of the practical limitations of using ethnographies to develop more extended statements of particular (historical) eras pertains to the small number of ethnographic texts to which we have access from particular places and times.

tendency on the part of social scientists to envision or presume that ethnography is a much more recent methodology that developed more uniquely in 19th and 20th century anthropology.

Many scholars also may not realize that it was sociologists at the University of Chicago (Palmer 1928; Prus 1996) who, while exposed to some variants of early anthropology, actually articulated the methodology of contemporary ethnography more explicitly and extensively than their anthropological counterparts (Wax 1971).

It has been fairly conventional in anthropology and sociology to use the term "ethnography" to refer to the study of a way of life of a group of people, with the general understanding that researchers use observational, participatory, and interview materials to access and examine other people's life-worlds.

Within the social sciences more broadly, the term ethnography frequently is used somewhat synonymously with the term "qualitative", thereby referencing the very wide array of descriptive accounts of things that people might develop. These range from more fleeting journalistic reports to projects that are more pointedly developed from interactionist and ethnomethodological, constructionist, and phenomenological frameworks, as well as from functionalist, Freudian, Marxist (also feminist, cultural studies, and postmodernist) standpoints and all manners of mixes of the preceding approaches.

Still, *if* ethnographic research is different from other modes of inquiry, it should be possible to specify some criteria for defining things as ethnographies or at least distinguishing things considered ethnographic from other forms and emphases of inquiry. The development of criteria for characterizing ethnographic research is important for scholarship in the social sciences more generally, but it is of particular consequence for the present project since we are claiming that the ethnographic research tradition has its origins in classical Greek scholarship rather than in the social sciences of the 19th and 20th century as is commonly supposed.

If ethnographic research is the study of human group life or human lived experience, it behooves us to ask just what this might entail. At the onset, it is to be acknowledged that this statement clearly is *not* intended as a defense of anything that someone might identify as ethnographic.[8] Indeed, because we envision Chicago-style symbolic interactionist research as the most viable form of ethnographic research (Prus 1997: 191-247; Prus 2007c),[9] we are particularly concerned about attending to what would qualify as ethnographic research from a symbolic

---

[8] Those familiar with ethnographic research more generally will recognize the great diversity of orientations (e.g., functionalist, Freudian, Marxist, remedial) that qualitative researchers often assume, as well as the tendencies on the part of many academics to mix conceptual frames and/or ignore specification of their theoretical foundations.

[9] Readers may appreciate that there are considerable affinities between Chicago style symbolic interaction (Mead 1934; Blumer 1969; Lofland 1976; Strauss 1993; Prus 1996, 1997, 2007c) and phenomenological (Schutz 1962, 1964), reality constructionist (Berger and Luckmann 1966), and ethnomethodological (Garfinkel 1967) approaches. Still, those working within the interactionist tradition place comparatively greater emphases on ethnographic research and comparative analysis.

This emphasis on interactionist ethnography, likewise, does not deny the development of some highly instructive field research by those in anthropology (e.g., Spradley 1970; Bartell 1971; Wolf 1991) or in the social sciences more broadly (e.g., MacLeod 1993; Ekins 1997). While those in anthropology generally would seem to accept interactionist assumptions (Mead 1934; Blumer 1969) the anthropologists have not explicated a comparative set (or sets) of assumptions on their own (Wax 1971; Whittaker 1994).

Those who know the anthropological literature also will appreciate how difficult it is to draw analytic comparisons across studies conducted by scholars who so often work with variable theoretical viewpoints and invoke diverse methodologies. Although one finds some variations among those who work within the interactionist tradition, there is a great deal more overall consistency among interactionist ethnographers.

interactionist perspective. In part, this emphasis is justified by observing that it is Chicago-style interactionism that provides the clearest specification of the premises of interpretive inquiry that can be found in the social sciences.

Insisting on a sustained interconnection of theory, methodology, and instances of research, the interactionists (following Mead 1934 and Blumer 1969) not only explicitly have sought to specify their base-line assumptions, but also have been comparatively systematic in their methodology and conceptually oriented in their analyses. As well, over the past century, the interactionists have accumulated an extended body of literature that addresses human knowing and acting in direct terms. Those who approach research in more generic terms (as opposed to pursuing particular research sites or substantive applications) may appreciate the value of this extended set of ethnographic resources.

While the premises which the interactionist more routinely work may be used to assess the base line viability of ethnographic approaches more generally,[10] we have focused more directly on a series of processes that seem basic to human group life more generally.

Working from an interactionist perspective, it is possible to address the question of "what is ethnography" by utilizing a set of generic social processes (GSPs) as a frame of reference. Building on the works of Blumer (1969), Strauss (1993), and an ethnographic base that is much too extensive to list here, Prus (1996, 1997) identifies eight generic social processes (GSPs) as basic to community life. These include *acquiring perspectives*, *achieving identity*, *accomplishing activity*, *making commitments*, *developing relationships*, *acquiring linguistic fluency*, *expressing emotionality*, and *participating in collective events*. Still, following Prus and Grills (2003), we would add *managing morality* to this set of fundamental processual features of community life.

If one accepts these GSPs as concepts that epitomize community life in the making, then these notions may be seen to provide a departure point for identifying the major parameters of ethnographic research. Even if some do not accept the viability of these particular GSPs, these concepts address matters of human knowing and acting in important respects and, thus, constitute consequential foils to those who might prefer alternative standpoints. Minimally however, if one is going to discuss ethnographies in a meaningful sense, some reference points are required.

Viewing these GSPs as central to human group life, one may use these concepts as focal points in assessing whether or not some instances of classical Greek literature should be recognized as ethnographies in more contemporary terms. Because this list of GSPs was developed much more recently, it may seem

---

[10] Building on the symbolic interactionist tradition (Mead 1934; Blumer 1969; Strauss 1993; Prus 1996, 1997, 1999; and Prus and Grills 2003) more generally, we identify eleven premises pertaining to human group life. Namely, *human group life is* (1) *intersubjective*; (2) *knowingly problematic;* (3) *object-oriented;* (4) *(multi)perspectival*; (5) *reflective*; (6) *sensory/embodied and (knowingly) materialized*; (7) *activity-based;* (8) *negotiable*; (9) *relational*; (10) *processual;* and (11) *realized in instances*.

Methodologically, a fuller appreciation of these assumptions would require that social scientists attend to (1) the ways in which people make sense of the world in the course of symbolic (linguistic) interchange, (2) the problematic or ambiguous nature of human knowing (and experience), (3) the object-oriented worlds in which humans operate, (4) people's capacities for developing and adopting multiple viewpoints on [objects], (5) people's abilities to take themselves and others into account in engaging [objects], (6) people's sensory-related capacities and [linguistically meaningful] experiences, (7) the meaningful, formulative, and enabling features of human activity, (8) people's capacities for influencing, acknowledging, and resisting one another, (9) the ways that people take their associates into account in developing their lines of action, (10) the ongoing or emergent features of community life, and (11) the ways that people experience and participate in all aspects of community life in the specific "here and now" occasions in which they find themselves "doing things."

inappropriate to expect that researchers from two millennia past would attend to all of these matters in particularly direct or focused manners. In this sense, the requirement that any examination of human group life developed within any time period would meet these standards may seem somewhat stringent in defining the essence of an ethnographic study.

Still, we will ask how researchers generally might attend to these GSPs and then apply these notions to the works of Herodotus, Thucydides, and Xenophon. It is not necessary that researchers deal with all of these matters in explicit, sustained, or equal manners in any particular study. However, insofar as more of these elements are ignored or discounted in particular works, it may be argued that these statements merit less recognition as ethnographies.

