

## ABSTRACT

If only we were Ageless and Immortal:  
Human Existence under the Immanence and Transcendence of the Gods of the *Iliad*

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Homer's portrayal of the gods in the *Iliad* has long been a source of scandal. Traditionally problematic depictions of the gods have been those that attest to their divine immanence, their similarity to human beings in character and behavior. While the gods of Homer's *Iliad* are undeniably immanent by traditional standards, they are also notably transcendent, that is, immune to the consequences of their interventions in the human world and sharply differentiated from human beings in their ontology. This divine immanence and transcendence has significant consequences for the gods' relation to the human characters of the epic. The gods, because of their immanence, share many of humanity's values and thus engage with humans frequently where these values are at play. However, because of their transcendence, the gods enjoy special ontological privileges that disadvantage humans in these interactions. This theology makes the primary crisis of the epic, the inhibition of the best from becoming what he or she was meant to be, the primary crisis of all humanity in the epic. Though the human characters of the epic recognize the tragedy of this condition, they do not condemn it as morally unjust, but accept it. This resigned acceptance follows from Homer's theology and reveals the power only a few ontological facts about gods and humans hold in the world of the epic.

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IF ONLY WE WERE AGELESS AND IMMORTAL: HUMAN EXISTENCE UNDER  
THE IMMANENCE AND TRANSCENDENCE OF THE GODS OF THE *ILLIAD*

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## PREFACE

For me, the magic of Homer's *Iliad* lies in the profound lessons it teaches us about the natures of conflict, loss, and pain and about the forces that are outside our control. Even though the world that created the *Iliad* is vastly different from our world today, humans have not yet stopped fighting, inflicting pain on others, or experiencing suffering and human beings today still live under the burden of forces outside their control, regardless of their worldviews or theologies. The *Iliad* is particularly striking in its characterization of these forces outside of humanity's control and of the human beings that both participate in and struggle against the workings of these forces. On the one hand, gods that are often petty, fickle, and capricious are significant sources of suffering for humans and they are also and insuperable. On the other, the human beings who live at the mercy of these gods do not morally condemn them as unjust. Instead, they resolutely consent to play their own roles in the cosmos as things only here today and gone tomorrow.

I have explored, in my thesis, the questions the *Iliad* poses surrounding the nature of these gods and the nature of the human beings that live under them. While the way in which we see the world has drastically changed since the time of the epic, the nature of the human struggles recounted in the epic, those of perpetuating systems of pain and suffering, of losing loved ones, and of failing in spite of all of one's effort, have not changed. Exploring these questions and seeking the answers Homer offers to them in the *Iliad* will help us better understand both the society that produced the epic and ourselves.

I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Jeff Fish, for his guidance and support during this process. His assistance during the research, writing, and revision stages of this project was invaluable, as was his patience and kindness. I would also like to thank the many other professors who helped me here and there with their answers to my questions, especially Dr. Jeff Hunt and Dr. Natalie Carnes for being part of my thesis defense committee. I am grateful to Baylor University and the Honors College for a wonderful and life-changing education and college experience. Finally, I would also like to thank my family and friends for their support, and God, for all the blessings I have received through everyone mentioned here.

Chandler F. Jordan

Waco, Texas, Spring 2020

## DEDICATION

For my mom and dad. Thank you for everything.

ζῶμεν γὰρ οὐ ὥς θέλομεν, ἀλλ' ὥς δυνάμεθα

—Μένανδρος



## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

Of all the questions and concerns the *Iliad* poses, Homer's portrayal of the gods has been one of those most scandalizing to scholars. The gods of the *Iliad* do not resemble the irreproachable, moral examples many envision when they picture what gods ought to be like. Nevertheless, Homer played a significant role in laying a foundation for the understanding and conceptualization of the gods for later centuries.<sup>1</sup> In addition to the epic's theological contribution, the *Iliad* was a cornerstone of entertainment and education in Ancient Greece. Plato, however, banned Homer from his ideal city-state.<sup>2</sup> For Plato, Homer's portrayal of the gods, of those beings which were supposed to be the most virtuous, excellent, and sublime, was anything but edifying for human beings. Plato, while largely at the forefront of a new philosophical movement of his own in Greece, was an inheritor of concerns about the nature of the gods. The pre-Socratic philosopher Xenophanes of Colophon, born almost a century and a half before Plato, criticized accounts of the gods that portrayed them too much like humans.<sup>3</sup>

Concern over Homer's portrayal of the gods has not been limited to the ancient world. In modern times, scholars have sought to justify the ways of Homer to critics.

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1. W. Burkert, in his *Greek Religion* (1977), describes in depth the roles Homer and Hesiod played in helping to unify for later centuries the Greeks' varied traditions and conceptions of their principal gods.

2. In his *Republic*, Plato bans the poets and tragedians from his ideal city first for their dealing with imitations of truth rather than with truth itself (600e-601b) and then for their appeals to and strengthening of base emotions and the inferior parts of the soul over the rational part (606d-607b). The unflattering portrayal of the gods, for Plato, is only one component of this problem with much of poetry.

3. Peter Adamson, *Classical Philosophy: a History of Philosophy without any Gaps* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 19-20.

For many, the skill of the poet and the integrity of the epic as a piece of art are seen as being in jeopardy if the worldview of the epic is unjust and morally unacceptable. An earlier generation of scholars such as Walter Leaf, Gilbert Murray, and George Calhoun present arguments for the inauthenticity of problematic passages in the *Iliad* that concern the gods.<sup>4</sup> Each assumed that the true Homer could never have authored such passages of “low” poetic, philosophical, and theological quality. They conclude that most of these problematic passages were later interpolations made for the entertainment of later audiences.

The majority of the passages concerning the gods considered problematic share something in common—their display of the gods’ immanence. This aversion to divine immanence reveals the development which theological thinking in ancient Greece and the west has undergone since the time of the epic. The *Iliad* presents a cast of gods that are utterly like human beings with respect to their desires, passions, and behaviors. Like human beings, they love, they fight, they cry, they become enraged, and they meddle in the affairs of others. Many philosophers saw such accounts of the gods as untenable and problematic. Philosophers and moral thinkers argued that that which was superior to human beings in body and strength must also be superior to human beings in every way, especially in moral excellence. As philosophers and moral thinkers produced increasingly developed and complicated accounts of morality and of human nature and purpose, the standards for those beings ontologically above humans became increasingly stringent.<sup>5</sup>

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4. K. R. Seeskin, “The Comedy of the Gods in the *Iliad*,” *Philosophy and Literature* 1, no. 3 (Fall 1977): 296, <https://doi.org/10.1353/phl.1977.0008>, Project MUSE.

5. Adamson, *Classical Philosophy*, 282.

Accordingly, philosophical and theological thought began to favor notions of divine transcendence over divine immanence. According to the philosophers, if human beings were to eschew base desires in favor of the true goods of goodness, beauty, and truth, they considered ludicrous the thought that higher beings would themselves aim to satisfy base desires. Consequently, the picture of distant, removed, sublime, and transcendent gods came to the philosophical forefront. If it the *telos* of human beings was to set their eyes on higher things, it was impossible to conceive of the high things, the gods, as looking down to lowly things.<sup>6</sup> Aristotle argues that the divine sits in rational contemplation (Met. 1072b). Divine beings who themselves live in contemplation of the good, true, and beautiful would be the last to sleep with mortals or fight in their wars. Some went so far as to claim that the divine has no concern whatsoever for the affairs of mortals.

Philosophers and theologians use divine transcendence and immanence as measures to help them evaluate the ways gods are conceptualized and characterized. Accounts, portrayals, and understandings of the divine can be evaluated according to how immanent or transcendent they are—that is, according to the degree to which they exist in the material world, are manifested in it, and intervene in it. Without a doubt, the two theological concepts have played significant roles in Greek thinking about the gods and in the historical evaluation of the gods of the *Iliad*. While the gods of Homer's *Iliad* seem thoroughly immanent, and thus, from the perspective of two millennia of theological and philosophical development, in some ways primitive, the *Iliad* itself presents a much more complicated picture.

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6. Adamson, *Classical Philosophy*, 282-283.

The gods of Homer's *Iliad* are both immanent and transcendent. While they are unequivocally immanent by modern standards, the epic presents a picture of the gods in which they are simultaneously extremely invested and involved in the human world but also ontologically separate from the human world and radically capable of retreating to their own realm of divine ease and sublimity. In the following chapter, I will show how the *Iliad* presents an account of the gods that is characterized by this immanence *and* transcendence. I will argue that the most significant component of the gods' immanence in the *Iliad* is their sharing the same values as the human characters of the epic. They act in similar ways as the human characters in order to fulfill similar desires and accomplish similar goals. I will argue that the transcendence of the gods is manifested in the epic primarily in two ways. It is seen, on the one hand, in how they are immune to the consequences of their immanence and, on the other hand, in the ontological privileges they enjoy by nature of being gods, that is, their immortality and increased strength and beauty.

In my third chapter, I will describe the consequences the gods' simultaneous transcendence and immanence have on their relationships and interactions with human beings. I will argue that the shared value between the gods and human characters that is most significant in that of honor, that is, the concern with one's reputation, respect, and esteem. Honor is the most important shared value, as it is a matter of concern for gods and mortals alike in all interactions in the epic, regardless of what other values are at play. Whatever the situation, the most important concern to the participants, immortal or mortal, is the preservation of one's honor and reputation. The gods' immanence and concern for honor, I argue, occasion frequent interactions with human beings, just as

these same concerns orchestrate the way humans interact with each other. The gods' immanence brings gods and mortals into conflicts in which mortals may respect a god's honor or insult it, just as is the case with mortals alone. However, I suggest that the gods' transcendence results in significant differences in how humans and the gods interact as regards honor, esteem, and reputation. The system of honor among human beings is characterized by competition and martial prowess. Humans must fight for their honor. However, the system of honor among the gods, thanks to their transcendence, is characterized by rank. The gods, because of their cosmological rank, are due honor; they do not fight for it. Similarly, as the gods think of themselves as due honor because of their transcendence and cosmological rank, they also think of the punishment of those who affront and insult their honor as their due.

In my fourth chapter, I will describe the consequences this theology of Homer has on how the human beings of the epic conceive of their position in their world and on how they choose to live in their world as a result of their conception of their position. The poem's theology reveals that the primary conflict of the epic, the inhibition of the best from becoming what he or she was meant to be, is largely the primary conflict of the humans of the epic. Just as Achilles, champion of the fluid, martial prowess system of honor, is oppressed by Agamemnon, champion of the fixed, rank system of honor, human beings are oppressed by nonnegotiable, ontological forces. Whatever great heights human beings manage to attain, they are always at the mercy of beings that enjoy cosmological rank and ontological privileges which humans are denied.

