For though some would bemoan the fact, it remains with us, influencing our actions and desires, forming who we are.

One last editorial remark. Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury and an important eighteenth-century moralist, once asked, "If Philosophy be, as we take it, the Study of Happiness, must not everyone, in some manner or other, either skillfully or unskillfully philosophize?"[10] In my experience, the answer to this question is a resounding yes. And so I have tried here to reach out to that perhaps mythic, certainly endangered, species, "the ordinary reader," writing without condescension, I hope, but at the same time with a self-conscious effort to enliven as well as to analyze and explain. I have even attempted (God forbid) to have fun, recklessly ignoring the warning of the Oxford don and Anglican archbishop of Dublin, Richard Whately, who cautioned in the nineteenth century that happiness is no laughing matter. The humanities are simply too important to be left to dour scholarly eyes alone. And we humanists need to recall more often that the rightful owner of our subject—the humanities—is humanity itself, of which we form only a tiny fraction.

Some of these goals are undoubtedly ambitious. But it is my hope that, as in the pursuit of happiness itself, there may be value in striving to attain them nevertheless, even when I fall short of my ultimate end.

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INTRODUCTION: THE TRAGEDY OF HAPPINESS

The search for happiness is as old as history itself, one might venture, and in a certain sense that claim would be true. For in the opening pages of Book One of what is widely regarded as the first work of history in the West—*The History* of Herodotus—we find the quest for happiness bound up in this inaugural record of the "great and wonderful deeds" of human affairs. Croesus, the fabulously wealthy king of Lydia, has summoned before him the itinerant sage Solon, lawgiver of Athens and a man who has traveled over much of the world in search of knowledge. The Lydian king lacks nothing, or so he believes, and attempts to convince Solon of the fact, dispatching servants to lead the wise Athenian around his stores of treasures so that he might marvel at "their greatness and richness." Needing nothing, Croesus nonetheless reveals that he is in need, for he is overcome by a "longing" to know who is the happiest man in the world. Foolishly, he believes that this man is himself.[1]

Solon's answer, however, threatens to dispel this illusion. The happiest man, he claims, is not Croesus but Tellus, a father from Athens who was killed in battle in the prime of life. And the second happiest men—two young brothers named Cleobis and Biton—are also dead,

having passed away in their sleep after pulling their mother to a village festival, yoked to her cart like a pair of oxen.

Not surprisingly, Croesus is perplexed by these answers, perplexed and then enraged, eventually sending Solon away, "thinking him assuredly a stupid man."[2] The Lydian's proud refusal to hear the wisdom in Solon's words sets in motion a series of events that eventually bring down Croesus and his kingdom, embroiling the peoples of Greece and Persia in nearly one hundred years of war. The great clash of civilizations that would draw to a close only with the Greek victories at Thermopylae, Salamis, and Plataea in 480–479 BCE might thus be read as the awful outcome of the search for human happiness.

In truth, it is unlikely that the historical figures Solon and Croesus ever met, though the real Solon probably did have something to say on the subject of happiness.[3] Still, the central place of this episode in Herodotus's *History* reminds us that this chronicle of human conflict is also a chronicle of human striving. Painting with a broad brush, Herodotus vows famously in the work's opening paragraph to capture all so "that time may not draw the color from what man has brought into being." The pursuit of human happiness, it would seem, has been with us from the start.

But what are we to make of Solon's response? Two well-built brothers, who shut their eyes for a well-earned rest, never to wake again. A young family man cut down in the prime of his life, leaving his wife and sons behind. On what terms might such people—such *dead* people—possibly be considered "happy"? What could Herodotus have meant, and how might he have been understood by those who gathered to hear his tales at the agora, the marketplace of the fifth-century Mediterranean world? To know this, we must listen with more care than Croesus to Solon's response. And we must do so while suspending our own beliefs about what happiness is, or what happiness should be. For nothing could be further from this early Greek ideal than our modern conceptions of the term.