First, in reference to *acquiring perspectives*, we may consider whether researchers acknowledge multiple viewpoints on the part of the group(s) being studied, either within those groups or in comparison to other groups. We also may ask whether researchers attend to people's viewpoints as matters to be learned and subject to application, reformulation, and negotiation.

With respect to *achieving identity*, we may assess whether researchers attend to images, identities, labeling processes, selective presentation and deception, and the variable ways that people act towards others based on the ways in which they define these others (as in self-other identities).

Third, regarding *accomplishing activity*, we may ask if and to what extent researchers address the matters of people doing things; as in planning, adjusting, coordinating, engaging objects, performing, and influencing and resisting others.[11] We may ask if researchers focus on human agency and detail the developmental flows of activity, and all manners of participant interchange.

We also may ask whether researchers attend to the *relationships* or bonds, affiliations, or associational networks in which people find themselves. Are researchers mindful of ways in which people envision, approach, engage, and disengage from one another? Do researchers consider matters of intimacy and distancing as well as the many ways (as in cooperation, conflict, persuasion, and friendship) in which people act towards one another? Also, do researchers attend to the multiple dimensions and developmental flows of relationships?

Relatedly, we may consider whether researchers attend to the ways in which people more fully involve themselves in situations, as in *making commitments* or investments, developing loyalties, or experiencing obligations with regards to the situation at hand.

It also is important to assess whether researchers are mindful of the central and enabling features of *language* for all manners of human knowing and acting (see Mead, 1934). Are researchers attentive to the symbolic nature of language, to the variable terms of reference and meanings that people may assign to the objects of their awareness? Relatedly, do researchers acknowledge the processes and problematics of communication (as in participants achieving intersubjectivity with one another)?

As well, we may inquire whether ethnographers attend to the ways in which people *experience emotionality* or deal with affective states such as excitement and fear, happiness and disappointment, love and disaffection, or anger and calm. Do researchers give attention to the ways in which people express emotionality, instruct

---

[11] Because the interactionists sometimes have been criticized for neglecting the study of power, policy making, and related matters pertaining to public sociology, we refer readers to Prus (1999, 2003b, 2005, 2007c) and Prus and Grills (2003).

others on appropriate modes of emotional expression, and monitor and adjust their own practices and notions of emotionality.

In judging works with respect to ethnographic qualities, we also may ask about the extent to which researchers consider the ways in which people participate in *collective events*, how they form and coordinate instances of these jointly experienced realms of association. Do they give attention to the ways in which people establish groups, engage others in collective endeavors, and deal with outsiders?

Insofar as *managing morality* (Prus and Grills, 2003) draws attention to the problematics of maintaining the social order of the community (and the subcommunities within), the matters of "defining trouble" (deviance and deviants), "participating in deviant life-worlds," and "regulating deviance' also merit sustained instances of ethnographic inquiry and associated comparative analysis.

As well as considering whether researchers examine the life-worlds of those they study in terms of these sorts, we also may ask two other base-line questions. Do the researchers (a) provide extended detail on participants' lived experiences and (b) represent the positions of those whose life-worlds are being studied from the viewpoints of those people (i.e., do the positions conveyed by the researcher reasonably reflect those that those people would have adopted had the researcher not been present)?

In the first case, we may be concerned whether researchers provide more extended descriptive materials on the experiences of the people whose life worlds are under consideration. Is sufficient detail given so that those reading the materials developed by researchers can achieve a more comprehensive sense of the viewpoints and practices of the people in the setting? Do readers have a sense of being there in ways that do not seem to have been unduly embellished or diminished by the researcher in the field? Does the text enable readers to achieve intersubjectivity with the ethnographic other? Somewhat relatedly, one may assess ethnographic research by asking whether the materials presented in particular studies are sufficiently detailed within to foster more precise transcontextual comparisons, as with the use of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967) or generic social processes (Prus 1996, 1997).

The second question asks whether authors endeavor to present the viewpoints and practices of those studied in as sincere and authentic ways as possible or whether authors use the setting to promote other agendas in dealing with the people in the setting (e.g., as in trying to reform, educate, or otherwise change those people's lives) or use the text as a device with which to promote moralist viewpoints with respect to audiences. Likewise, do the researchers dramatize aspects of the research setting in order to enhance their own personas or entertain readers?[12] All of these practices would detract from the value of an ethnographic research project.[13]

---

[12] A critical commentary developed by Lucian of Samosata (circa 120-200 [see Prus 2008c]) who addresses practices of his contemporaries who developed ethnohistorical accounts of human group life very much resonates with the practices of many present day qualitative and ethnographic researchers. Also see Schwalbe's (1995) commentary on the failings of "sociological poets."

[13] Having defined the parameters of ethnographic research in this way, one may ask about instances of ethnographic research on a contemporary plane that might qualify as exemplars of the criteria listed here. While necessarily partial (for a more extended topic contextualized listing of related ethnographies, see Prus 1997), some noteworthy monographs include: Cressey's (1932) *The Taxi-Dance Hall*; Lofland's (1966) *The Doomsday Cult*; Wiseman's (1970) *Stations of the Lost*; Bartell's (1971) *Group Sex*; Prus and Sharper's (1977, 1991) *Road Hustler;* Haas and Shaffir's (1987) *Becoming Doctors*; Fine's (1987) *With the Boys*; Schneider and Conrad's (1983) *Having Epilepsy*; Prus and Irini's (1980) *Hookers, Rounders, and Desk Clerks*; Prus' (1989a,b) *Making Sales* and *Pursuing Customers*; Sanders' (1989) *Customizing the Body*; Charmaz' (1991) *Good Days, Bad Days*;

Classical Greek Ethnohistorians

Although virtually all of the texts of the early Greek era may be seen to provide some materials pertinent to a fuller understanding of classical Greek life-worlds, and some authors such as the poets (Homer c700BCE; Aeschylus c525-456BCE; Euripides c480-406BCE; Sophocles c495-405BCE; Aristophanes c450-385BCE; Menander c344-292 BCE) and the philosophers Plato (c420-348BCE) and Aristotle (c384-322BCE) contribute notably to a broader ethnographic appreciation of Greek lived experience through their portrayals and analysis of human knowing and acting, we will be focusing more directly on three historians who examine people's life-worlds in more immediate and sustained terms.

The three scholars, Herodotus (c484-425BCE), Thucydides (c460-400BCE) and Xenophon (c430-340BCE) worked independently of one another and although Thucydides and Xenophon were aware of the writings of their predecessors, they all approach their subject matters and develop their texts in significantly different manners.

As with the Greek literature more generally, Homer's (c700BCE) *The Iliad* and *Odyssey* may be seen to set the stage for subsequent developments in Greek history and ethnography. While *The Iliad* and *Odyssey* are highly fictionalized, both texts provide extended accounts of people's life-worlds, viewpoints, thoughts, activities, relationships, and interchanges. Still, the two books attributed to Homer represent dramatic forms of entertaining literature rather than more scholarly examinations of human relations. We can only conjecture about how the ethnohistorical tradition may have developed in Greece. Still, it is important to recognize that the early Greeks not only had developed a highly sophisticated phonetic alphabet but also (following Homer) had become accomplished producers of literary texts as well as scientists and philosophers of note by 600BCE.

While not the first Greek historian of record, Herodotus provides us with the first (preserved) substantial analysis of Greek and nonGreek Mediterranean civilizations.[14] In the intervening centuries to the present time, the works of Herodotus and Xenophon have been overshadowed by Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*. However, all three authors are exceptional scholars in their own right and each of the three studies discussed here does much to contribute to our understanding of human group life. Whereas our discussions of these three texts are highly abbreviated, the full texts are readily available in hardcopy publications as well as Internet sources. Beyond opportunities to assess the claims we have made, readers are likely to find these texts extremely worthwhile for the rich array of observations and insights that they provide into another set of life-worlds.