While the characters of the epic recognize this condition as tragic and pitiable, they do not morally condemn it or question it, but rather accept it as matter-of-fact. I will

argue that Homer's theology explains this resigned acceptance—both the acceptance of experiencing suffering and causing suffering. Homer's theology makes the experience of suffering, whether divinely or humanly caused, inevitable for all humans. One who succeeds in most of his or her endeavors is abnormally fortunate. One who fails and suffers has only experienced that which is to be expected for all humans. The absoluteness of this condition necessitates a resigned acceptance of this condition. In the same way that this inevitability explains the resigned acceptance of experiencing suffering, it also explains the human characters' willingness to inflict great pain and suffering on others in spite of their own intimate sensitivity to the horrors of such pain and suffering. The human characters of the epic participate in this system because refraining from it does not stave off inevitable woes. It would only benefit one's enemies. Suffering and pain is inevitable, both from the gods directly and from the gods indirectly through other humans. Refraining from causing others pain does not prevent one's own inevitable pain. It only benefits one's enemies.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Transcendence and Immanence of Homer's Gods

Book 5 of the *Iliad* contains one of the most striking episodes in all of the epic. In Book 4, the truce that was supposed to end the war is shattered and the Achaeans and Trojans resume their bloody fighting. Book 5 tells the remarkable story of a human hero doing battle with gods on the plain of Troy. The fact that Homer's gods would step onto a human battlefield and give aid to one side over the other clearly speaks to the degree of their immanence. Certain details within the book reveal more nuanced points that illustrate the nature of this immanence.

Diomedes, the Greek hero who contends with the gods, is able to do so only because Athena gives him increased strength and the ability to discern the gods disguised throughout the fighting masses. When she gives him his strength, Athena instructs him to steer clear from all gods, but to charge and attack Aphrodite if he sees her (124-132). Later, deep into his unstoppable rampage, Diomedes spies Aphrodite trying to whisk her unconscious son Aeneas away to safety. Instead of charging after Aeneas, Diomedes aims after Aphrodite, obedient to Athena's command, and succeeds in stabbing her wrist (318-343). With a shriek, Aphrodite leaves her son on the battlefield and, after having commandeered Ares' horses and implored him to join the fight and rein in Diomedes, she rushes to her mother (355-374). Dione, after hearing her daughter's explanation of the events, says:

τέτλαθι, τέκνον ἐμόν, καὶ ἀνάσχεο κηδομένη περ·  
πολλοὶ γὰρ δὴ τλήμεν Ὀλύμπια δώματ' ἔχοντες  
ἐξ ἀνδρῶν χαλέπ' ἄλγε' ἐπ' ἀλλήλοισι τιθέντες. (382-384)

Bear it and endure, my child, though distressed;  
for indeed we many who have homes on Olympus have endured  
difficulties from men, laying pains upon each other.<sup>1</sup>

Dione goes on to tell stories in which the gods Ares, Hera, and Hades underwent similar instances of pain and suffering on account of involvement in the human world (385-409).

Dione's words and her stories speak to much more than the fact that the gods frequently involve themselves in worldly affairs. They are even willing to incur pain and suffering at the hands of human beings and other gods for their involvement. Diomedes not only nicks the wrist of a goddess with his spear (334-342), but later disembowels the god of war himself (853-863). This degree of investment in the world, one in which the gods are willing to incur physical pain and suffering for their interventions, speaks not only to their nature, the ontological immanence of these gods, but to their character as well. The gods not only exist on the same physical plane as human beings such that they can intervene in the world and suffer physical wounds, they have natures that *yearn* to intervene so much so that suffering and pain are merely brushed off as an inevitable consequence of doing that which is natural for and expected of the gods.

After Diomedes wounds Aphrodite, he unsuccessfully charges Apollo, trying to get at Aeneas whom Apollo is protecting (431-442). After repulsing Diomedes, Apollo, like Aphrodite, enjoins Ares to join the fray and rein in rampaging Diomedes (455-459). With the enlistment of Ares, the tide of battle begins to turn in favor of the Trojans, and Diomedes, seeing Ares' involvement, withdraws discouraged. Hera, seeing her Argives retreating, asks Zeus if she may send Athena down to rein in Ares and his sweeping slaughter of the Greeks (755-766). Zeus agrees and Athena rushes down to Diomedes.

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1. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted. For the Greek text I have used Willcock (1978 and 1984).



She insults Diomedes' fighting nerve and he answers saying that he hesitates not out of fear or cowardice, but as mindful of her previous command that he go up against no god except Aphrodite (814-824). Diomedes knows that Ares leads the Trojan rampage. Refreshing his strength, Athena tells him not to fear (825-834). Together they charge Ares, and with Athena's aid, Diomedes' hurled spear hits its mark right in Ares' stomach, sending him roaring back to Olympus with a howl that shakes the plain and all the fighting warriors (853-863).

When it comes to the gods' involvement in battle on the plain of Troy, they are overwhelmingly portrayed as playing a largely hands-off role. Instead of fighting themselves, they are almost always portrayed as running through the ranks of their sides exhorting and encouraging the fighters and breathing renewed strength into them. This episode presents a significant exception to this trend. As Athena and Diomedes charge Ares, they find him stripping the corpse of a man *he himself* had just killed:

ἦτοι ὁ μὲν Περίφαντα πελώριον ἐξενάριζεν  
Αἰτωλῶν ὃχ' ἄριστον Ὀχνησίου ἀγλαὸν υἱόν·  
τὸν μὲν Ἄρης ἐνάριζε μαιφόνος· αὐτὰρ Ἀθήνη  
δῦν' Αἴδος κυνέην, μή μιν ἴδοι ὄβριμος Ἄρης·  
ὥς δὲ ἶδε βροτολοιγὸς Ἄρης Διομήδεα δῖον,  
ἦτοι ὁ μὲν Περίφαντα πελώριον αὐτόθ' ἔασε  
κεῖσθαι ὅθι πρῶτον κτείνων ἐξαίνυτο θυμόν,  
αὐτὰρ ὁ βῆ ρ' ἰθὺς Διομήδεος ἵπποδάμοιο. (842-849)

Indeed, he was stripping the massive man Periphas,  
best by far of the Aetolians, the splendid son of Ochesius,  
him whom Ares, blood-stained, was stripping; but Athena  
put on Hades' cap that mighty Ares not see her.  
But when man-destroying Ares saw godlike Diomedes,  
indeed, he let massive Periphas lie there where  
first slaying him he took away his soul,  
straightaway he went straight for horse-taming Diomedes.

Ares himself is described as having slain Periphas and taken away his θύμος. Ares' physical participation in human battle is an almost unparalleled illustration of the immanence of Homer's gods in the *Iliad*. Not only can the gods be expected to intervene in human battle by whisking away their loved ones to safety or giving their favorites strength, there is the chance that a god might participate himself in the *physical act* of fighting and slaying human beings.

It is important at this point to address some of the broader issues surrounding the roles of Homer's gods in the *Iliad*. Ares is the only god explicitly described in the *Iliad* as physically killing humans, and indeed, of all the gods, he would be the one expected to be described as participating in the slaughter of war so directly. Where Athena represents wisdom, strategy, and tactics in battle, Ares represents the passion, violence, and indiscriminate slaughter of war.<sup>2</sup> Given that the gods, or some of them at least, represent forces that weight upon and influence human life, such as violence and indiscriminate slaughter, many have sought to excise the *characters* of the gods from the epic and only keep the forces they represent, in effect to allegorize the poem. Homeric scholarship has a long history of such interpretation. Much of this endeavor has been undertaken in an effort to de-problematize the poem and preserve the piety of the poet, such that, for instance, it would be impossible to interpret Ares, a god, as himself slaying a human, or Zeus, the king of the gods, as being seduced and succumbing to lust, as is described in Book 14 (312-351).<sup>3</sup>

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2. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 142 and 169.

3. Examples of ancient thinkers who interpreted Homer allegorically include Plutarch (46-120 CE), with his *On Homer*, Heraclitus (first or second century CE), with his *Homeric Problems*, and Porphyry (234-305 CE), with his *Homeric Questions*. Plutarch's treatise, *How to Study Poetry*, reveals the impetus behind these endeavors, although he only engages in ethical allegory and eschews more far-reaching physical allegories that one can find, for instance, in Heraclitus. Plutarch recognizes that poetry

While much has been written for the purposes of allegorizing the Homeric gods and thus “saving” Homer, many others have argued that the poem does not allow for the excision of the gods as characters. Malcolm Willcock offers three ways in which the gods in the *Iliad* are used.<sup>4</sup> On the one hand, there is the use of the gods merely as figures of speech—the use of the name Aphrodite in the place of “love” and the name Ares in the place of “war,” etc.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, there is the use of the gods merely as machinery for the plot.<sup>6</sup> For example, Aphrodite serves as the means through which Paris is rescued from his duel with Menelaus in Book 3 (369-382). In between these two functions of the gods in the poem, there is the presentation of the gods as individual characters with their own desires, motives, and presences. As Willcock notes, there are instances like the wounding of Ares where a god’s presence cannot be understood merely as the presence of the abstract force that god is understood as representing.<sup>7</sup> Bloodlust by itself cannot kill a man just as tactics itself cannot return a thrown lance to the hand of its thrower (22.273-277).

In this instance in Book 5, Ares is unable to be reduced to the abstract force of passion, bloodlust and violence, even though he is the god who would most be expected to participate directly in a man’s killing. Ares as bloodlust can strike fear into soldiers,

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and tragedy have much that, at first glance, might lead the minds of young people astray. Youth must be educated in what is good and right before they engage with poetry, so that they may understand it properly and find the underlying good and truth in what at first is scandalizing. Much of this interpretive project included interpreting and recognizing what is allegorical in such poetry.

4. M. M. Willcock, “Some Aspects of the Gods in the *Iliad*,” *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 0, no. 17 (January 1970): 3, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43646244>, Wiley.