In the first place, Herodotus employs not any single word to describe the object of Croesus's desire, but several, drawing on a number of closely related terms that had come down to him from the great

epic period of Homer and Hesiod in the eight and ninth centuries BCE.[4] Herodotus makes use, for example, of the term *olbios,* which, along with its close cousin *makarios,* may be rendered (imperfectly) as "blessed." In the Homeric hymns and the Hesiodic poems, these complex terms are used frequently in reference to the heroes, to the gods, and to those who enjoy their favor, indicating divine sanction, freedom from suffering, and general prosperity, both material and moral. Thus, in the Homeric *Hymn to Apollo,* the master of the Cretans addresses a god disguised as an ordinary man with some confusion: "Stranger—though you are nothing like mortal men in shape or stature, but are as the immortal gods—hail and all happiness to you," employing here a variant of *olbios.*[5] But in the *Hymn to Hermes,* the poet uses a form of *makarios* to describe the cave dwelling of the god Hermes and his mother, which is full of "nectar and lovely ambrosia," with "much silver and gold," fine clothing, and other things "such as are kept in the sacred houses of the blessed." Like the Olympians who know no hardship and are beautifully clad, richly fed, and secure in their possessions and persons, those who are *olbios* or *makarios* are similarly favored.[6] They are, one might say, "fortunate." And so we find Herodotus, and through him, Solon, speaking of those who possess what Croesus claims to enjoy as having *eutychia,* or "luck." To live in the favor of the gods, to be blessed, is to live with fortune on one's side.

Finally, Herodotus uses one other adjective to capture all these subtleties—*eudaimon* (and the noun, *eudaimonia*)—indicating a flourishing, favored life. The word was first employed in extant Greek literature by Hesiod. "Happy and lucky the man" (*eudaimôn te kai olbios*), he declares in the *Work and Days,* who knows and keeps the holy days, who understands omens, who avoids transgression, and "who does his work without offending the deathless gods."[7] But the word was emerging in Herodotus's own time as the preferred—and absolutely central—term to designate the elusive quality for which Croesus yearned. Comprising the Greek *eu* (good) and *daimon* (god, spirit, demon), *eudaimonia* thus contains within it a notion of fortune—for to have a good daimon on your side, a guiding spirit, is to be lucky—and a notion of divinity, for a

daimon is an emissary of the gods who watches over each of us, acting invisibly on the Olympians' behalf. As a leading classicist has observed, "*Daimon* is occult power, a force that drives men forward where no agent can be named," and it is this aspect of the term that helps to account for the unpredictable force that leads Croesus, like all men, impelling him forward in pursuit of he knows not what.[8] For if to have a good *daimon* means to be carried in the direction of the divine, to have a bad *daimon*, a *dysdaimon* (or *kakadaimon*) is to be turned aside, led astray, or countered by another. The gods, alas, are as capricious as mortals, as that unhappy wife of Shakespeare's Othello, Desdemona, learns to her dismay. Her name is simply a variation on the Greek word for unhappy, *dysdaimon*, as Shakespeare certainly knew. He was probably also aware that *daimon* is the Greek root of the modern word "demon," a fiend or an evil spirit who haunts. Something of that vaguely sinister connotation is embedded in *eudaimonia* itself.

Thus, when Croesus asks Solon after hearing of the blessedness of Tellus, Cleobis, and Biton, "Is the happiness [*eudaimonia*] that is mine so entirely set at naught by you that you do not make me the equal of even private men?" Solon's response makes clear that in matters of chance, one can never be too sure:

> Croesus, you asked me, you who know that the Divine is altogether jealous and prone to trouble us, you asked me about human matters. In the whole length of time there is much to see that one would rather not see—and much to suffer likewise. I put the boundary of human life at seventy years. These seventy years have twenty-five thousand two hundred days, not counting [leap years] . . . so that all the days of a man's life are twenty-six thousand two hundred and fifty; of all those days not one brings to him anything exactly the same as another. So, Croesus, man is entirely what befalls him. To me it is clear that you are very rich, and it is clear that you are the king of many men; but the thing that you asked me I cannot say of you yet, until I hear that you have brought your life to an end well.[9]

This is the wisdom of a world in which inscrutable forces constantly threaten to subvert human aims, a world ruled by fate or by the gods, in which suffering is all pervasive and uncertainty is woven into the fabric of daily experience. Today it is sometimes tempting to think of early Greek life in the manner by which it has largely come down to us—as myth—imagining it, deliciously, as a sunny, sensual affair, flowing with the unflinching purpose of Attic oarsmen, clean as classical marble, sweet as ambrosia. But such reveries hide the less pleasant facts: that thunder or an eclipse could induce terror, that pestilence and hunger periodically wiped out entire communities, that horribly disfigured men and women were a presence in every town, that children were as apt to die before their fifth birthday as to live longer, that bloody warfare was a constant reminder of the fragility of existence. In a world such as that, life was less something to be made than something to be endured. Only those who did so successfully could be deemed fortunate, blessed, happy.