Wolf's (1991) *Rebels*; MacLeod's (1993) *Club Date Musicians*; Karp's (1996) *Speaking of Sadness*; and Fine's (2001) *Gifted Tongues* and (2006) *Authors of the Storm*.

[14] Whereas Homer's *The Iliad* may be seen as a historically informed statement in certain respects, Homer (circa 700 B.C.E.) is much more appropriately acknowledged as a poet rather than a historian. Thus, although only a few fragments of his work remain, Hecataeus of Miletus (c525BCE) is generally considered the first person to provide more sustained ethnographic and geographic accounts of his travels in Greece, Egypt, and Asia Minor. Other historians writing before Herodotus include Charon of Lampsacus, Dionysius of Miletus, and Hellanicus of Lesbos (Mytilene). As Marincola observes in his introduction to Herodotus' *The Histories* (1996), Herodotus appears aware of several of these earlier histories (also see Sinclair 1934; Freedman 1946). Still, in the absence of substantial portions of these other people's works, it should *not* be supposed that Herodotus essentially copied or duplicated earlier studies.

> For if anyone, no matter who, were given the opportunity of choosing from amongst all of the nation's in the world the beliefs which he thought best, he would inevitably, after careful consideration of their relative merits, choose those of his own country. Everyone without exception believes his own native customs, and the religion he was brought up in, to be the best... (Herodotus, III: 38)

Although little is known about Herodotus' (c484-425BCE) own life we may begin by observing that Herodotus' *The Histories* is a highly articulate, massive, and multifaceted volume with extensive relevance to the social sciences -- particularly to scholars in anthropology and sociology.

While the most central theme of *The Histories* appears to be that of *providing Greeks with a Persian perspective on Persian-Greek conflicts* (c650-479BCE) of which the battle of Thermopylae (480BCE) is probably best known, Herodotus' *The Histories* is a great deal more encompassing than this (still considerable) theme suggests.

In the process of accounting for the development of Persia as a military force in the eastern Mediterranean, Herodotus provides extended series of accounts of the many peoples that he encountered in his expedition(s) into the Mediterranean (broader Egyptian and Persian) arena. In addition to acknowledging the considerable diversity of the peoples whose places he visited and describing their environments, life-worlds, and practices in some detail, Herodotus also develops ongoing comparisons of other people's activities with Greek practices and Greek notions of other peoples.[15]

While attending to the wondrous things he encounters and focusing disproportionately on some of these more exceptional matters, Herodotus intends his work to enable the Greeks to better know and understand the nonGreek or barbarian world.

The task that Herodotus has undertaken would be enormous even with all of the advantages of travel, communication, and literary resources available to contemporary scholars. That he was able to accomplish so much under severely limited circumstances indeed is a tribute to his exceptionally focused scholarship, analytic abilities, personal resourcefulness, and incredible perseverance.

Herodotus' *The Histories* has encountered considerable criticism over the centuries, ranging from his accounts of extraordinary matters, to claims that he presents selective, judgmental portrayals of particular peoples, to suggestions that he did not actually travel the Mediterranean as he says he did. Still, given what Herodotus has accomplished in this text, much of the criticism directed toward this volume is notably marginal in nature.

Thus, there appears to be much authenticity in the materials that Herodotus introduces, and considerable skill and care has been taken in the ways in which he pursues and records his subject matters, the way he orders this extended array of materials, and the considerable, thoughtful analysis that he provides in the process.

Herodotus provides only limited explicit commentary on his methodology, the obstacles he encountered, and his own skepticism of the materials encountered. However, it should be appreciated that Herodotus is an astute and highly

---

[15] Herodotus provides materials (the likes of which have been preserved nowhere else) on the Babylonians, the Massagetae, the Indians, the Scythians, and others. Notably, too, in developing his commentary on these other peoples, Herodotus invokes comparative references to various (and notably diverse) Greek states.

accomplished scholar. Clearly, he is a persistent inquirer and discerning student of the human condition. He expects somewhat similar qualities of his readers, particularly those of a more scholarly sort.

Intending to provide readers with an authentic account of the things he encountered, Herodotus assumes the position of an observer, an inquirer, and a listener. He reports what he has seen and what he has been told. Relatedly, on several occasions he pointedly notes that he is recounting what he has been told rather than confirming or asserting the viability of particular materials he has received from other sources. At other times, he provides two or more differing accounts of things, leaving it to the reader to choose between (or, as always, to question or reject) the things people have told him.

Although Herodotus often is ignored by contemporary anthropologists and other social scientists, those who carefully examine Books I-IV of *The Histories* cannot miss the rich descriptive, cross-cultural, and comparative anthropological analysis that Herodotus develops.

Thus, Herodotus is explicitly attentive to matters of cultural relativism, interchange, and transmission with respect to matters such as religion,[16] language, family relations, morality and deviance, death, trade, technology, military ventures, entertainment, in-group and out-group relations, and so forth. Herodotus also recognizes that each group of people both constitute life-worlds unto themselves and are amenable to ideas, technologies, and practices associated with specific other groups with whom they have more sustained or focused contact. Despite the highly enabling descriptions and analytical insights on human group life that Herodotus provides in Books I-IV, Books V-IX address the humanly engaged world in ways that yet more extensively approximate contemporary symbolic interaction. It is here that Herodotus addresses human knowing, acting, and interacting in more extensive and detailed manners.

When focusing more centrally on Persian political and military concerns and their contacts in conflicts with the Greeks, Herodotus develops these materials with an overall humanly engaged, processual flow. Books V-IX are noteworthy for their extended attention to: multiple viewpoints on the part of the participants; people's capacities for reflectivity, anticipation, and deliberation; activities of both more solitary and collective natures; and tactical interchange, as in trust, deception, influence work, resistance, negotiation, and overt conflict; as well as the formation, maintenance, and dissipation of alliances.

In addition to those people and things that were more accessible to immediate inquiry and observation on his part, it should be appreciated that Herodotus also was studying people and events that predated him. Accordingly, he was not able to speak in direct terms with many of the principal actors. At the same time, he is intent on presenting things from these people's viewpoints. In their absence, he attends carefully to those contemporaries who are best able to represent the positions of these earlier individuals and uses other opportunities and materials to ascertain the viability of his information. Although parts of his database clearly are more problematic, contemporary scholars might appreciate that the people and events with which Herodotus was dealing in these latter chapters were matters of great consequence and immediacy to the Persians and others with whom he had contact.

Readers may be skeptical of certain features of the accounts that Herodotus recorded from what was told to him by the Persians and others. However, it should

---

[16] Religious studies scholars and others interested in the sociology of knowledge may appreciate the explicit debunking of Greek theology (associated with Homer and Hesiod) that Herodotus (Book II: 52-53) provides in the midst of a much more extensive account (Book II) of Egyptian life-worlds.

be appreciated that Herodotus still developed a highly detailed, articulate, and sustained set of accounts of the various peoples he encountered in the eastern Mediterranean area. Indeed, he provides some very compelling descriptions of people's life-worlds and practices that would have otherwise never been available to the academic community. As well, despite some limitations, Herodotus' *The Histories* not only represented a foundational reference point for other "ethnohistorians" and analysts of the human condition but his text also serves as valuable resource for comparative analysis in the study of a great many processual aspects of community life.