5. Willcock, “Some Aspects of the Gods,” 3.

6. Willcock, “Some Aspects of the Gods,” 3.

7. Willcock, “Some Aspects of the Gods,” 5-6.

but Ares *merely* as bloodlust cannot kill soldiers. In this way, Ares' personal slaying and stripping of a human being still speaks to the nature of the *gods* and not merely to the nature of *forces* in the world and in human life such as violence, passion, bloodlust, etc. Such an instance of a god's direct slaying of a human being speaks to the gods' sharing with humans a susceptibility to bloodlust, passion, and indulgence in violence. The gods' inability to die does not make them averse to the taking of life or love of war. While no other god in the *Iliad* is portrayed as so thoroughly indulging in bloodlust and indiscriminate slaughter as Ares, many gods are described as indirectly causing the deaths of human beings, thus tying them as well to the susceptibility to bloodlust and indulgence in violence. Athena plays an active role in Hector's death and Apollo in Patroclus'. Willcock is right to argue against reductive allegory that eliminates the gods as characters in the *Iliad*. They are surely intended to be understood as more than just personified forces, impersonal and without motives and desires.<sup>8</sup> While Homer may use the gods as a way of commenting on the nature of the forces that impact human life, the gods are no less characters of the epic with their own desires and motivations.

At the beginning of Book 13, Zeus turns away from the battle, confident that with the Trojans having pressed the Greeks so far back, Achilles' sending of Patroclus into battle is imminent (1-6). Poseidon, however, disobeys Zeus' injunction that the gods sit out and not get involved (17-31). He aids the Greeks slyly, exhorting and encouraging them under disguise and giving them renewed strength (59-61). Despite Poseidon's help and a second wind for the Greeks, the Trojans continue their onslaught, and by the beginning of Book 14, all the Greek captains are wounded and distraught (27-32). Hera,

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8. Jasper Griffin, *Homer on Life and Death* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 145.

scared for her Greeks, concocts a plan to seduce and put Zeus to sleep so that Poseidon can help them openly (153-165). With help from Aphrodite and Sleep, Hera succeeds. Poseidon is able to help the Greeks so much that the Trojans are put on the defensive and Hector is almost killed (352-387 and 433-439).

The seduction of Zeus, throughout the history of Homeric scholarship, has been considered one of the most problematic passages in the *Iliad*. It is also one of the most striking examples of the gods' immanence. Not to mention the fact that the very notion of the divine reproducing is ludicrous by modern standards, the idea that the unconquerable king of gods and humans is able to be conquered by lust was unthinkable to many ancient (and modern) scholars. In a faux pas of legendary proportion, Zeus praises Hera's great beauty by comparing it to that of his mortal love conquests (311-328). The gods' rape of mortal women and susceptibility to passion and lust reveal a similarity to mortals. Just as humans value and pursue beauty, sexual gratification, and physical desires and delights, so do the gods. The immanence of the gods in the *Iliad* primarily reveals the gods as sharing the same values as those among whom they intervene and meddle.

Values are facets of behavior, conduct, and ways of thinking for which a community or culture has an affective regard. As illustrated above, the gods of the *Iliad* are portrayed as caring about loved ones, being susceptible to lust and bloodlust, and indulging their desires for killing, sex, and other things. Some of the values of the gods, as illustrated by their actions, include a general care for loved ones and family, a recognition of an acceptable perceived duty or desire to protect them, a recognition that the gods can acceptably kill in certain circumstances and can do so to get things they

want, and a recognition that the gods have physical desires and pleasures that can acceptably be fulfilled. A certain amount of vagueness is required here since the poem does not always present a clear picture of acceptable and unacceptable desires and behaviors for the gods. In any case, they act in much the same way as the human characters of the epic. They kill because they are susceptible to bloodlust and because they want things that can be had through killing; they work to protect (and avenge) loved ones; and they work to satiate their physical pleasures and delights.

Book 18 includes one of the epic's most straightforward recognitions of the gods and humans' shared values. At the beginning of the book, Achilles is notified of the death of Patroclus. Upon hearing the news, Achilles is so distraught that the messenger fears that he will kill himself (22-34). His mother Thetis hears her son mourning from the bottom of the sea (35-38). As he speaks with his mother, Achilles realizes that he must set aside his anger at Agamemnon and return to the fight so that he may avenge Patroclus' death (97-126). Before Thetis goes off to Hephaestus to commission a set of divine armor for Achilles, Zeus and Hera have a brief exchange. Seeing that the fall of Troy is now fast approaching given the death of Patroclus and the imminent return of Achilles to battle, Zeus comments on the degree to which Hera is attached to the Argive cause. He jokes that the Achaeans must have been born from Hera herself (356-359). Hera is amazed at his quip:

αἰνότατε Κρονίδη ποῖον τὸν μῦθον ἔειπες.  
καὶ μὲν δὴ πού τις μέλλει βροτὸς ἀνδρὶ τελέσσαι,  
ὃς περ θνητός τ' ἐστὶ καὶ οὐ τόσα μῆδεα οἶδε·  
πῶς δὴ ἔγωγ', ἣ φημι θεάων ἔμμεν ἀρίστη,  
ἀμφότερον γενεῇ τε καὶ οὖνεκα σὴ παράκοιτις  
κέκλημαι, σὺ δὲ πᾶσι μετ' ἀθανάτοισιν ἀνάσσεις,  
οὐκ ὄφελον Τρώεσσι κοτεσσαμένα κακὰ ῥάγαι; (357-367)

What a thing you have said, most dreadful son of Cronos!  
Indeed, even some mortal, I suppose, will always accomplish something  
for another, one even who is mortal and does not know such wiles;  
indeed, how should *I* not, whom I say is the best of the goddesses,  
both in birth and on account that I have been called your  
wife—and *you* rule among all the immortals—how should  
*I* not stitch together ills for the Trojans, having borne a grudge?

Here is an explicit affirmation by a god of the gods' sharing of the same values with human beings, the most significant facet of the immanence of the epic's gods.

Interestingly, Hera does not answer Zeus' marvel at her support of the Greeks with a reminder of any relationship of hers to the Greeks or with a defense of her love of and care for them. Instead, she appeals to her right as a god to punish Troy.

Hera's line of reasoning is that if mere mortals work to help each other, it should be no wonder that a god, especially one of the highest gods, works to the advantage of those she cares about. Here, Hera desires to help the ones she cares for win victory in battle and vengeance for herself. The greater "human" principle that individuals help those they care for achieve their ends is that which Hera finds fitting for the gods and herself to emulate. Attaining victory in battle and winning vengeance are merely the values that inform the ends Hera will help her dear ones accomplish in this instance. An individual will only help a friend achieve a goal if that goal aligns with the individual's own values. The things the gods help those they care for achieve are not limited to the values of victory in battle and vengeance described here. As human beings help each other procure victory and glory, honor and renown, wealth and vengeance, power and knowledge, wives and concubines, so too do the gods help those they care for procure these things, betraying their sharing of these values with humans.

Remarkably, Hera does not even argue that in certain circumstances it is permissible for gods to act like humans. Rather, she argues that the gods, by nature of who they are, are owed such freedoms. The behavior that is understood as the way in which human beings naturally act is revealed to be inherited from the gods. It is not solely human to help one's friends and harm one's enemies—it is divine.

The gods' immanence, as I have shown, is not only the predisposition or ability of the gods to act in the human world and intervene in human affairs, but also an utter obsession with the human world—an obsession for which they will undergo harm, as the example of Dione's comfort of Aphrodite shows. The examples of Ares' slaying and stripping of a human and Zeus' susceptibility to and fascination with sexual pleasures and delights illustrate the gods' sharing of many of the same values with human beings. Hera's commentary on divine behavior and divine dues cements this idea, explicitly tying divine behavior to human behavior and, more remarkably, portraying human behavior as a replication of that which is the gods' and is natural for and to be expected of the gods.

The immanence of the gods and their utter fascination with the human world speak to some need of the gods for humanity. Jasper Griffin notes that even though the gods “feast on nectar and ambrosia...they demand burnt-offerings from men.”<sup>9</sup> Although seemingly having all they could ever need—beautiful food and drink, beauty and youth, everlasting palaces—they still expect things from humans and involve themselves in the affairs of human beings. While Griffin notes that the reason for this is never explicitly given in the poem, I suggest that the answer to this question of the gods' need of humanity lies in the fact that they share the same values as mortals. Ahuvia Kahane

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9. Jasper Griffin, “The Divine Audience and the Religion of the *Iliad*,” *The Classical Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (May 1978): 8, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S000983880003771X>, the Classical Association.



suggests that the gods' fascination with human beings and the human world can be explained by a desire to live vicariously through human beings and their beloved mortals.<sup>10</sup> While it is possible to view the gods as living vicariously through human beings, their immanence makes it so that they already live significantly *among* and *beside* human beings. They do not need to live vicariously through humans, because they already live intimately involved with them, acting in accordance with the same values, concerns, desires, and interests, even though they clearly do not pass their daily lives among them.

Despite this striking degree of divine immanence, Homer's gods are also strikingly transcendent. While Homer presents a cast of gods that share the same values as the human characters and are intimately concerned with them, he also presents gods that are notably immune to and able to turn away from the human world. Moreover, the gods enjoy a select number of ontological privileges that, despite all their similarities with human beings, make them transcendent over the world of human beings and the Trojan war.

First and foremost, the transcendence of Homer's gods differs from traditional theological and philosophical notions of divine transcendence. According to traditional standards, the Homeric gods, even at their "most transcendent," would be thoroughly immanent. These notions of divine transcendence have little place for any mixing and mingling of the transcendent with the physical, material world.<sup>11</sup> Theologian Kathryn

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10. Ahuvia Kahane, *Homer: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012), 183.

11. Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1988), 38-39.

Tanner reports, “in the cosmologies of the Hellenistic era, which were formed through the confluence of Platonic and Aristotelian categories, the transcendence and direct involvement of God with the non-divine appear to be mutually exclusive, to vary inversely in degree. The more transcendent God is the less God is directly involved in the world; and vice versa.”<sup>12</sup> The gods of the *Iliad* are nowhere near transcendent according to such understandings of divine transcendence. Nevertheless, despite the thorough immanence of the epic’s gods, the poet’s portrayal of the gods includes a significant element of the gods’ immunity to the world and their ability to turn away from it and retreat to their own sublime domain.

The transcendence of the gods as it appears in the *Iliad* has two facets. First, the gods can be understood as transcendent in how their immanence has no meaningful consequences for them. While the gods’ incessant meddling is itself an attestation to their immanence, the fact that they suffer no meaningful or lasting consequences for that meddling is in itself an attestation to the presence of a form of transcendence in the nature of the epic’s gods. Second, the poem’s gods can be understood as transcendent in the peculiar facets of their ontology that make them superior to human beings and other creatures, namely, their immortality, perpetual youth, increased strength and beauty, etc.