It is in part for this reason that Solon judges Tellus, Cleobis, and Biton worthy of the epithet of "happy." All three successfully negotiated life's perils while they lived, and then died with honor at the moment of their greatest glory. Of Tellus, we are told:

> In the first place, [his] city was in a good state when he had sons—good and beautiful they were—and he saw children in turn born to all of them, and all surviving. Secondly, when he himself had come prosperously to a moment of his life—that is, prosperously as it counts with us—he had, besides, an ending for it that was most glorious: in a battle between the Athenians and their neighbors in Eleusis he made a sally, routed the enemy, and died splendidly, and the Athenians gave him a public funeral where he fell and so honored him greatly.[10]

Living in a city ravaged neither by plague nor by marauding armies, the father and grandfather of beautiful children who survived childbirth unscarred and unmarked, himself healthy and of sufficient

means, honored in life as in death, Tellus managed to run the gauntlet of life without falling and to leave it with honor and grace.

Cleobis and Biton also performed this most perilous of feats. Blessed with "sufficiency of livelihood and besides, a strength of body," these two prizewinning athletes from the Argive were late in taking their mother to a temple for the feast of Hera. Unharnessing the oxen that pulled their cart, they drew it themselves at a much faster pace for many miles, and when they arrived, they were seen by all who had gathered for the feast:

> The Argive men came and stood around the young men, congratulating them on their strength, and the women congratulated the mother on the fine sons she had; and the mother, in her great joy at what was said and done, stood right in front of the statue and there prayed for Cleobis and Biton, her own sons, who had honored her so signally, that the goddess should give them whatsoever is best for a man to win. After that prayer the young men sacrificed and banqueted and laid them down to sleep in the temple where they were; they never rose more, but that was the end in which they were held.[11]

It is the last line that prevents us from yielding to the temptation to pull these tales into our own time, to see the "happiness" of Tellus, Cleobis, and Biton in recognizable terms as a function simply of their robust health, their relative prosperity, their familial harmony, their noble achievements, and their public esteem. All these factors, to be sure, figure in Solon's reckoning, but it is the end—death—that gives them meaning, ensuring in its finality that one's good fortune, one's blessedness, can no longer be taken away. It is a good death that the goddess deems "best for a man to win," so that is the reward she bestows. Where life is governed by uncertainty, one can count no man happy until he is dead, for as Solon warns, "to many the god has shown a glimpse of blessedness only to extirpate them in the end."[12]

And this, of course, is precisely the destiny of Croesus, whose downfall is presented as a cautionary tale of the hubris of deeming oneself happy in a world where it is impossible to control one's fate. Men and women, Solon says, are what "befall" them, a certainty that applies equally to rich and poor. Although wealth may help to satisfy our desires and even shield us from certain pains, it can do nothing, ultimately, to withstand ill fortune or the wrath of the gods, for "no single person is self-sufficient." Shortly after Solon's departure, Croesus learns the awful truth of those words, receiving "a great visitation of evil." His son is killed in a freak accident, Croesus himself misinterprets an oracle at Delphi and is lured into a disastrous war as a consequence, and his kingdom is destroyed by invading Persian armies. Only as a captive, facing imminent destruction atop a funeral pyre whose flames lick at his feet, does Croesus realize the wisdom of Solon's words and the folly of his own pride. "No one who lives is happy," he exclaims, calling out three times the name of the Athenian sage and recounting his own fate for the benefit of all who "are in their own eyes blessed."[13] Only when Croesus has fully repented is the god moved. "Suddenly, out of a clear sky, with no wind in it, there gathered clouds, and a storm burst and a violent rain with it; and the fire was quenched." Croesus is saved at the final hour, but only after he has renounced the belief that he was, or ever can be, happy while still alive.

In the understanding of Herodotus and his contemporaries, then, happiness is not a feeling, nor any subjective state, a point highlighted by the irony that Croesus originally *thinks* that he is happy, only to be shown otherwise. Happiness, rather, is a characterization of an entire life that can be reckoned only at death. To believe oneself happy in the meantime is premature, and probably an illusion, for the world is cruel and unpredictable, governed by forces beyond our control. A whim of the gods, the gift of good fortune, the determination of fate: Happiness at the dawn of Western history was largely a matter of chance.