Thucydides -- History of the Peloponnesian War

> As to the speeches that were made by different men, either when they were about to begin the war or when they were already engaged therein, the words actually spoken, both for me as regards that which I myself heard, and for those who from various other sources have brought me reports. Therefore the speeches are given in the language in which, as it seemed to me, the several speakers would express, on the subjects under consideration, though at the same time I have adhered as closely as possible to the general sense of what was actually said. But as to the facts of the occurrences of the war, I have thought it my duty to give them, not as ascertained from any chance informant nor as seemed to me probable, but only after investigating with the greatest possible accuracy each detail, in the case both of the events in which I myself participated and of those regarding which I got my information from others. And the endeavour to ascertain these facts was a laborious task, because those who were eye-witnesses of the several events did not give the same reports about the same things, but reports varying according to their championship of one side or the other, or according to their recollection. And it may well be that the absence of the fabulous from my narrative will seem less pleasing to the ear; but whoever shall wish to have a clear view both of the events which have happened and of those which will some day, in all human probability, happen again in the same or a similar way -for these to adjudge my history profitable will be enough for me. And, indeed, it has been composed, not as a prize-essay to be heard for the moment, but as a possession for all time. (Thucydides – Book I: xxii)

In presenting his study of the Peloponnesian War (431-404BCE), Thucydides provides a detailed, humanly engaged, chronological account of a series of confrontations and treaties between Sparta and Athens (and various other states in the Greek world). Although Thucydides' account ends somewhat abruptly in 411BCE, he intends that his statement will have enduring relevance for people interested in intergroup relations.

Whereas Herodotus built on other people's accounts of their situations and tales of the past, blending these with his own observations and investigations of the present in developing *The Histories*, Thucydides (c460-400BCE) wrote primarily as a contemporary who not only participated in some of the events on which he reports, but who also talked at some length with others (Spartans, Athenians, and other Greek representatives) about their experiences with these and related matters.

As a scholar particularly intent on providing a careful, reliable, and enduring account of the events and human interchanges that took place in the wars in which Athens and Sparta, and their respective but shifting sets of allies and antagonists became embroiled, Thucydides explicitly distances himself from poets and popular

chroniclers. Thucydides also intends, explicitly and openly, to represent as many sides and aspects of specific engagements (battles, alliances, home-front matters) as he is able, without endorsing or condemning any of the parties (or their viewpoints) in these exchanges.

The History of the Peloponnesian War is an extended study of human enterprise and human relations in the political arena. It is a study of intergroup relations as well as the study of people's relations within groups. Further, because Thucydides was not mislead by the artificial macro-micro structuralist distinction that sociologists and political scientists would invoke 2000 years later, he examines an assortment of political life-worlds in ways that directly and compellingly illustrate the relevance of enacted human relations and interchanges for wide ranges of social order in community life and intergroup relations more explicitly.

Attending directly to the humanly known and engaged world, Thucydides, explicitly and at some length, addresses the matters of war and peace; alliances and treaties; morality and condemnation; conquest and defeat; sincerity and deception; loyalty and betrayal; self-interest and community emphases; good fortune and unforeseen hardship; honor and disgrace; anticipation and surprise; planning and confusion; confidence and fear; compassion and revenge; resourcefulness and destruction.

This is not a study of personalities or personality types nor is it an attempt to reduce human affairs to structuralist factors. Instead, Thucydides attends, with great care to people's viewpoints, definitions of situations, deliberations, identities, activities, relationships, and a wide range of situated interchanges.

While Thucydides clearly acknowledges the developmental flow of community life and the implications of earlier activities and events for setting the various stages on which people subsequently find themselves, Thucydides very much appreciates the situated and enacted nature of human conduct. Relatedly, the emphasis is on the participants, their viewpoints, their activities, interactions, and adjustments.

In attending to the great many theaters of operation and the varied participants in the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides envisions people as agents who have capacities for reflective activity, deliberation, and wide arrays of strategic interchange.

Those who read Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* will find an extended collection of speeches that directly address *political* (civil, military, and intergroup) matters. The instances of rhetoric (as influence work and resistance) on which Thucydides reports include things such as: issues of leadership, support and morale; the making, avoiding, and stalling of war or peace; the development, severance and reconstitution of alliances and treaties; the problems of preparing for, coordinating, and adjusting to troublesome situations; the development and revision of policies; the task of negotiating events with multiple parties, including those on the home front; the problems of defining sanctions for defeated enemies; and concerns with deception, loyalty, and responsibility.[17]

Spanning a twenty-year period, Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* provides some of the most compelling sets of rhetorical interchanges available in the literature. In the process, he makes a great many insightful observations regarding people's tactical deployments of speeches, auditor assessments of these speeches (including recollective memories, anticipations, concerns with motivations and

---

[17] Readers familiar with the writings of Cicero and Quintilian will recognize that these later Roman rhetoricians not only benefited from Thucydides' treatment of rhetoric, but also had great respect for Thucydides' scholarship.

deceptions), and auditor counter responses and adjustments. Indeed, it would be difficult for careful readers not to be amazed at the extensive and detailed array of speeches that Thucydides presents in this volume.

Thucydides is acutely mindful of the multiplicity of viewpoints and interests that people may invoke in their relations with one another across situations and overtime. Likewise, he goes to some length to establish the particular viewpoints that different parties may take with respect to one another and acknowledges the sorts of uncertainties and deliberations with which they approach situations -- as well as in the limited time-frames in which people so often operate.

Thucydides deals with group relations at great length and is highly attentive to people's relations with a variety of outsiders (with shifting interests and alignments) as well as their relations with a wide assortment of insiders. Relatedly, Thucydides openly considers the reputations and images that people associate with one another, both as insiders and outsiders. He explicitly addresses the collective memories and stocks of knowledge that people develop with respect to outsiders, including the ways in which particular outsiders have dealt with them and with other people.

He also is mindful of the different images that people may have with respect to themselves, their associates in the field, the people on the home front, their allies, and adversaries. Likewise, Thucydides is attentive to the many different roles (as well as the more central and marginal manners) in which people may engage one another in their various theaters of operation. He also recognizes that people in political and military spheres face the task of operating in multiple theaters (as in dealing with enemies, allies, one's own supporters, and insider opposition) on a more or less simultaneous basis.

Accordingly, in addition to acknowledging the ways that people interact with one another and anticipate the activities of particular others, Thucydides also discusses the ways in which people might assist, promote, disrupt, and discourage the objectives and activities of others in their broader theaters of operations. Thucydides is well aware that people have the capacity to define and redefine the things with which they deal. He is highly cognizant of the particular forms of language or terms of reference that people may use in defining the objects of their awareness and concern as well as promoting their preferred definitions of things to others.

To his credit, as well, Thucydides is highly attentive to the formation and coordination of associations. He attends to preparations regarding matters of funding, supplying, and staffing groups. He addresses planning and negotiated deliberation on the part of the participants, as well as the ways that people engage, assess, and adjust to situations (and other people).

Thucydides' considerations of the alliance-making process (as in formation, continuities, dissolution, and resurrection) also are highly remarkable. In addition to indicating the ways in which various parties may assume roles as insiders and outsiders with respect to one another across a range of contexts, he also indicates the importance of people's alliances for the degrees of freedom that they may assume in acting towards others. Thus, depending on people's affiliations with other parties, they (political figures, states, and alliances) may get drawn into things that they had not intended. They also may attempt to use their affiliations with particular others as levers in dealing with insiders as well as outsiders.

Relatedly, Thucydides reminds us that any changes in personnel, policy, governments, resources, or problems in some area, that involve one's allies, oneself, or other parties can be highly disruptive to the situations of particular groups and can radically redefine the value of particular alliances.