Of these two facets of the god’s transcendence in the *Iliad*, the first is manifested in the fact that their immanence has no meaningful consequences for them. Book 5 ends with the wounding of Ares by Diomedes and his healing on Olympus. After being stabbed by Diomedes through the stomach, Ares rushes up to Olympus with a roar that shakes the battlefield (853-863). When Ares arrives, he has a heated exchange with his

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12. Tanner, *God and Creation*, 38-39.

father Zeus (868-898). As to be expected, Ares seeks Zeus' condemnation of Athena's actions and punishments for her. Instead of sympathizing with Ares, Zeus is enraged at him. He thunders:

μή τί μοι ἄλλοπρόσαλλε παρεζόμενος μινύριζε.  
ἔχθιστος δέ μοι ἔσσι θεῶν οἱ Ὀλυμπον ἔχουσιν·  
αἰεὶ γάρ τοι ἔρις τε φίλη πόλεμοί τε μάχαι τε. (889-891)

Fickle one, do not whine about anything sitting next to me.  
You are the most hated to me of the gods who hold Olympus;  
for strife and war and battle are always dear to you.

A few lines later, Zeus changes his tone:

ἀλλ' οὐ μάν σ' ἔτι δηρὸν ἀνέξομαι ἄλγε' ἔχοντα·  
ἐκ γὰρ ἐμεῦ γένος ἔσσι, ἐμοὶ δέ σε γείνατο μήτηρ·  
εἰ δέ τευ ἐξ ἄλλου γε θεῶν γένεω ὧδ' αἰδηλός  
καί κεν δὴ πάλαι ἦσθα ἐνέρτερος Οὐρανιῶνων.  
ὧς φάτο, καὶ Παιήον' ἀνώγειν ἰήσασθαι.  
τῷ δ' ἐπὶ Παιήων ὀδυνήφατα φάρμακα πάσσω  
ἠκέσατ'· οὐ μὲν γάρ τι καταθνητός γ' ἐτέτυκτο. (895-901)

But truly, I cannot bear that you suffer pains longer still;  
for you are born from *me*, and your mother bore you to *me*;  
but if you, destructive one, were born thus from any other of the gods,  
you would have been put below the sons of Ouranos long ago.  
He spoke thus and ordered Paeëon to heal him.  
And working into him pain-killing drugs, Paeëon healed him;  
for he had in no way been made a mortal.

Finally, Ares returns, healed, to his divine glory and splendor at Zeus' side.

ὧς ἄρα καρπαλίμως ἰήσατο θοῦρον Ἄρηα.  
τὸν δ' Ἥβη λοῦσεν, χαρίεντα δὲ εἵματα ἔσσε·  
παρ δὲ Διὶ Κρονίῳνι καθέζετο κύδεϊ γαίῳν. (904-906)

So swiftly did he heal impetuous Ares.  
And Hebe washed him, and she arrayed him in lovely clothes;  
and he sat beside Zeus, the son of Cronos, exulting in glory.

The wounding of Ares, the quarrel of Ares with Zeus, and his healing and return serve as one of the most striking examples of the gods' transcendence in the epic.

Beginning in Book 5, a trend is manifested that sees displays of the gods' transcendence attending displays of their immanence. As Jasper Griffin says, "the greatest humiliations and disgraces of the gods [i.e. displays of their immanence] are intimately and regularly linked with the greatest exaltations of their power and splendor."<sup>13</sup> In contrast to the transcendence traditionally understood by theology and philosophy, a transcendence characterized by extreme separation and distance, this transcendence is found in and illustrated by the gods' immunity to the consequences of their immanence.

Ares stands before Zeus holding his bowels in his hands. Not only does Ares suffer what would be a life-ending wound for a mortal, he suffers a verbal lashing from his father, the king of the gods, who says that he hates him above all other gods. The only thing keeping Ares out of Tartarus is his familial relation to Zeus. The price of meddling in the human world in this instance is disembowelment. The price of indulging strife, passion, violence, and bloodlust is being the object of Zeus' seething hatred. In spite of these things, however, Ares' divinity and relation to Zeus are enough to wipe away the consequences of his meddling and sharing of human values, that is, his immanence. Despite an astonishing degree of immanence and the gods' propensities to suffer physical pain and harm for their interventions, the gods' being gods, their ontology insulates them from the consequences they suffer on account of their immanence and interventions.

In Book 20, having mourned Patroclus, Achilles reenters the battle. The book begins with Zeus assembling all the gods on Olympus and commanding them to go down to the plain of Troy and help whichever side they wish (19-40). Zeus says that he fears

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13. Griffin, "The Divine Audience," 19.

Achilles might destroy Troy against the will of fate if the gods do nothing (26-30). The gods do not get directly involved. They limit themselves to merely exhorting and encouraging. In Book 21, the rampage of Achilles continues. Achilles drives half of the Trojans to the city and half into the river Xanthus (1-5). When Achilles refuses to stop his slaughter of Trojans in his waters, Xanthus enlists the help of the river Simois and they begin attacking Achilles, almost overwhelming and drowning him (211-271 and 305-323). Fearing for her hero's life, Hera commands Hephaestus to attack Xanthus make him give up Achilles (324-341).

After Hephaestus attacks, fighting breaks out among the gods (383-390). Athena thrashes Ares and Aphrodite, Apollo yields before Poseidon, saying that mortals are not worth such quarrels among the gods, and Hera pummels Artemis. This passage, like the wounding of the gods and the seduction of Zeus, has been seen as one of the most problematic in the epic.<sup>14</sup> However, just as this passage reveals another extent of the gods' immanence, that is, their willingness (minus Apollo) to come to blows over mortals, the passage, like the healing of Ares, also reveals a facet of their divine transcendence.

ἐν δ' ἄλλοισι θεοῖσιν ἔρις πέσε βεβριθυῖα  
 ἀργαλέη, δίχα δέ σφιν ἐνὶ φρεσὶ θυμὸς ἄητο·  
 σὺν δ' ἔπεσον μεγάλῳ πατάγῳ, βράχε δ' εὐρεῖα χθών,  
 ἀμφὶ δὲ σάλπιγξεν μέγας οὐρανός. ἅϊε δὲ Ζεὺς  
 ἦμενος Οὐλύμπῳ· ἐγέλασσε δέ οἱ φίλον ἦτορ  
 γηθοσύνη, ὅθ' ὀρᾷτο θεοὺς ἔριδι ζυνιόντας. (385-390)

But upon the other gods fell strife, weighty  
 and difficult, and the spirit in their hearts wavered;  
 and they attacked with a great crash, and the breadth of the earth rattled,  
 and great heaven thundered around like a trumpet. And Zeus heard,  
 sitting on Olympus; and his dear heart laughed with delight,  
 because he saw the gods meeting in strife.

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14. Seeskin, "The Comedy of the Gods," 295.

The fighting of the gods differs significantly from the fighting of the humans on the plain of Troy. Where human warriors loose each other's knees and hearts and send each other to permanent deaths in Hades, the gods smack, wallop, lash, and pummel each other and run home crying. All the while, the king of the gods looks on with a joyful laugh.

Kenneth Seeskin sees this episode as a parody of the real fighting; "no one is killed, no one is particularly valiant, nothing is resolved."<sup>15</sup> Demonstrations of the gods' power and sublimity often closely follow episodes of their ridiculousness or humiliation. Seeskin argues that Homer's choice to use the gods as comedic relief and to portray them as ridiculous at times serves to illustrate their divinity. Whereas much of Homeric scholarship has seen these such passages as utterly problematic and degrading of the gods, Seeskin argues that they serve to affirm the gods' power, sublimity, and divinity in contrast with the human characters. The things Seeskin calls comedic, amusing, and ludicrous, i.e. their fighting, their meddling, their being wounded, etc., are examples of their immanence. The things Seeskin calls examples of their power, sublimity, and divinity, are examples of their transcendence.

Seeskin observes that in the *Iliad*, "amusement is a privilege."<sup>16</sup> The gods can laugh at each other and make fools of themselves because they are immune to the serious consequences of their actions. They are "utterly free of the grim realities that afflict men: e.g., war, famine, disease, old age."<sup>17</sup> To mortal human beings, those woes are of extreme importance, but not to immortal gods. Seeskin writes that because of this,

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15. Seeskin, "The Comedy of the Gods," 299.

16. Seeskin, "The Comedy of the Gods," 301.

17. Seeskin, "The Comedy of the Gods," 301.

The adultery of Helen is tragic, that of Aphrodite is funny; the anger of Achilles is deadly serious, the hot-headedness of Ares is not; the inability of Agamemnon to control his underlings has dire consequences, whereas the inability of Zeus to control Hera tends to be preposterous.<sup>18</sup>

Accordingly, it is clear how demonstrations of the gods' transcendence almost always attend manifestations of their immanence. While the gods care deeply, like human beings, about war, violence, physical pleasures, revenge, and honor, and are thus drawn into many seemingly embarrassing circumstances because of their concerns, their ontology ensures that those pursuits have no serious consequences for them.

Disembowelment ends a human's life. Ares' wounding ends with his healing and exaltation. For humans, war is deadly and its damages permanent. For the gods, with Zeus' reign secure, fighting is silly and inconsequential, it is child's play, because everything returns to normal.

This immunity of the gods to the consequences of their interventions in the human world is related to the gods' ability to turn away from the human world and retreat to their own realm of divine ease and sublimity. Jasper Griffin, exploring the ways in which the gods are portrayed in the epic, notes that they are often portrayed as an audience watching human affairs.<sup>19</sup> He argues that they can watch as audience members of spectacle and sport, or as audience members of a tragedy, in which they are emotionally invested in what happens.<sup>20</sup> While this watching in audience is an example of the gods' immanence, Griffin writes that "the gods are involved in human life, they love and pity

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18. Seeskin, "The Comedy of the Gods," 304.

19. Griffin, "The Divine Audience," 1-2.

20. Griffin, "The Divine Audiences," 16-17.

men; but also they enjoy the spectacle, and at will they can turn away from it.”<sup>21</sup> Just as Ares’ wounding ends in restoration and just as all the gods return to sublimity on Olympus after beating each other up, the gods that are so invested in human affairs can divorce themselves from them and return to Olympus.