We tend to think of this general conception of the world, in which suffering is endemic and happiness largely beyond our control, as in a broad sense "tragic." And in the context of the Athenian world

known to Herodotus, that word is not at all misplaced. For it was precisely there, in precisely that period, the fifth century BCE, that "tragedy" (*tragoidia*) took the stage as a new word and a new form of art. Performed annually in honor of the god Dionysus at the springtime festival known as the City Dionysia, *tragoidia* initially referred only to a general type of theatrical performance. Roughly equivalent to our modern word "play," it implied neither content nor emotional tone. But that *tragoidia* should come to take on associations with what we now think of as tragedy, more generally speaking, is hardly surprising. As any reader of the great playwrights of the period—Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides—will know, fifth-century BCE Athenian "tragedies" seldom have happy endings. On the contrary, they return again and again to situations in which seemingly innocent figures are overwhelmed by circumstances they cannot control. Forced to make impossible choices between irreconcilable alternatives, the likes of Agamemnon and Antigone, Orestes and Oedipus, Electra and Medea are hunted down by gods and pursued by familial curses, overwhelmed by fate and defeated by the very nature of things. And although those figures inevitably contribute to their own undoing through hubris and folly, the crux of the tragic dilemma is that there can be no easy resolution of conflict, no decision without grave costs, no simple, happy ending. Agamemnon, in Aeschylus's *Oresteia*, is in this respect an altogether typical figure. He must *either* sacrifice his own daughter at the behest of the gods, *or* relinquish his honor by abandoning the Greek campaign against Troy. The tragedy of his dilemma is that he cannot have it both ways. Torn between duty and love, justice and self-sacrifice, family and city, and any number of other irreconcilable ends, the protagonists of the Greek tragic stage are caught up in circumstances and trapped by themselves. Inhabiting a world in which conflict is inevitable and struggle preordained, they cannot *make* themselves happy, for among mortals in this tragic universe, "no man is happy," as the Messenger in Euripides's *Medea* darkly proclaims. The Chorus in Sophocles's *Philoctetes* is bleaker still, bemoaning the "unhappy race":

> Of mortal man doomed to an endless round
> Of sorrow, and immeasurable woe!

In this play, as in so many others of the genre, the only salvation for the titular hero is through the unlikely intervention of a god. Just as the heavens opened to shower rain on Croesus atop his pyre, Hercules arrives at the final moment of Sophocles's play to extricate Philoctetes from his plight. Hercules is a deus ex machina (*theos ek mēchanēs*)—literally a "god from the machine"—a reference to the Greek convention in *tragoidia* of lowering an actor in the guise of a deity onto the stage by a crane or some other such contraption as a way to bring the drama to a close. It may be argued, as Aristotle would do in the *Poetics*, that this is a clumsy way to end a play. But the deus ex machina serves perfectly to dramatize a much more important point: In the tragic tradition, happiness is almost always a miracle, requiring the direct intervention of the divine.

Herodotus was a contemporary of Sophocles, who probably knew him personally and almost certainly knew his work. Not surprisingly, the tale of Croesus shares many features of the same tragic outlook. Croesus, too, is caught up in circumstances beyond his control, the victim, Herodotus tells us, of a family curse visited upon the offspring of one of Croesus's distant ancestors, who by slaying his master invoked the wrath of the gods. And though Croesus surely contributes to his own demise through his misinterpretation of the oracle, his misreading of events, and his presumptuous certainty that he is the happiest of all men, it is clear that the destruction of his kingdom and the death of his son are an inordinate price to pay for any actual faults he has committed. In the end, we must conclude, Croesus suffers not so much for what he has done as for the kind of world he inhabits, a world in which "fate that is decreed, no-one can escape," a world in which "no one who lives is happy."[14] Where human agency is frustrated, human choice contradictory, and human suffering inevitable, happiness, if it comes at all, is largely what befalls us. That is the tragic predicament.

This tragic vision was by no means original to Herodotus or even to the formal classical tragedies performed on the fifth-century Athenian stage. Without question, each of these new genres—*historia* and *tragoidia*—laid out this vision with an unprecedented sharpness and self-conscious clarity. But the general understanding of happiness on which they rely is much older. When the poet Semónides of Amórgos, a small island in the Cyclades archipelago of the Aegean, observed in the seventh century BCE that "We who are human have no minds, / but live, from day to day, like beasts and know nothing / of what God plans to make happen to each of us," he was merely articulating the long-standing wisdom of his ancestors. A surviving fragment of another of Semónides's pearls of wisdom—"A women thick around the ankles is no good"—may give us pause in accepting his general authority without reservation.[15] But with respect to his account of the human condition, at least, we can be confident that his judgment was widely shared. Harking back to a perennial, prehistoric view of the world in which the rhythms of time were understood through myth and the universe through the play of the gods, this fatalistic mind-set animates the epic poetry of Homer, for whom the gods alone are the "blessed ones," and human beings "of all creatures that breathe and crawl across the earth" the most dismal, the most agonized.[16] A similar outlook is central to the stories of classical Greek mythology, of ancient Egypt, and of a great many other traditional cultures.