Thucydides' work on the negotiation of terms between hostile parties represents another highly compelling aspect of his work. Because his material is so detailed, it offers exceptional insight into the ways in which agreements are developed, sustained, readjusted, disregarded, scuttled, and possibly renegotiated.

Xenophon – Anabasis (The Persian Expedition)

> Soldiers, you must not be downhearted because of recent events. I can assure you that here are as many advantages as disadvantages in what has happened. First, you have the assurance that the men who are going to act as our guides are genuine enemies of those whom we have to fight. Then there is the fact that those Greeks who neglected to stay with us in their positions, and considered themselves capable of having the same success with the natives as they have under our command, have been taught a lesson, and will be less inclined on another occasion to leave the post where we have put them. What you have to do is to conduct yourselves in such a way that you will appear to the natives, even the ones on our side, as better men than they are, and make it plain to the enemy that they will not have to fight now with the same sort of people as they did when you were not properly organized. (Xenophon 1972:235)

Whereas Herodotus and Thucydides are known for single preserved texts, Xenophon (c430-340BCE) wrote a number of different works, several of which have survived. Although some other texts that Xenophon developed have significant ethnographic qualities (including Hellenica, The Cavalry Commander, and Oeconomicus),[18] we will be concentrating primarily on Anabasis (or The Persian Expedition).[19]

As a participant-observer account of a Greek military expedition (401-399BCE) into Persia, *Anabasis* has much more of a journalistic flow than do the statements developed by Herodotus and Thucydides. Although Xenophon's *Anabasis* does not achieve the extended detail or analytical rigor of Thucydides' *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, Xenophon is a sustained participant in a comparatively more contained set of collective events.

By attending to the interchanges involving an assortment of military personnel from different Greek communities and the various outsiders that the Greeks encountered on their expedition, *Anabasis* provides extensive insight into the obstacles, dilemmas, interchanges, and adjustments that the Greeks experienced in dealing with one another and the peoples they encountered both on their journey deep into the heart of the Persian empire and during their subsequent struggle to return to Greece.

Xenophon began his journey with "The Ten Thousand" (Greek mercenaries) not as a military officer or soldier but as a traveling companion of sorts (on the encouragement of a friend who planned to introduce Xenophon to Cyrus the Prince

---

[18] Albeit seemingly intended as a concluding sequel to Thucydides work on the Peloponnesian War, *Hellenica* is a much less thorough and adequate account than that provided by Thucydides. *The Cavalry Commander* represents an insider-based set of instructions on the management of military campaigns and the objects of deployment. *Oeconomicus* deals with the management of estates (property) but is developed in considerably more generic terms.

[19] Of the three classical Greek ethnographies addressed herein, Xenophon's *Anabasis* is by far the easiest to read. However, Xenophon's *Anabasis* is much better appreciated as an instance of analytic scholarship after studying Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War.* This is probably because one can situate Xenophon's account within the conceptual set of background materials that Thucydides provides. This allows one to more fully appreciate some important aspects of group relations that Xenophon presents in seemingly more casual manners.

of Persia -- the brother of Artaxerxes II, the King of Persia). Following a complicated set of military deceptions that changed the course of the intentions of those who had originally signed up to fight another group of people, the Greek expedition subsequently realized that they would be fighting on the side of Cyrus who intended to militarily overthrow his brother as king.

After a series of disasters, including a successful treacherous plot to deprive the Greek army of their generals, captains, and some trusted soldiers, the remaining members of the Greek militia found themselves near the King's capital city, a thousand miles deep in Parisian territory, without any central leadership and in the midst of communities of people who defined the Greeks as their enemies.

While desirous of regaining lost Greek honor and benefiting personally from their hapless expedition in whatever way they could on their own, the Greeks also recognized that short-term survival and a longer term objective of returning home safely were matters of considerable concern.

In the void created by the deaths of all upper echelon Greek military personnel, Xenophon was selected as one of the leaders of the expedition. With Xenophon assuming this new, somewhat precarious management role, *Anabasis* depicts the day-to-day circumstances that the Greek expedition encountered and the ways that they dealt with these situations.

For the Greeks, the expedition consisted of an ongoing series of life-and-death challenges involving an often-hostile geographical climate and the wide array of encounters with those populating the various sectors of the Persian Empire into which the Greeks trod. Xenophon provides an account of the collectively experienced and engaged life worlds in which the members of the Greek expedition found themselves.

In addition to the ambiguities, obstacles, and points of the diversity encountered from various Persian peoples (often with notably differing concerns, moralities, and loyalties), the Greek expedition also faced many instances of internal confusion and dissension, as well as struggles for leadership and allegations of disloyalty.

Clearly mindful of the multiple viewpoints of the participants involved in the setting, Xenophon also is highly attentive to people's capacities for reflectivity, deliberation, influence work and resistance, as well as people's involvements in overt conflict and more covert deception and treachery. In many respects, *Anabasis* is the study of management in the making, but it also is an account of people's reactions to the management endeavors of others.

While one might hope for more detailed accounts of many of the situations that transpired, Xenophon gives considerable, often highly insightful, attention to the decision making process and provides some particularly valuable material on the ways that people endeavor to influence and resist one another. This is especially evident in the speeches that people make to the assemblies they face and in the ways in which Xenophon deals with people's concerns and activities as they strive for particular images and identities with respect to the Greeks and others in the environment -- as they try to maintain and promote enthusiasm in the face of difficulty and loss, and attempt to achieve direction and sustained focus in their collective ventures.

Xenophon does not achieve the overall depth or analytical rigor that characterizes Thucydides' work. Nevertheless, *Anabasis* remains a valuable, focused and instructive account of human group life and has particular relevance for the study of intergroup relations, management, and collective behavior.

In Perspective

In concluding this paper, we ask about the viability of the works of Herodotus, Thucydides, and Xenophon as ethnographic resources that are relevant to contemporary studies of human knowing and acting. The answer to this question will be developed in several ways. First, we return to the GSPs we identified essential to the ethnographic study of human group life, asking to what extent Herodotus, Thucydides, and Xenophon address these matters.

Next, we consider how these early Greek texts compare with materials developed at the juncture of 19th and 20th centuries by North American scholars who also embarked on instances of ethnographic research.[20]

Subsequently, the comparison is extended to include the ethnographic research done to the present time. We then raise the standards even higher and ask about the place of the Greek texts with respect to the interactionist quest for more distinctive analytic ethnographies.

Finally, we ask about the value of these three Greek texts as a set of resources pertaining to the study of political life, management, and collective behavior more generally. Mindful of these objectives, readers may appreciate that these discussions necessarily will be highly compacted.

Since we are unable to represent these texts in greater detail, it will be necessary to assume some liberties in the claims that we make with respect to the works of Herodotus, Thucydides and Xenophon. Still, because these texts are widely available, readers may readily assess our claims by examining these materials in more sustained detail.

When defining the criteria (GSPs) for more adequate ethnographies we said that it was essential that scholars in the field attend to the matters of *acquiring perspectives*, *achieving identity*, *accomplishing activity*, *making commitments*, *developing relationships*, *acquiring linguistic fluency*, *expressing emotionality*, *participating in collective events, and managing morality.*

Even though we have been making judgments about the extent to which each of these authors has addressed or dealt with these GSPs throughout this project, the immediate assessments represent little more than a rudimentary overview of these matters. We begin by observing that Thucydides offers an ethnography that not only has exceptional scope and depth, but also is compelling in all of these areas.

Still, all three authors are notably strong with respect to the matters of multiple perspectives, the enabling qualities of speech (linguistic fluency), and the coordination of collective events (including intergroup relations and conflict).