While the *Iliad* is replete with examples of the gods’ freedom from the consequences of their meddling, the gods of the epic are also thoroughly conscious of their ontological privileges and of those things that make them superior to mortal human beings. After Diomedes succeeds in wounding Aphrodite in Book 5, he charges after Aeneas even though he sees Apollo guarding him (431-442). After being rebuffed three times, Diomedes gathers his strength for a fourth charge and attacks δαίμονι ἴσος, like a god. Apollo, startled at Diomedes’ resolve to go up against a god, thunders at Diomedes:

φράζεο Τυδεΐδη καὶ χάζεο, μηδὲ θεοῖσιν  
ἴσ’ ἔθελε φρονέειν, ἐπεὶ οὐ ποτε φύλον ὁμοῖον  
ἀθανάτων τε θεῶν χαμαὶ ἐρχομένων τ’ ἀνθρώπων. (440-442)

Think Tydides! And relent! Have no desire to think of  
yourself as equal to gods, since the races of deathless gods  
and mortals who walk upon the earth are not alike.

Apollo, under similar circumstances, gives a similar rebuke to Achilles at the beginning of Book 22. He has just assumed the likeness of Agenor, one of Priam’s sons, and lured Achilles away from the main battle, allowing the Trojan combatants (minus Hector) to retreat into the city (21.595-611). Apollo then reveals himself to Achilles and taunts him. His words are reminiscent of his rebuke of Diomedes. He says:

τίπτέ με Πηλέος υἱὲ ποσὶν ταχέεσσι διώκεις  
αὐτὸς θνητὸς ἐὼν θεὸν ἄμβροτον· οὐδέ νύ πώ με  
ἔγνωσ ὥς θεός εἰμι, σὺ δ’ ἀσπερχές μενεαίνεις.  
ἦ νύ τοι οὐ τι μέλει Τρώων πόνος, οὐς ἐφόβησας,  
οἳ δὴ τοι εἰς ἄστυ ἄλεν, σὺ δὲ δεῦρο λιάσθης.

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21. Griffin, “The Divine Audience,” 18.



οὐ μέν με κτενέεις, ἐπεὶ οὗ τοι μόρσιμός εἰμι. (8-13)

Why, swift-footed son of Peleus, do you pursue me, yourself mortal and me an immortal god? And you have not yet even perceived that I am a god, yet you labor vehemently. I say, the matter of the Trojans is now no care to you, those whom you have put to flight, who indeed have been shut into the city, but you have been turned here. Indeed, you will not kill me, for I am not fated for it.

Apollo's rebuke of Diomedes and his taunt of Achilles both reveal facets of the gods' transcendence. However much the gods' immanence allows them to fraternize with human beings, compete against them, and be wounded by them, human beings can never reach the level of the divine. Whatever heights human heroes do reach, the ontological privileges of the gods always persist. Diomedes, caught up in his frenzied rampage, charges Apollo himself in an attempt to get Aeneas. Apollo must remind him that in spite of his great feats, the races of gods and mortals, for all their similarities, are different, and that as such, he cannot dare to think of himself as like a god. Because of the ontological differences between immortal god and mortal hero, a god will never be meaningfully defeated by a human. Achilles also needs to be reminded of this by Apollo. While Achilles may be able to slaughter scores of mortal Trojans, he cannot defeat, much less kill, a single god, for the gods simply cannot die and do not lose in the long run.

In Book 21, Achilles faces the river gods Xanthus and Simois, but he is overwhelmed and almost drowns (211-271). Thanks to Hera and Hephaestus, the river gods are forced to give up their attack (324-341). Despite Achilles' resistance, the river overtakes him:

ὥς αἰεὶ Ἀχιλῆα κιχήσατο κῦμα ῥόοιο  
καὶ λαιψηρὸν ἔοντα· θεοὶ δέ τε φέρτεροι ἀνδρῶν. (263-264)

Thus did the waves of the flow ever overtake Achilles,  
even him, the swift one; for gods are better than humans.

Less than a hundred lines before, Achilles slays Asteropaeus, the grandson of the river god Axios (160-183). After cutting him down, Achilles boasts over his corpse (184-199). He boasts that as the great-grandson of Zeus through Peleus and Aeacus, he is better and stronger than any grandson of a mere river god (186-191). While genealogy plays a significant role in the epic in explaining certain characters' strengths, no genealogical fact allows Achilles to defeat Xanthus and Simois. The greatest and strongest of human beings is still inferior to the smallest and weakest god. For all of Achilles' greatness, Xanthus still overcomes him. While the mortal descendants of stronger gods might be stronger than those of weaker gods, the ontological privileges of even the weakest gods stand fast before the greatest mortals. As Apollo says, the race of gods and mortals are not the same.

Ahuvia Kahane makes an interesting observation concerning the differences between mortals and gods in the epic. He writes, "the principle that preserves divine blood is telling; semi-divine parentage does not endow a hero with immortality nor save Achilles or Sarpedon from death."<sup>22</sup> However great one is and however great one's parentage is, in the *Iliad*, there is no crossing of mortals to the divine, however much the divine crosses over into the mortal realm. Throughout the epic, various gods must remind Zeus of the destiny of all mortals for death after he considers saving someone:

ἄνδρα θνητὸν ἐόντα πάλαι πεπρωμένον αἴσῃ  
 ἄψ ἐθέλεις θανάτοιο δυσηχέος ἐξαναλῦσαι;  
 ἔρδ'· ἀτὰρ οὐ τοι πάντες ἐπαινέομεν θεοὶ ἄλλοι.  
 (16.441-443 and 22.179-181)

A mortal man? Having been destined for a long time by fate?  
 Do you again wish to release him from ill-sounding death?  
 Do what you want; but all of us other gods, we won't praise you.

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22. Kahane, *A Guide for the Perplexed*, 178.

Despite the similarities of the gods to humans and how much the gods interact with humans in pursuit of similar things, humans are ontologically constrained while the gods enjoy freedom because of their ontology. Not even the king of the gods can save his own son or one of his dearest mortals from their mortality.

The gods of the *Iliad*, while utterly immanent, are significantly transcendent, even if not by traditional standards. While they constantly intervene in human affairs, acting according to the same values as human beings, they are immune to the consequences of their involvement. This presence of both immanence and transcendence has significant consequences on the gods' interactions with humans as will be described in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER THREE

### This Theology's Consequences on the Honor Culture

As we have seen, Homer presents a picture of the gods as beings both immanent and transcendent. His gods are intimately concerned with the human world, but simultaneously immune to the consequences of their interventions and able to remove themselves from the human world and retreat to their own realms of divine ease and sublimity. The most significant component of the gods' immanence, as we have also seen, is their sharing of many of the same values as the human characters of the epic. The gods look at the world in a similar way as the human characters and act within the world in a similar way, working to secure their desires and accomplish their goals, because of their sharing of values.

The nature of the gods has significant consequences for how the gods interact with the human characters of the epic. In this chapter, I argue that the most important value Homer's gods share with his heroes is honor. In all their interactions, regardless of the concerns at stake, honor and reputation are of the utmost importance to both gods and humans. The gods' immanence brings them into frequent contact with the human characters such that honor is at stake in much the same way that it is among humans, but the gods' transcendence influences the way honor works in these interactions in significant ways. I will analyze how the epic's gods and humans both share an intimate concern for honor and reputation, paying attention as well to the similarities and differences between the honor of the divine and that of mortals as described in the epic.

Finally, I will describe the consequences the gods' immanent and transcendent nature has on their interactions with humans where honor is a concern.

According to Douglas Cairns, honor "is a stock translation of the Greek *timē*, which denotes both one's 'value' in one's own eyes and others' eyes and the esteem conferred by others."<sup>1</sup> Cairns continues: "[T]he 'value' of an individual may rest on a wide variety of qualities: prowess in warfare, rank, wealth, noble birth, age, some special skill or profession, kinship," etc.<sup>2</sup> Just as one's value can come from many places, one can be honored in many ways, for example, "in the form of material goods, such as the *gera*...the sacrifices offered the gods, or the choice cuts of meat, full cups of wine, and grants of land," but also in nonmaterial forms of esteem, such as in "admiration, verbal greetings, the best seat at the table, or carrying out an order."<sup>3</sup> It is clear that the human society of the *Iliad* is governed by an honor culture. An honor culture is a culture in which members of the culture are highly sensitive to their own value and that of others, and desire the recognition of themselves by others, that is, they desire their own honoring. Furthermore, the members of an honor culture understand themselves as having a duty to maintain their good name, public esteem, and reputation before others, that is, to protect their honor.

Just as both humans and gods in the *Iliad* are susceptible to rage, anger, passion, and lust and are intimately concerned with physical delights, love, vengeance, and entertainment, both gods and humans care about honor and the many things that

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1. D. Cairns, "Honor," *The Homeric Encyclopedia*, vol. II, ed. Margalit Finkelberg (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 367.

2. Cairns, "Honor," 367.

3. Cairns, "Honor," 367.

accompany and are at stake in issues of honor, reputation, and esteem. Honor is the most important value shared by humans and gods because it is that value which is a concern to agents in all interactions in the *Iliad*, regardless of what matter is at the heart of the interaction. Whether debating tactics in an assembly, interpreting an oracle, dealing with issues of love, or fighting in battle, one's reputation, esteem, and honor are always of concern.

Just as human society in Homer has a hierarchy intimately related to one's honor, Olympus also has such a hierarchy. Those higher up on the hierarchy have and are due greater honor while those below have and are due less. On Olympus, Zeus sits at the top of the hierarchy of the gods. In Book 1, Zeus returns to Olympus after hearing Thetis' request and agreeing to help the Trojans in order to increase Achilles' honor.

Ζεὺς δὲ ἐὼν πρὸς δῶμα· θεοὶ δ' ἅμα πάντες ἀνέστην  
ἐξ ἐδέων σφοῦ πατρὸς ἐναντίον· οὐδέ τις ἔτλη  
μεῖναι ἐπερχόμενον, ἀλλ' ἀντίοι ἔσαν ἅπαντες. (533-535)

And Zeus went home; and all the gods stood up from  
their own seats to face the father; and no one dared to remain  
sitting with him coming, but all stood up to face him.

While the gods are portrayed throughout the epic as chaffing under Zeus' authority and sometimes testing his authority, his position as king of the gods is never depicted as being in serious jeopardy. It is made clear from the first book that all the Olympian gods recognize Zeus' authority and give him the honor he is due by nature of having this position. Zeus would never stand for another god, but all are sure to stand for him.