This fact helps account for the longevity of the link connecting happiness to luck and fate.* That link held fast long after the fifth century BCE, and in certain respects it endures today. It is striking that in virtually every Indo-European language, the modern word for happiness is cognate with luck, fortune, or fate. The root of "happiness,"

*Strictly speaking, luck and fate are opposed, in that one implies randomness and the other preestablished order. When considered from the standpoint of human happiness, however, the two are closely related, in that each denies the role of human agency in determining the course of human events. Whether the universe is predetermined or unfolds chaotically, what *happens* to us—our happiness—is out of our hands.

for example, is the Middle English and Old Norse *happ*, meaning chance, fortune, what *happens* in the world, giving us such words as "happenstance," "haphazard," "hapless," and "perhaps." The French *bonheur*, similarly, derives from *bon* (good) and the Old French *heur* (fortune or luck), an etymology that is perfectly consistent with the Middle High German *Glück*, still the German word for happiness *and* luck. In Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese, *felicità*, *felicidad*, and *felicidade* all stem from the Latin *felix* (luck, sometimes fate), and the Greek *eudaimonia* brings together good fortune and good god. One could multiply these examples at much greater length, but the point would be the same: In the Indo-European language families, happiness has deep roots in the soil of chance.

That so many of these modern words for happiness emerged only in the late Middle Ages and the early Renaissance, while the wheel of lady fortune (Fortuna) continued to turn, is itself testimony to the strength of this enduring connection. For as we shall see, by this stage the tragic understanding of happiness had been challenged by a number of competing conceptions—above all, post-Socratic philosophy and the Christian religion. For all his indebtedness to both those traditions, however, Chaucer did not hesitate in the fourteenth century to have his monk observe in *The Canterbury Tales:*

> And thus does Fortune's wheel turn treacherously
> And out of happiness bring men to sorrow

Nor did Shakespeare, several centuries later, allow his Renaissance humanism to obscure the hap of hap. One might hope for "happy hap" but could rest assured that "hap what hap may."[17] Down to the present day, what the historian Jackson Lears has called the "culture of chance" has played an important role in configuring our fortunes.[18]

Yet despite the stubborn persistence of horoscopes in our newspapers, palm readers on our street corners, and casinos as our places of recreation, most Westerners tend to resist, like Einstein, the notion that life or the universe is a dice player's game. Happiness might be thwarted by a random act of violence, we concede, a terrorist strike, or a freak

accident. And most of us are probably willing to allow, rather more prosaically, that "shit happens," in the contemporary phrase, for better or for worse. But when it comes to the ultimate trajectory of our lives, we are generally loath to leave happiness to chance. To be happy is a right, we believe, a natural human entitlement, perhaps even a "moral obligation," to cite a chapter title of a recent best-selling book.[19] Arguably, there is no greater modern assumption than that it lies within our power to find happiness. And arguably there is no greater proof of that than our feeling that we have failed when we are unable to do so.

This book tells the story—the history—of how people in the West came to harbor that belief. It is a long story, and in telling it, I hope to make what is today an unexamined assumption appear strange—less a certainty of the universe than a species of faith. The product of Greek and Roman philosophy and centuries of Judeo-Christian reflection, modern conceptions of happiness, we will see, were born in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in an age we now call the Enlightenment. It was in that period that considerable numbers of men and women were first introduced to the novel prospect that they could be happy—that they *should* be happy—in this life.

Granted, the idea was not entirely without precedent. Just as some human beings had long imagined happiness to lie in a remote, otherworldly place—in the fields of Elysium, say, or the islands of the blessed, in the Hyperborean regions, in Heaven, Paradise, or a vanished Golden Age—others had been prepared to speculate on the prospects of happiness on earth. Yet in both classical philosophy and Christian practice, happiness of this immanent variety was exceedingly rare—the preserve of a "happy few," whose outstanding virtue or exceptional favor made them more than mere men. As Aristotle observed, a life of happiness "would be superior to the human level," tantamount to the divine.[20] His happy few were a "godlike" few—a description that applies equally well to the Socratic sage or the Platonic philosopher, the Stoic ascetic or the Epicurean wise man, the Catholic saint or Calvin's predestined elect. In all of those incarnations, the happy man—and less frequently, the happy woman—was thought of as one who approached the gods, who had gone beyond the

merely human, who had achieved a form of transcendence. For much of Western history, happiness served as a marker of human perfection, an imagined ideal of a creature complete, without further wants, desires, or needs.