The GSPs pertaining to people's identities and reputations, activity as a pragmatically constructed set of pursuits, commitments and obligations, the development of relationships, and people's experiences with emotionality are especially prominent in Thucydides text, but they also are strongly evident in Xenophon's volume. These GSPs receive noteworthy, but considerably less attention in Herodotus' *The Histories*.

The matter of managing morality also receives considerable attention in each of these texts. Not only are each of these authors aware of the diversity and relativity of

---

[20] Judging from Emile Durkheim's (1912) *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, some very competent ethnographic materials had been developed by some European ethnologists around the turn of the 20th century. This also is suggested by the extended commentary on ethnography developed by Marcel Mauss (2007) who had been very centrally involved in establishing a center for ethnological inquiry at the University of Paris in 1925. Unfortunately, we are not in a position to develop any viable comparisons of these materials with the works of Herodotus, Thucydides and Xenophon.

viewpoints that communities and groups within may invoke in dealing with insiders and outsiders, but all three scholars are highly attentive to the problematic and processual nature of human interchanges where matters of morality are involved.

Using these GSPs as a criterion, the three Greek texts clearly qualify as ethnographies. However, because the Greek scholars approach their studies in different ways among themselves, develop extensive and complex statements, and discuss human group life in places and times that are less familiar to us, it is important that contemporary scholars be prepared to approach these texts with somewhat greater patience than when they examine ethnographic materials of a more contemporary nature.

When one invokes the second criterion, using the ethnographies developed by sociologists at the juncture of the 19th and 20th centuries (Hallet and Fine 2000) as a comparison point with which to judge the ethnographies of Herodotus, Thucydides, and Xenophon, there is no close approximation. Although the 19th and very early 20th century publications offer some descriptive material and instructive insights into aspects of North American city life, the classical Greek accounts of human group life are vastly superior in virtually every other category of scholarship that one might reasonably apply more generally and in reference to the GSP criteria just considered more specifically.[21]

If we next ask how the Greek materials compare with those subsequently developed in the balance of the 20th century and into the 21st century, the answer may be somewhat more pleasing to those who insist that that which is latest is the best.[22] Quite directly, as a descriptive methodology, North American ethnographic research had improved a great deal by the 1930's (e.g., see Palmer's 1928 statement on research methodology). However, the subsequent attentiveness to the close sustained examination of human lived experience on the part of those defining themselves as ethnographers or qualitative researchers has been far from even or consistent in its development.

As a result, not an inconsiderable amount of contemporary qualitative research (often with postmodernist emphases) can be pointedly faulted for its scholarly inadequacy (e.g., moralistic, poetical, shallow, superficial, prescriptive, disregard of activity) Still, if one defines extended Chicago-style ethnography as among the very best available (as related to theory, methods, and substantive as well as conceptual depth) on a contemporary plane, the ethnographies of Herodotus and Xenophon look less remarkable.

However, there still are no ethnographies that can match Thucydides' *The History of the Peloponnesian War* in terms of sheer sustained, multifaceted ethnographic coverage of their subject matters. As an ethnographic statement, Herodotus' *The Histories* is notably less developed than Thucydides text. Nevertheless, *The Histories* still is a most remarkable compilation of ethnographic materials. The closest approximation to either of these works that one encounters in contemporary anthropology may well be Malinowski's (1922, 1926, 1929) work on the Trobriand Islanders of the West Pacific.

---

[21] We are not saying that the early American ethnographies lack merit. Despite their limitations, these early American ethnographies represent important trailblazers of sorts.

[22] Because of their tendency to reduce human group life to textuality where they do not also combine their analysis with variants of the oppression thesis and remedial strategies thereof, we are inclined to not include "postmodernist analysis" (as in so called, "postmodernist ethnography") among authentic ethnographic materials. While some of this research is more pluralistic and/or openly attentive to human lived experience, it is often interfused with other agendas. Readers may refer to Prus (1996, 1999) for fuller considerations of the inadequacies of postmodernist and related analytic genres in the social sciences (also see Schwalbe 1995; Prus 2008c).

Among the early Chicago sociologists, the most comparable studies are Anderson's (1923) *The Hobo*, Thrasher's (1927) *The Gang*, and Cressey's (1932) *The Taxi-Dance Hall*. Among more recent ethnographies, the closest comparisons are Wiseman's (1970) *Stations of the Lost*, Prus and Irini's (1980) *Hookers, Rounders, and Desk Clerks*, and Prus' (1989a, b) *Making Sales* and *Pursuing Customers*. Still, while the contemporary works cited here are among the most sustained, multifaceted, and pluralist studies of community life worlds, they do not achieve the scope and depth of Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* or the coverage of Herodotus' *The Histories*.

Because Xenophon's *Anabasis* is considerably more limited in scope than the texts of Herodotus and Thucydides, there are many more contemporary ethnographies that offer compelling comparisons. In addition to the works just listed, other early Chicago ethnographies that compare favorably with *Anabasis* include Shaw's (1930) *The Jack-Roller*, Waller's (1930) *The Old love and The New*, and Sutherland's (1937) *The Professional Thief*. The anthropological studies of Bartell (1971; *Group Sex*) and Wolf (1991; *The Rebels*) also surpass *Anabasis* in various respects as ethnographic productions more general terms as also do many of the more extended Chicago-style ethnographies, such as Lofland's (1966) *The Doomsday Cult*; Emerson's (1969) *Judging Delinquents*; Prus and Sharper's (1977) *Road Hustler*; Schneider and Conrad's (1983) *Having Epilepsy*; Fine's (1986) *With the Boys;* Haas and Shaffir's (1987) *Becoming Doctors*; Charmaz's (1991) *Good Days, Bad Days*; MacLeod's (1993) *Club Date Musicians*; Karp's (1996) *Speaking of Sadness*; and Fine's (2001) *Gifted Tongues* and (2006) *Authors of the Storm*.

Each of these studies also represents important ethnographic ventures into lesser-known territories. Still, despite the viability of the contemporary ethnographies listed here (and others developed more directly in the Chicago tradition; see Prus, 1997),[23] it should be acknowledged that these works are better viewed as supplementary to, rather than replacements of, Xenophon's *Anabasis*.[24]

Another way of assessing ethnographic research from the classical Greek era, as well as that produced on a more contemporary plane, is to ask about the relevance of these materials in reference to *analytic ethnography*.[25] This is a much more stringent criterion, since it requires that ethnographers also assume more direct

---

[23] Readers may appreciate that it is not our concern to defend contemporary ethnographies or ethnographers. As indicated elsewhere (Prus 1996, 1997, 1999, 2007c), we place great value on contemporary, especially Chicago-style, ethnography and envision this mode of research as the key to developing a genuine social science pertaining to human knowing and acting. Likewise, we have great regard for those scholars who venture out into the world of the other in more sustained, inquisitive, open, and pluralistic manners. Still, our more immediate task revolves around the question of whether the texts of Herodotus, Thucydides and Xenophon qualify as ethnographies.

[24] Clearly there are weaknesses in the Greek ethnographies under consideration. Indeed, Herodotus' *The Histories* is much more diversely focused and considerably more difficult to appreciate in more unitary terms than are many of the better contemporary ethnographies.

Likewise, it simply was not possible for Herodotus to obtain firsthand accounts of many of the events he discusses. Xenophon's *Anabasis* would have been strengthened notably had he provided more sustained detail on the events he describes, made greater use of supplementary (participants) sources from the expedition, and developed his material in more pointedly analytic terms. Still, both of these volumes are remarkable accomplishments and to us it seems unwarranted to assign substantial fault to these texts without generating feelings of intellectual pettiness.

This is especially the case for Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*. It is not the perfect study, but it is such a massive undertaking and is developed so effectively that one truly cannot ask more of anyone.