As I described earlier, Poseidon, in Book 13, disobeys Zeus' order that no god intervene in the battle raging on the plain of Troy (17-31). Book 14 describes Hera's seduction of Zeus, plotted so that with Zeus having been put to sleep, Poseidon might

help the Greeks openly. Book 15 begins with Zeus waking up to see Hector nearly dead and the Trojans on the retreat (1-15). After threatening Hera with terrifying violence, he orders Hera to send Iris down to Poseidon with the command that he return to the sea (14-33). Iris' message appeals to the two primary places from which honor comes in the epic, rank and martial prowess. She appeals to both Zeus' greater rank and his greater strength and might, that is, to his greater martial prowess.

εἰ δέ μοι οὐκ ἐπέεσσ' ἐπιπείσεται, ἀλλ' ἀλογήσει,  
φραζέσθω δὴ ἔπειτα κατὰ φρένα καὶ κατὰ θυμόν  
μή μ' οὐδὲ κρατερός περ ἐὼν ἐπιόντα ταλάσση  
μεῖναι, ἐπεὶ εὖ φημι βίη πολὺ φέρτερος εἶναι  
καὶ γενεῇ πρότερος· τοῦ δ' οὐκ ὄθεται φίλον ἦτορ  
ἶσον ἐμοὶ φάσθαι, τόν τε στυγέουσι καὶ ἄλλοι. (162-167)

But if he will not be persuaded by my words, but if he disregards them,  
let him indeed then consider in his mind and in his heart  
that he, though being strong, will not bear to remain there with me  
coming, for I am much stronger in my own might—I say—  
and I am first in birth; but his dear heart does not care that he says  
he is equal to me, the one whom the others also loathe.

When Poseidon first hears Zeus' command, he is enraged.

ὦ πόποι ἦ ῥ' ἀγαθός περ ἐὼν ὑπέροπλον ἔειπεν  
εἴ μ' ὁμότιμον ἐόντα βίη ἀέκοντα καθέξει.  
τρῆς γάρ τ' ἐκ Κρόνου εἰμὲν ἀδελφεοὶ οὓς τέκετο Ῥέα  
Ζεὺς καὶ ἐγώ, τρίτατος δ' Αἴδης ἐνέροισιν ἀνάσσω. (185-188)

Hmhp! Though being strong, he has spoken arrogantly if he intends  
to restrain me with force, being unwilling but of the same honor.  
For we are three brothers whom Rhea bore from Cronos,  
Zeus and myself, and Hades the third, lord of those beneath the earth.

Poseidon then elaborates on how each of them became the lords of their domains. After Cronos' fall, there were three domains to be assigned; he drew the sea, Hades the realm of the dead, and Zeus the sky. Olympus and the land were to be theirs in common, he said (189-193). Poseidon then continues:

τὼ ῥα καὶ οὐ τι Διὸς βέομαι φρεσίν, ἀλλὰ ἔκηλος  
καὶ κρατερός περ ἔων μενέτω τριτάτῃ ἐνὶ μοίρῃ.  
χερσὶ δὲ μή τί με πάγχυ κακὸν ὥς δειδισσέσθω·  
θυγατέρεσσιν γάρ τε καὶ υἷάσι βέλτερον εἶη  
ἐκπάγλοις ἐπέεσσιν ἐνισσέμεν οὐς τέκεν αὐτός,  
οἳ ἔθεν ὀτρύνοντος ἀκούσονται καὶ ἀνάγκη. (194-199)

Therefore, I will in no way live according to the will of Zeus,  
though he is strong, let him remain at ease with his third.  
But let him not terrify me thus with any ill in his hands;  
for it would be better for him to chastise his own sons and  
daughters with terrible words, those whom he himself bore,  
who *have* to listen to him, him chiding them on.

Wisely, Iris gives Poseidon a second chance to obey Zeus' orders. She asks him if he really wants her to bring back that answer to Zeus. She reminds him both that the minds of even the good and great change and that the Furies always side with older siblings in such arguments (201-204). Poseidon relents, thanking Iris for her prudence (206-207).

However, this does not mean that Poseidon is satisfied:

ἀλλὰ τόδ' αἰνὸν ἄχος κραδίην καὶ θυμὸν ἱκάνει  
ὅππότε' ἂν ἰσόμορον καὶ ὁμῇ πεπρωμένον αἴσῃ  
νεικεῖν ἐθέλῃσι χολωτοῖσιν ἐπέεσσιν.  
ἀλλ' ἦτοι νῦν μὲν κε νεμεσσηθεὶς ὑποείζω. (208-211)

But this dread distress comes upon my heart and mind  
whenever one desires to reprove with wrathful words one  
who is equal and has been allotted an equal share.  
But indeed, though having been justly angry, I will now yield.

Poseidon ends with a message for Iris to give to Zeus. He recognizes that he is yielding now, but he vows that if Zeus ever decides to spare Troy against his will and that of Athena, Hera, Hermes, and Hephaestus, the anger between them will become irreparable (211-217).

This exchange between Poseidon and Iris reveals much about the nature of honor in the poem and about how the gods conceive of and value honor. While Zeus sits



unambiguously at the top of the Olympian hierarchy, those below him do not always fully accept their places and they often try to accomplish their own ends against his will. The exchange also helps to illustrate the roles the forces of rank and martial prowess play in issues and disputes of honor. Zeus demands that Poseidon listen to him because he is the *strongest* by far of the gods as well as the *first-born* son of Cronos.

Poseidon acknowledges that Zeus is the mightiest of all, but he rejects Zeus' claim to the greatest rank. Given that each of the brothers drew equal domains and share the realm of the land, he sees them three as sharing equal rank and sees Zeus' threats as the abuse of an equal by an equal rather than the commands of one with proper authority. Zeus could behave like this with his children, since they are his children, but not with his brother, with another son of Cronos. However, in the end, Poseidon yields and withdraws. It appears that preserving unity and concord on Olympus is more important than any desire of a single god. One god's desires are not worth inaugurating a new *theomachy* and upending the status quo. Nevertheless, the ultimate denial of Poseidon of Troy's fall would mean lasting discord between him and Zeus.

It is clear that honor holds a significant place in the hearts of both humans and the gods, but there are significant differences in the sources of their honor. As I briefly mentioned above, honor in the epic largely derives from two places, rank and martial prowess. These forces play significant roles in creating hierarchy and in generating and compelling honor, both on Olympus and in the human world. While both forces operate in both worlds, the differences between the sources of honor for humans and gods largely align with these two forces. Honor among humans generally has to be fought for and is normally won according to one's own strength, might, and martial prowess. Honor

among the gods is generally not fought for or earned with feats of strength (at least in the *Iliad*), but rather is owed the gods by nature of their rank in the cosmos.

At the foundation of the honor culture for human beings is the absolute fact that “all men die.” This ontological fact is recognized numerous times throughout the epic by both gods and humans. The fact that all humans die is a universal principle that ties together all human lives in the epic. As Achilles recognizes many times in the epic, the common lot of brave and cowardly warriors and of strong and weak fighters is death (e.g. 9.314-322 and 21.99-113). While the mythological past is replete with stories of mortals escaping death and being granted divine sublimity, in the world of the epic, in the generation whose destiny it is to be ground down by bloody warfare, no human being will escape his or her lot, fate, and destiny—death.

The logical consequent of the inevitability of lasting death is to do all that one can to survive in the world past death. Even though one’s identity and individuality might be lost in the land of shades, one may be able to survive in the land of the living through tales that praise and pass on one’s glory and renown. This question of how one should live in the shadow of death is that which defines Achilles. He had the choice to remain in Phthia and die without glory, living in comfort to a ripe old age, or to fight on the plain of Troy and die at a young age but with glory unrivaled by any (9.410-416). Curiously enough, the epic that recount his feats is not only still read today, more than twenty-five hundred years after its composition, but is considered one of the greatest works of literature of all time.

Since death is inevitable and permanent, human beings must differentiate themselves from one another and make names for themselves—they must fight for and

win glory that will demand their honoring. This requires, as Seeskin argues, action that “involves a kind of transcendence.”<sup>4</sup> Socrates, at his trial,<sup>5</sup> argued that heroic action occurs “when one makes light of death compared to the prospect of incurring dishonor.”<sup>6</sup> To a glorious hero, “death, however terrible, is preferable to a loss of face and dishonor.”<sup>7</sup> This action is an act of transcendence, where one chooses truer goods over lesser goods. It is “the recognition that personal honor and revenge for a loved one are incommensurable with anything long life has to offer, such as riches, comfort, or leisure time.”<sup>8</sup> For a hero intimately aware of his mortality, honor, glory, vengeance, and all things that work to bolster one’s honor are of much greater value than those things that might make life long and comfortable, but ultimately do nothing to preserve one’s honor, glory, and renown, those things which preserve oneself in the culture past death.

Honor for mortals primarily comes from fighting and one’s own martial prowess. If one is to be remembered past death, one must perform great feats whose greatness survives one’s death. The poem shows an awareness of the role inherited rank plays within the mortal honor system, particularly in the portrayal of Agamemnon, the king who inherited his scepter from Zeus, and in the ways divine parentage impacts a mortal’s importance. After all, the quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles, the conflict of the epic, represents the tension between rank and martial prowess and their roles in doling

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4. Seeskin, “The Comedy of the Gods,” 302.

5. *Apol.* 28b-28d. Socrates says this imagining that someone has asked him if he is ashamed to have practiced an activity that has put his life in danger.

6. Quoted by Seeskin in “The Comedy of the Gods,” 301.

7. Seeskin, “The Comedy of the Gods,” 302.

8. Seeskin, “The Comedy of the Gods,” 302.

out honor among humans. Nevertheless, that which generally characterizes the honor system of mortals is competition and martial prowess. Mortals must fight for their honor and glory.

While honor for mortals corresponds primarily with the competitive martial prowess system, honor for the gods corresponds primarily with the fixed rank system. While there are traces of both systems on Olympus just as on earth, the fixed rank system generally characterizes the system of honor among the gods in the same way that the martial prowess system generally characterizes the mortal honor system. In the past, the gods fought each other for their places on the divine hierarchy. Just as Cronos fought and overthrew his father Ouranos, Zeus fought and overthrew his father Cronos. While such fighting helped characterize the world of the gods and establish their hierarchies, and while this history sometimes breaks through into the poem,<sup>9</sup> the *Iliad* itself does not present a picture of the divine hierarchy in which any god might significantly reorder the hierarchy or seriously challenge Zeus and take his place as king. The *Iliad* presents a picture in which the authority of Zeus is consolidated and under no meaningful threat, however much the gods tend to resist his will and test his patience.