The Enlightenment fundamentally altered this long-standing conception, presenting happiness as something to which all human beings could aspire *in this life.* The basic default position of humanity, happiness was not a gift from God or a trick of fate, a reward for exceptional behavior, but a natural human endowment attainable in theory by every man, woman, and child. Indeed, where human beings were unhappy, Enlightenment thinkers argued, something must be wrong: with their beliefs, with their form of government, with their living conditions, with their customs. Change these things—change ourselves—and we could become in practice what all were intended by nature to be. Happiness, in the Enlightenment view, was less an ideal of godlike perfection than a self-evident truth, to be pursued and obtained in the here and now.

Such a dramatic shift in the nature of human expectations did not occur overnight. Initially the preserve of a social and intellectual elite, the Enlightenment's promise of human happiness on earth spread gradually outward. By the end of the eighteenth century, with the outbreak of the American and French revolutions, happiness could claim widespread recognition as a motivating ideal. Thomas Jefferson took it for granted that enlightened citizens of the world would agree with him when he judged in the Declaration of Independence that the right to the pursuit of happiness was a "self-evident truth." And the French, in proclaiming their own Declaration of Rights of Man and the Citizen in 1789, understood that few would find fault with the lofty goal articulated in the last line of the document's preamble securing the "happiness of all." A great human pursuit had begun. It continues still.

The first half of this book examines the ways in which a classical and Christian concept was transformed into an earthly end. The second half investigates the ambiguities of this coming to earth. For what did it really mean to demand, and to expect, a lifetime of happiness in

a still-imperfect world? Perpetual pleasure? Endless euphoria? Purely material gain? And if human beings had a right to happiness, then did not others have a duty to provide it? To what extent were happiness and freedom commensurate—or happiness and virtue, happiness and reason, happiness and truth? Was happiness simply a state of feeling, the calculus of pleasure and pain? Or did it continue to be a reward, a precious prize to be earned at the cost of sometimes painful sacrifice?

These are but a few of the many vexing questions raised by this curious Enlightenment pursuit. Their persistence, long after the eighteenth century, highlights the fact that try as it might, the Enlightenment did not wholly succeed in separating happiness from its religious and metaphysical past. Enchanted still, happiness retained the allure of transcendence, the intimation of the divine. And it was in large part for this reason that it continued to command such power. In the name of happiness, human beings continued to search for the strength of the gods of old, tempted by the prospect that our dominion over nature and control of fortune might make gods of us all, that the happy many might replace the happy few.

But even though the close observer could detect traces of the transcendent in the happiness of the post-Enlightened world, the nature of the pursuit was undoubtedly changing. Slowly, the goal became less to make more of man—to ask him to rise above—than to feed him the ambrosia that had been taken from heaven, to deliver him his due. And over time, this would create a sense of entitlement and expectation that was fraught with danger. Even in a post-Enlightened world, the attempt by mortals to walk on hallowed ground—to become gods themselves or to banish them altogether—was a perilous affair. The Greeks had called it hubris, excessive pride, the refusal to accept the natural limits that separated the sacred from the profane. And they raised the specter of divine retribution for those who dared to cross that line, the suffering and sadness visited upon the tragic heroes who reached (overreached) for what was fit only for the gods. "Many are the forms of the daimon-ly, many things unhoped-for the gods bring to pass" was the stereotyped conclusion to Euripidean tragedies.[21] There were good *daimones* and bad

daimones, good demons and bad demons: To be under the spell of either was to be haunted and possessed.

To think of the search for happiness in this sense as a form of possession—possession by an alien force that moves through us, like the force that carried Croesus to his doom—may help account in mythic terms for a phenomenon that commentators long after the Greeks have described in different ways: the frustrating tendency of the search for happiness to lead human beings astray. It is this tendency to which Aeschylus gave voice when he complained of the "deceitful deception" of the gods, asking, "What mortal man shall avoid it?"

> Benign and coaxing at first
> It leads us astray into nets which
> No mortal is able to slip,
> Whose doom we can never flee.[22]

Many since have been moved to similar reflections, and together they raise a disturbing prospect for all who live in a post-Enlightened age. Might not the search for happiness entail its own undoing? Does not our modern commandment to be happy produce its own forms of discontent?