[25] The quest for an analytic ethnography is closely interconnected with the development of "grounded theory" (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss 1993) and "generic social processes" (Blumer 1969; Lofland 1976; Prus 1996, 1997, 1999, 2003b, 2007c; Prus and Grills 2003).

and engaged roles as assessors and generators of theory pertaining to the human condition.

As formulated by Blumer (1969) and Lofland (1976, 1995), the pursuit of analytic ethnography means asking to what extent the authors involved in the production of particular ethnographies also used their inquiries as settings with which to assess existing concepts and to develop more precise conceptualizations of human group life. The task for researchers is to use their data to dialogue with existing concepts and other studies of parallel sorts (i.e., to engage in sustained comparative analysis) as a means of assessing and extending existing conceptual notions. Although this viewpoint is often encouraged by interactionist and other social scientists at a pedagogical level, in practice this is generally achieved only in limited degrees.

Part of the reason for such little overall progress in this area is that many ethnographers become "area specialists" and develop only limited familiarity with studies outside of their substantive domains or fields of inquiry. Because most of the material available in particular substantive fields is of minimal value in developing more viable analytic comparisons of human lived experience, scholars who lack familiarity with research of a parallel nature in other substantive fields are apt to have little overall material with which to work in pursuing more sustained comparative analyses. As well, because ethnographic research is so highly labor intensive and time consuming, few researchers seem willing or able to embark on what is an additionally challenging line of scholarship.

Given the trailblazing nature of their own work, the classical Greek ethnographies do not fare particularly well on the criterion of analytic ethnography. Still, it should be acknowledged that Herodotus, Xenophon, and especially Thucydides introduce a number of conceptual standpoints that clearly foster the development of theory in the areas of political and military endeavor, management, and intergroup relations. In this respect, the three Greek ethnographers continue to do well in general terms, but (like most contemporary ethnographies) will achieve greater analytic potential when more explicitly compared (similarities and differences) with other instances of ethnographic research along particular conceptual dimensions (e.g., see the GSPs referenced earlier). That these three Greek texts have been under appreciated in the social sciences much more directly reflects the limitations of contemporary students of the human condition than the works of the early scholars who produced tham.[26]

Hence, whereas the works of Herodotus, Thucydides and Xenophon often are valued for their contributions to a fuller comprehension of an earlier era of Western civilization, the major conceptual payoff of these materials will be achieved, instead, by using this material to learn more about the human condition through more sustained comparative transcontextual and transhistorical analysis.

Because of their highly detailed contents and analytical insights, the Greek texts referenced here have great value as resource materials for developing theory about human knowing and acting not only in the past but also with respect to the present and the ever-unfolding future.

To this point, the works of Herodotus, Thucydides, and Xenophon generally have been discussed as separate entities. Our last question is, "What value do these texts have as a set or collection of scholarly works?"

---

[26] Although Xenophon was a contemporary of Plato (and also a student of Socrates), neither Herodotus nor Thucydides would have been in the position to benefit from the writings of Plato. Certainly, none of the three ethnographers considered here would have been able to benefit from the exceptionally rigorous analytical texts produced by Plato's student, Aristotle.

While neither Thucydides nor Xenophon make much direct reference to their predecessors and, in that respect, lose some of the advantages associated with analytic ethnography, we have the advantage of having access to all three pieces of work and being able to consider them as a set in ways that none of these earlier authors could have done.

Taken together, these three studies provide an incredible wealth of materials on collectively engaged activity. Given their shared emphasis on political and military matters as these develop in actual practice,[27] the works of these three Greek scholars have exceptional relevance for considerations of political interchange, management, intergroup relations, policy making, group related motivation and enthusiasm, influence work and resistance, and the forming and coordinating of associations.[28]

Although the value of these instances of classical Greek scholarship will be greatest when contextualized within the broader interactionist tradition, there is little in the interactionist literature or in any of the contemporary realms of political science, management studies, or organizational behavior (Prus 1999) that examines political and military interchanges in comparable, highly sustained, directly enacted and collectively engaged terms.

As ethnographers and social scientists seeking to achieve more enduring and accurate conceptualizations of the human condition, we have much to gain from a careful examination of the remarkable legacy left to us by three early Greek ethnographers Herodotus, Thucydides, and Xenophon.

References

Anderson, Nels (1923) *The Hobo*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Aristotle (1984) *The Complete Works of Aristotle*. Edited by Jonathan Barnes, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Bartell, Gilbert (1971) Group Sex. New York: Signet.

Becker, Howard S. (1963) Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance. New York: Free Press.

Becker, Howard and Harry Elmer Barnes (1978) Social Thought: From Lore to Science (3rd. ed.) Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith.

---

[27] We know virtually nothing of Herodotus' personal involvements in political and military matters, but Herodotus displays considerable insider familiarity with political and military ventures in his analysis of the Persian Empire and the conflicts that Persia had with Greece. It is apparent that both Thucydides and Xenophon had participated extensively in the arenas they discuss in their texts.

[28] For more extended considerations of "power as a humanly enacted essence," "policy as a social process," and the "canons of public sociology," see Prus 1999, 2003b, and 2007c, respectively.

Berger, Peter and Thomas Luckmann (1966) The Social Construction of Reality. New York: Doubleday-Anchor.

Blumer, Herbert (1969) Symbolic Interactionism. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Bogardus, Emory (1960) The Development of Social Thought (4th ed.). New York: McKay.

Bryant, Joseph M. (1996) Moral Codes and Social Structure in Ancient Greece: A Sociology of Greek Ethics from Homer to the Epicureans and Stoics. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Charmaz, Kathy (1991) Good Days Bad Days: The Self in Chronic Illness and Time. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Cressey, Paul (1932) The Taxi-Dance Hall. University of Chicago Press.

Durkheim, Emile [1902-1903] Moral Education. Translated by Everett K Wilson and Herman Schnurer. New York: Free Press (Reprinted 2002; Mineola, NY: Dover Publications) (1961).

------ [1904-1905] The Evolution of Educational Thought. Translated by Peter Collins. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul (1977).

------ [1912] The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life. Translated by Joseph Ward Swain. London: Allen and Unwin (1915).

Ekins, Richard (1997) Male Femaling: A Grounded Theory Approach to Cross-dressing and Sex-changing. New York: Routledge.

Emerson, Robert M. (1969) Judging Delinquents. Chicago: Aldine.

Fine, Gary Alan (1987) With the Boys: Little League Baseball and Preadolescent Culture. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

------ (2001) Gifted Tongues: High School Debate and Adolescent Culture. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

------ (2006) Authors of the Storm: Meteorologists and the Culture of Prediction. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Freeman, Kathleen (1949) The Pre-Socratic Philosophers. (2nd ed.). Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell.

Garfinkel, Harold (1967) Studies in Ethnomethodology. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Glaser, Barney and Anselm Strauss (1967) The Discovery of Grounded Theory. Chicago: Aldine.

Gouldner, Alvin (1965) Enter Plato: Classical Greece and the Origins of the Social Theory. New York: Basic.

Haas, Jack and William Shaffir (1987) Becoming Doctors: The Adoption of a Cloak of Competence. Greenwich, CN: JAI.

Hallett, Tim and Gary Alan Fine (2000) "Ethnography 1900: Learning from the Field Research of an Old Century." Journal of Contemporary Ethnography 29: 593-617.

Herodotus (1996) The Histories. Translated by Aubrey de Sélincourt. New York: Penguin.

Karp, David A. (1996) Speaking of Sadness: Depression, Disconnection and the Meanings of Illness. New York: Oxford University Press.