The honor of the gods, as depicted in the *Iliad*, comes almost entirely from their inherited rank. Homer's gods do not have to fight and accomplish great feats of strength in order to be honored by each other or by mortals. While the gods' greater strength and power are reasons for greater honor, they are the consequences of the gods' ontological privileges as gods, and are thus more attestations to their inherited rank than to their cultivated martial prowess.

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9. Laura M. Slatkin, "The Wrath of Thetis," in *Oxford Readings in Homer's Iliad*, ed. Douglas L. Cairns (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 419-420.

Rank on a hierarchy can be earned or granted. The rank of the gods is for the most part granted or inherited, not earned. Achilles is among the highest ranked Greek captains because he has proven himself with the scores of enemies he has slain and cities he has plundered. Agamemnon is the commander-in-chief of the Greek forces because he received his scepter from Zeus. There is room to debate how much of any given individual's rank is earned or granted. While Achilles himself clearly fights and gets his own hands dirty more than Agamemnon, his strength was not something he himself cultivated and trained. Rather, it was a product of his parentage. In the same way, while Agamemnon frequently appeals to Zeus' gift of his command, the *Iliad* does portray him in instances as acting as a good commander, general, and king (11.10-46 and 11.91-93). With respect to the gods, the extent to which they *deserve* their places as gods can also be contested. Nevertheless, it should be clear that in the world of the *Iliad*, their position as gods is mostly something they were granted and did not earn. The inherited component of this rank is significant because it ties the gods' cosmological rank to the transcendence described in the preceding chapter. The gods' transcendence over the mortal world, their ontological privileges of immortality and increased strength and beauty, and the "rank" described here, are all closely related and are all components more of what the gods *happen to be* than of what the gods have *made themselves to be*. In this way, the gods' cosmological rank is very much synonymous with their transcendence in that both illustrate their "fated" positions in the universe—positions not cultivated or earned, but allotted by fate.

In Book 3, the duel between the Greeks and Trojans is broken by Aphrodite as she rescues Paris from imminent death at the hands of Menelaus (369-382). At the beginning

of Book 4, Zeus muses about what the gods should do. He questions whether the gods should reignite war and battle, or hand down pacts of peace (1-19). Hera is enraged to think that Troy might survive destruction and Zeus marvels at her hatred of Troy (20-29). He lets her know that Troy is the dearest city to him by far:

οὐ γάρ μοί ποτε βωμὸς ἐδεύετο δαιτὸς ἔϊσης  
λοιβῆς τε κνίσσης τε· τὸ γὰρ λάχομεν γέρας ἡμεῖς. (48-49)

For my altar did not ever lack an equal feast or drink offering  
or savor of sacrifices; for we receive the honors by destiny.

The exchange between Hera and Zeus is one of the epic's most striking revelations of the way the gods' perceive their relationship to mortals. What is important here, however, is Zeus' explicit recognition of sacrifices and honors as the gods' due. While the Greek verb λαγχάνω is most often understood as meaning to merely receive one's lot or portion, the verb can sometimes mean to receive one's *fated* or *destined* lot, thus sometimes including a connotation of that which one λαγχάνει being tied to one's fate, destiny, or nature.<sup>10</sup> As commoners give gifts to kings and queens on account of their rank, which they have by nature of who they are, so do humans sacrifice to the gods.

While the system of sacrifice is understood as including a facet of reciprocity, in which those who frequently and faithfully offer sacrifices are understood as more likely to incur the favor and aid of the gods, the gods themselves seem to understand sacrifices merely as things due themselves. Homer chose to name Troy as the city that honored Zeus the most of the human world where the epic tradition did not compel him to do so (4.44-49). Still, those sacrifices could not save Troy. While the gods are sometimes mindful of the sacrifices paid them by humans and thus help them, the poem does not

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10. Richard John Cunliffe, *A Lexicon of the Homeric Dialect* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012), 243.

depict the gods as understanding sacrifices as necessarily indebting them to mortals.

Rather, the gods see sacrifices and other such expressions of honor merely as their due.

Sacrifices and acts of honor are sometimes remembered, but they do not bind the gods to act favorably towards any mortal. Gods are due veneration. They do not work for it.

In Book 7, the Greek captains discuss tactics. Nestor suggests they build a wall and rampart in front of their ships to protect against Trojan charge (336-343). From Olympus, the gods look down on the laboring Greeks. Poseidon is exasperated to see the Greek construction project.

Ζεῦ πάτερ, ἥ ῥά τίς ἐστι βροτῶν ἐπ' ἀπείρονα γαῖαν  
ὅς τις ἔτ' ἀθανάτοισι νόον καὶ μῆτιν ἐνίψει;  
οὐχ ὀράας ὅτι δ' αὖτε κάρη κομόωντες Ἀχαιοὶ  
τείχος ἐτειχίσσαντο νεῶν ὕπερ, ἀμφὶ δὲ τάφρον  
ἤλασαν, οὐδὲ θεοῖσι δόσαν κλειτὰς ἐκατόμβας;  
τοῦ δ' ἥτοι κλέος ἔσται ὅσον τ' ἐπικίδνεται ἡώς. (446-451)

Father Zeus! Is there any mortal upon the boundless Earth  
who still shares his plans and thoughts with the immortals?  
Do you not see that the long haired Achaeans have again built  
walls before their ships and dug a trench around it?  
And they have not even given the gods a famous hecatomb.  
And indeed, its glory will spread as far as the dawn.

Zeus answers Poseidon with a scolding.

ὦ πόποι ἐννοσίγαι' εὐρυσθενές, οἷον ἔειπες.  
ἄλλός κέν τις τοῦτο θεῶν δείσειε νόημα,  
ὃς σέο πολλὸν ἀφαιρότερος χειρὰς τε μένος τε·  
σὸν δ' ἥτοι κλέος ἔσται ὅσον τ' ἐπικίδνεται ἡώς. (455-458)

Well! What a thing you have said, mighty earth-shaker!  
Some other god would fear this thing, one who is  
much less notable in hand and might than you;  
but indeed, *your* glory spreads as far as the dawn.

Just as Zeus understands sacrifices and honors as the gods' due, Poseidon does as well. It is baffling to Poseidon that the Greeks would undertake such a labor without seeking the

blessing of the gods with sacrifice. He sees himself as due the attention of mortals. We might wonder whether sacrificing to Poseidon would have ensured his protection of their wall and ships against the impending Trojan onslaught. It does not seem that a hecatomb would have saved the Greeks and their wall from the necessity of fulfilling Thetis' request. While sacrifices do have an element of reciprocity, they are primarily seen by the gods as a means of furnishing the honor they see themselves as naturally due.

Achilles' mother Thetis offers an example in which this honor due the gods is apparently violated. Thetis often refers to herself as the most wretched of all the goddesses (e.g. 1.512-516 and 18.429-441). Her forced betrothal to a mortal, facilitated in order to safeguard Zeus' reign by ensuring that the son who would dethrone him was never born to him, resulted in many woes for her.<sup>11</sup> Not only does she have a husband who wastes and withers away with old age, but worst of all, she has a son who, though excellent in every way, must die (18.429-461). As such, his mortality ensures that they can never enjoy the divine bliss that is due gods together. Although gods are due sacrifices, leisure, bliss, and the general fulfillment of the things they desire, Thetis, because of her forced marriage, is largely denied these things, both for herself and her son. Thetis' story illustrates a violation of this divine system of honor which sees honor and the things that come with it as the gods' due.

P. V. Jones recognizes that the human characters of the *Iliad* largely do not think about the gods in ways characterized by mystical reverence or adoration. He writes, "when heroes talk about the gods, they talk of their power and their unpredictability. When they react to the gods, they do so as if they were reacting to very powerful humans,

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11. Slatkin, "The Wrath of Thetis," 429-430.



who may be friends or enemies.”<sup>12</sup> The gods’ pursuit of many of the same things as mortals in accordance with many of the same values as mortals brings the gods into interactions with them either as powerful friends or foes. Their frequent interventions in the affairs of mortals are not given a second glance because in the world of the poem to intervene is merely to do that which is expected of the gods. The characters do not ask why or how. The only pertinent question to the characters is whose side they are on.

This type of involvement, in which the gods are primarily thought of as *friends* or *enemies* to humans, illustrates how the gods interact with humans in ways in which honor is at stake. Just as humans honor their human friends and allies and affront the honor of their human enemies, so too do they honor their divine allies and affront the honor of their divine enemies when, in conflict, the gods are either friends or foes.

Aware or unaware, Agamemnon, in his harsh dismissal of Chryses, indirectly insults the honor of Apollo, Chryses’ benefactor (1.26-32). Just as humans throughout the poem incur insults to themselves when one of their own is harmed, so too does Apollo when Chryses is thus abused. Another example involves Aphrodite, who receives withering criticism from Helen, whom she commands to return to Paris after his failed duel with Menelaus (3.369-382). Helen ironically asks if Aphrodite will also take her to Phrygia or Maeonia if she has some dear man there to give her to. She concludes by telling the goddess that she herself, forsaking her divinity, should take her place and comfort Paris.

ἦσο παρ’ αὐτὸν ἰοῦσα, θεῶν δ’ ἀπόεικε κελεύθου,  
μηδ’ ἔτι σοῖσι πόδεσσιν ὑποστρέψειας Ὀλυμπον,  
ἀλλ’ αἰεὶ περὶ κεῖνον ὄϊζε καὶ ἐφύλασσε,  
εἰς ὃ κέ σ’ ἢ ἄλοχον ποιήσεται ἢ ὃ γε δούλην.

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12. P. V. Jones, “The Independent Heroes of the *Iliad*,” *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 116 (1996): 108, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/631958>, The Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies.

κεῖσε δ' ἐγὼν οὐκ εἶμι· νεμεσσητὸν δέ κεν εἴη·  
κείνου πορσανέουσα λέχος· Τρῳαὶ δέ μ' ὀπίσσω  
παῖσαι μωμήσονται· ἔχω δ' ἄχε' ἄκριτα θυμῳ. (406-412)

*You* go sit beside him and *you* leave behind the life of the gods,  
and do not turn your feet back to Olympus,  
but suffer forever besides that one and protect him,  
until he makes you his wife or perhaps his slave.  
I for my part will not be there; for it would be most reprehensible,  
tending to that one's bed, and all the Trojan women would  
reproach me again; but I have endless anguish in my heart.

