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Why History?

How does one make decisions? How does one decide what food they like to eat? All decisions use some past experience or some knowledge to influence them. If someone has more knowledge in a subject then they will make better choices in the end. For example, a doctor with more practice within a specialty who has stayed up to date on current technology has the ability to make more efficient, and more superior selections when performing surgeries, or diagnosing patients. One's past can help define who they are because they base most of their decisions off of past mistakes or successes.

People make better decisions when they have multiple sources of information to draw from when making an educated decision. A decision is influenced by education of past events. Clement of Alexandria was an educated man in philosophy and rhetoric. He became a religious Christian man after reading and learning about many different religions.¹ He was a man impacted by learning. He believed that, "Happy is the man who possess the knowledge that comes form historia. He does not devise calamities for the citizens, or commit injustice, but surveys the ageless order of Nature, what it is, and how, and why. Never can such men as this practice such base needs."² Clement of Alexandria believed that people are happier if they hold knowledge of the past because by holding this knowledge then they have made better choices within their lives. A person is always influenced by their past or the past of society when making decisions. By using their

¹ Piotr Ashwin-Siejkowski, *Clement of Alexandria: A Project of Christian Perfection* (New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 20-1.

² G. E. M. De Ste. Croix, "Herodotus," *Greece & Rome*, 2nd ser., 24, no. 2 (October 1977): 131.

knowledge, people's decisions end up making a person better and usually cause them to avoid mistakes. Clement of Alexandria examined multiple works because he "held a passion for the most ancient, trustworthy wisdom."³ He lived by what he said because he wanted to gain as much knowledge as possible, so his decisions would make his life better.

The telling of history did not start until the fifth century by Herodotus. Herodotus inspired many Greeks to look back and see what happened in their homeland. History caused many "Greeks to realize that knowing how a thing came to be what it is, and studying it in that light, for its own sake, as objectively as possible, may help one to understand it and learn how best to deal with it."⁴ By learning as much as they could about anything, many Greeks benefitted in the end. If one can learn as much as they can about history, or learn about a historical event that strikes passion in one could help lead to less disaster in the world. The Greeks were the first civilization to draw back on the past for improving their present civilization. They believed that everything within the "human environment" was relevant to man.⁵ By using all resources available to one makes a massive difference in all aspects of life. For example, in the present most people only use the Internet as a source for historical information; however, there are millions of libraries throughout the globe that hold much more information than the Internet could ever provide. Books, magazines, and journals hold so much information about the past like stories based on experience. By taking advantage of experiences of people from the past, this will most likely give one a bigger pay off in the end.

³ Ashwin-Siejkowski, 22.

⁴ Croix, 133.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 134-5.

Every person that encounters the past can interpret it differently. We have the capability to morph history into the meaning that we want it to hold.⁶ We take history and learn what we want from it. We could block out the bad parts that make us sad, and focus solely on parts that spark our interest. In order for one to approach history then one has to feel kinship with the people we study.⁷ People want to relate that person to themselves, so that they can receive a deeper meaning when interpreting history. They make history what they want it to be. For example, Aristotle looked back at Herodotus' works as a source for information to his present situations. He referred to him multiple times throughout his lifetime.⁸ He sometimes did not agree with Herodotus' work, but it inspired him to look further into the issue and learn more to fit his ideal of history. "By hitching our own stories to the stories of those who went before us, the past becomes a useful resource in our everyday lives, an endless storehouse of raw materials to be shaped for our present needs."⁹ We use history once we understand it and use it as a source for defining who we are or who we want to become.

History is the greatest source for impacting one's life in the decisions that one makes. History is used as a guide for future actions whether politically, economically, or socially.¹⁰ One must consult history in order to make it what one wants. People can interpret the past in whichever way they want, but they all use it as an influence in their daily lives. History makes us, but we must allow it to influence our lives by using the knowledge we have gained from it.

⁶ Sam Wineburg, "Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts," *The Phi Delta Kappan* 80, no. 7 (March 1999): 490.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 490.

⁸ Croix, 135.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 490.

¹⁰ M. I. Finley, "Myth, Memory, and History," *History and Theory* 4, no. 3 (1965): 293.