Lofland, John (1966) The Doomsday Cult: A Study in Conversion, Proselytization and Maintenance of Faith. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

------ (1976) Doing Social Life. New York: Wiley.

------ (1995) "Analytic Ethnography: Features, Failings, and Futures." Journal of Contemporary Ethnography 24: 30-67.

MacLeod, Bruce A. (1993) Club Date Musicians: Playing the New York Party Circuit. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Mauss, Marcel (2007) Manual of Ethnography. Translated by Dominique Lussier. Edited by N. J. Allen. New York: Durkheim Press / Berghahn Books.

Mead, George H. (1934) Mind, Self and Society. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Palmer, Vivian (1928) Field Studies in Sociology. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Plato (1937) The Dialogues of Plato. Translated by Benjamin Jowett. New York: Random House.

------ (1961) The Collected Dialogues of Plato. Edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

------ (1997) Plato: The Collected Works. Edited by John M. Cooper. Indianapolis: Hackett.

Prus, Robert (1989a) Making Sales: Influence as Interpersonal Accomplishment. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

------ (1989b) Pursuing Customers: An Ethnography of Marketing Activities. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

------ (1996) Symbolic Interaction and Ethnographic Research: Intersubjectivity and the Study of Human Lived Experience. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

------ (1997) Subcultural Mosaics and Intersubjective Realities: An Ethnographic Research Agenda for Pragmatizing the Social Sciences. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

------ (1999) Beyond the Power Mystique: Power as Intersubjective Accomplishment. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

------ (2003a) "Ancient Forerunners." Pp. 19-38 in Handbook of Symbolic Interactionism, edited by Larry T. Reynolds and Nancy J. Herman-Kinney. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira.

------ (2003b) "Policy as a Collective Venture: A Symbolic Interactionist Approach to the Study of Organizational Directives." International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy 23 (6): 13-60.

------ (2004) "Symbolic Interaction and Classical Greek Scholarship: Conceptual Foundations, Historical Continuities, and Transcontextual Relevancies." The American Sociologist 35 (1): 5-33.

------ (2005) "Terrorism, Tyranny, and Religious Extremism as Collective Activity: Beyond the Deviant, Psychological, and Power Mystiques." The American Sociologist 36 (1): 47-74.

------ (2006) "In Defense of Knowing, In Defense of Doubting: Cicero Engages Totalizing Skepticism, Sensate Materialism, and Pragmatist Realism in Academica." Qualitative Sociology Review 2 (3): 21-47.

------ (2007a) "Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics: Laying the Foundations for a Pragmatist Consideration of Human Knowing and Acting." Qualitative Sociology Review 3 (2): 5-45.

------ (2007b) "Human Memory, Social Process, and the Pragmatist Metamorphosis: Ethnological Foundations, Ethnographic Contributions and Conceptual Challenges." Journal of Contemporary Ethnography 36 (4): 378-437.

------ (2007c) "The Intellectual Canons of a Public Sociology: Pragmatist Foundations, Historical Extensions, and Humanly Engaged Realities." Pp. 195-235 in Public Sociology: The Contemporary Debate, edited by Lawrence T. Nichols. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.

------ (2007d) "On Studying Ethnologs (Not just People, 'Societies in Miniature'): On the Necessities of Ethnography, History, and Comparative Analysis." Journal of Contemporary Ethnography 36 (6): 669-703.

------ (2008a) "Aristotle's Rhetoric: A Pragmatist Analysis of Persuasive Interchange." Qualitative Sociology Review 4 (2): 24-62

------ (2008b) "Producing, Consuming, and Providing Instruction on Poetic Texts in the Classical Roman Era: The Pragmatist Contributions of Horace (65-8BCE), Longinus (100CE), and Plutarch (46-125CE)." Studies in Symbolic Interaction 30: 81-103.

------ (2008c) "Writing History for Eternity: Lucian's (c120-200) Contributions to Pragmatist Scholarship and Ethnographic Analysis." Journal of Contemporary Ethnography 37 (1): 62-78.

------ (2009a) "Poetic Expressions and Human Enacted Realities: Plato and Aristotle Engage Pragmatist Motifs in Greek Fictional Representations." Qualitative Sociology Review 5 (1): 3-27.

------ (2009b) "Reconceptualizing the Study of Community Life: Emile Durkheim's Pragmatism and Sociology." The American Sociologist 40:106-146.

------ (2010) "Creating, Sustaining, and Contesting Definitions of Reality: Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BCE) as a Pragmatist Theorist and Analytic Ethnographer." Qualitative Sociology Review 6 (2): 3-27.

Prus, Robert and Scott Grills (2003) The Deviant Mystique: Involvements, Realities, and Regulation. Westport, CT: Praeger [Greenwood] Press.

Prus, Robert and Styllianoss Irini (1980) Hookers, Rounders, and Desk Clerks: The Social Organization of the Hotel Community. Salem, WI: Sheffield.

Prus, Robert and C.R.D. Sharper (1977) Road Hustler: The Career Contingencies of Professional Card and Dice Hustlers. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.

Puddephatt, Antony and Robert Prus (2007) "Causality, Agency, and Reality: Plato and Aristotle Meet G. H. Mead and Herbert Blumer." Sociological Focus 40 (3): 265-286.

Sanders, Clinton (1989) Customizing the Body: The Art and Culture of Tattooing. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Schneider, Joseph W. and Peter Conrad (1983) Having Epilepsy. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Schwalbe, Michael (1995) "The Responsibilities of Sociological Poets." Qualitative Sociology 18: 393-413.

Schutz, Alfred (1962) Collected Papers I: The Problem of Social Reality. Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.

------ (1964) Collected Papers II: Studies in Social Theory. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.

Shaw, Clifford (1930) The Jack-Roller. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Sinclair, T. A. (1962) A History of Classical Greek Literature: From Homer to Aristotle. New York: Collier.

Spradley, James P. (1970) You Owe Yourself a Drunk: An Ethnography of Urban Nomads. Boston, MA: Little, Brown.

Strauss, Anselm (1993) Continual Permutations of Action. Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter.

Sutherland, Edwin (1937) The Professional Thief. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Thrasher, Frederick M. (1927) The Gang. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Thucydides (1928) History of the Peloponnesian War (four volumes). Translated by Charles Forster Smith. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

------ (1972) History of the Peloponnesian War. Translated by Rex Warner, with an Introduction by M.I Finley. New York: Penguin Putnam.

Waller, Willard (1967) The Old Love and the New. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Wax, Rosalie (1971) Doing Fieldwork. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Whittaker, Elvi (1994) "The Contribution of Herbert Blumer to Anthropology." Pp. 379-392 in Doing Everyday Life, edited by Mary Lorenz Dietz, Robert Prus, and William Shaffir. Toronto: Copp Clark Longman (Addison-Wesley).

Wiseman, Jacqueline (1970) Stations of the Lost: The Treatment of Skid Row Alcoholics. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.

Wolf, Daniel (1991) The Rebels: A Brotherhood of Outlaw Bikers. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.

Xenophon (1998) Anabasis. Translated by Carleton L. Brownson. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

------ (1925) The Calvary Commander. Pp. 235-293 in Xenophon in Seven Volumes, VII, Scripta Minora. Translated by E. C. Marchant. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

------ (1918) Hellenica in Xenophon Vol I-II. Translated by Carleton L. Brownson. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

------ (1923) Oeconomicus. Pp. 363-526 in Xenophon in Seven Volumes, IV, Memorabilia and Oeconomicus. Translated by E. C. Marchant. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

------ (1972) The Persian Expedition [Anabasis]. Translated by Rex Warner. New York: Penguin Putnam.

Citation