The rebuke is one of the most scathing of any god by any mortal in the epic. Aphrodite, seething mad, tells Helen to not provoke her, lest she toss her over the walls of Troy to bite the dust, hating her in that moment as much as she has loved her up to that point (413-417).

While Aphrodite does not explicitly say that Helen has insulted her honor, Aphrodite's outrage is clear enough evidence that Helen has insulted her and her honor greatly. She insults Aphrodite's status, or rank, as a goddess. Not only is Helen insubordinate, an affront in itself to one of greater rank, but she demands that Aphrodite forsake her divinity, suffer, and live at the beck and call of a mortal man, a rejection of her rank. The mere saying of these words, as Achilles' insulting of Agamemnon, is sufficient to constitute an affront to the goddess' honor.

The very origin of the conflict that marks the setting of the *Iliad* is itself rooted in a conflict between gods and humans in which one dishonors the other, that is, in the judgement of Paris. This source of the conflict of the epic in such an account where a god's honor is insulted by a human has significant consequences for the larger worldview of the epic. These consequences, and the role the gods' nature as transcendent and imminent play in them, will be described in the next chapter. Meanwhile, in order to

draw on elements of the epic cycle for the analysis of the *Iliad*, it is necessary to explore the nature of the epic cycle's relationship to the *Iliad*, since the only place in the epic where the judgement is explicitly mentioned, 24.25-30, is believed by many to be a later interpolation. The judgement of Paris, if suitable for analyzing the world of the *Iliad*, marks the supreme example of how the gods' transcendence influences their interactions with mortals where honor is at stake.

As the story goes, Eris, angered at her not being invited to Zeus' banquet for Thetis and Peleus' marriage, came anyway with a golden apple addressed "to the fairest." Zeus, unwilling to decide to whom of Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite he should award the apple, gave Paris the task of deciding. Finding the gifts of kingdoms and shrewdness in battle lacking, and thus Hera and Athena, Paris gave the apple to Aphrodite and was given in return Helen, the world's most beautiful woman as a wife.

Whereas Menelaus and Agamemnon's resolve to retrieve Helen motivates their persistence to see Troy fall in the human realm, Hera and Athena's hatred of Troy over their rejection by Paris motivates in the divine realm their desires to see Troy fall, if the judgement is to be accepted. For our purposes, the important point is that gods left an interaction insulted by a human, and thus they left as enemies. Just as human characters in the *Iliad* hate each other because of insults and affronts against them, so do Hera and Athena hate the Trojans for Paris' insult of and affront against them.

The *Iliad* itself is vague when it comes to the war's cause and beginning. As Robert Vacca notes, Books 2 through 4, those which Homer uses to introduce many of his characters and set the stage of the epic, have no direct references to the judgement of

Paris.<sup>13</sup> In those books, as Vacca notes, the elopement is characterized as a “private quarrel between the two sons of Atreus and the Trojans” and not as the reason for fighting for the whole army or the cause of the goddesses’ hatred of Troy.<sup>14</sup>

In Book 4, Homer gives his audience a behind the scenes peek into the gods’ perspective on the war. After the truce of Book 3 is broken, Zeus jokes about handing down pacts of peace, ending the war, and saving Troy (1-19). Hera is infuriated. Zeus, struck by her unceasing hatred of Troy, asks what great pains the Trojans have caused Hera to provoke such wrath (30-49). Instead of answering Zeus with reasons for why she hates the Trojans, Hera answers with an appeal to her rank as a goddess and her right to pursue Troy’s destruction (50-67). She unflinchingly offers Zeus the destruction of her three most beloved cities in order to see Troy fall. Both Vacca<sup>15</sup> and A. Maria van Erp Taalman Kip<sup>16</sup> agree with Karl Reinhardt’s suggestion that to bring up something as frivolous as the divine beauty contest here would undermine the seriousness of Zeus and Hera’s struggle. Vacca and Erp Taalman Kip also agree with Reinhardt that Homer was aware of the story of the judgement of Paris and that his omission of it was intentional.

Due to the poem’s overall silence on the matter, many have argued, even in ancient times, for the inauthenticity of the lines in Book 24 that mention the Judgement of Paris.<sup>17</sup> Speaking of returning Hector’s corpse:

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13. Robert Vacca, “The Theology of Disorder in the *Iliad*,” *Religion and Literature* 23, no. 2 (Summer 1991): 5, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40059472>, the University of Notre Dame.

14. Vacca, “The Theology of Disorder,” 5.

15. Vacca, “The Theology of Disorder,” 10.

16. A. Maria van Erp Taalman Kip, “The Gods of the *Iliad* and the Fate of Troy,” *Mnemosyne* Fourth Series, 54, no. 4 (August 2000): 392, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4433117>, Brill.

17. Erp Taalman Kip, “The Gods of the *Iliad*,” 392.

ἐνθ' ἄλλοις μὲν πᾶσιν ἐήνδανεν, οὐδέ ποθ' Ἥρη  
οὐδὲ Ποσειδάων' οὐδὲ γλαυκῶπιδι κόρῃ,  
ἀλλ' ἔχον ὥς σφιν πρῶτον ἀπήχθετο Ἴλιος ἱρή  
καὶ Πρίαμος καὶ λαὸς Ἀλεξάνδρου ἔνεκ' ἄτης,  
ὃς νείκεσσε θεὰς ὅτε οἱ μέσσαιον ἵκοντο,  
τὴν δ' ἤνησ' ἣ οἱ πόρε μαχλοσύνην ἀλεγεινήν. (25-30)

It then pleased all the other gods, but not Hera  
or Poseidon or the gleaming-eyed maiden,  
but they held to it still as when divine Troy and Priam and his people  
first became hateful to them on account of the folly of Alexander,  
who insulted the goddesses when they came to his courtyard,  
and commended her who furnished his grievous lust.

Throughout the history of Homeric scholarship, many have argued for excising some or all of these lines.<sup>18</sup> Many find it strange that Homer would go through the whole of his poem and only mention such important information as the cause of some of the gods' hatred of Troy in the last book. Erp Taalman Kip, for instance, says that she would at the least delete lines twenty-eight through thirty.<sup>19</sup>

While Erp Taalman Kip and Vacca view Homer's silence on the cause of the war and the origin of the gods' hatred of Troy as playing a central role in the poem's overall worldview, this issue is not what matters here. What is important for our purposes is whether an event like the judgement of Paris can be understood as being the cause of the god's hatred and whether a human's affront to a god's honor marks the cause of the war. Both Vacca and Erp Taalman Kip see Homer's ambiguity concerning the source of the gods' hatred of Troy as supporting a more sinister and frightening outlook on the nature of the gods. While this might be the case, our concern is not whether the gods' anger and hatred of Troy is warranted, but whether any insult occurred at all. If it did, then the

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18. Erp Taalman Kip, "The Gods of the *Iliad*," 392.

19. Erp Taalman Kip, "The Gods of the *Iliad*," 393.

gods' hatred of Troy at least has some cause. For Erp Taalman Kip, in line with her view that the vagueness supports a sinister characterization of the gods, suggests that the goddesses' hatred might have no cause whatsoever.<sup>20</sup>

Despite the epic's near silence on the judgement of Paris, it seems that we can still accept a form of the episode as the cause of some of the gods' hatred of Troy and thus the war of the *Iliad*. Homer's epics did not exist in a vacuum—they were not fully his own stories. A whole apparatus of Greek myth surrounded the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Ancient Greek audiences came to performances and retellings of the stories of their myths already knowing how they began and how they ended. Describing the middle of the story was that which was left to the poet, performer, or tragedian, and they often took great liberties. Fate plays such a role in the stories of Ancient Greece because the endings of the stories of their myths were largely fixed and unchangeable. Just as there was no conceivable world in which Oedipus did not kill his father and marry his mother there was no conceivable world in which Troy survived its destruction. Sacred Troy must fall and Priam and his people must be slain because that is merely what happened. Homer was free to tell us *how* Troy fell, but he was not free to save Troy. If the story of Paris' judgement was widely known in Homer's time, his audience could not have approached the epic without it in mind, given Greek myth's constraint concerning these things. Given this, I argue that the judgement of Paris, or an event like it, can still reasonably be understood as the ultimate cause of the war, the gods' hatred, even though the epic suppresses mention of *this* episode. I will follow in the tradition of Vacca, Erp Taalman

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20. Erp Taalman Kip, "The Gods of the *Iliad*," 394.

Kip, and Reinhardt in believing that the poet was aware of the story of Paris' judgement and left it out for literary reasons.

No god in the *Iliad* is portrayed as becoming angry with or hating an individual or group of people for no reason. Even Ares, in his bloodthirsty rampage in which he himself kills humans, is not portrayed as being driven by *hatred*. Rather, he is portrayed as overcome by an impersonal bloodlust and passion for violence. While we might question the warrant of the gods' hatred, we must recognize that it at least comes from somewhere. Just as Apollo hates the Greeks for their imminent destroying of Troy, just as Xanthus hates Achilles for his slaying of Trojans, and just as Aphrodite bursts out in rage at Helen for her scathing insults, Hera and Athena must hate Troy for a reason. It might be something as frivolous as the results of a beauty contest, or it might be something more sinister and serious. Regardless, it does not seem possible that their hatred has *no* cause.

The gods' immanence occasions interactions with human beings in which the gods can be seen as friends or enemies, and thus the potential arises for humans to honor or affront gods. The gods' immanence makes humans and gods players of the same game—one played over honor. However, the gods' transcendence allows the gods to not play the game by the same rules. When a mortal affronts the honor of another human, the patient of the affront strives to recoup that loss either by fighting to re-bolster his own honor in a different way or by fighting the agent of the affront with the hope of avenging himself and thus regaining his honor. Quarrels, affronts, and disputes of honor are resolved among human beings in much the same way that honor is gained in the first

place, through fighting, competition, and demonstrations of one's own martial prowess; they are resolved according to one's excellence.

The gods do not fight and do battle in order to restore their insulted honor.

Whereas a human being must rely on his own physical strength and might or that of his allies in order to pay back the agent of his insult, gods do not rely on their strength in this way. The justification for their efforts of paying back an agent of their insult comes from their rank and their ontological privilege as gods, that is, from their transcendence. A god does not labor in the dust of the battlefield and wrangle with a human being in the hopes of being the one to defeat and dishonor him and to thus recoup the prior loss of face. A god works from Olympus, out of the view of humans, working from behind the scenes to bring about pain as punishment for those that have affronted him or her.

Another significant difference between the way mortals and gods' resolve affronts is that just as the gods' honor has an element of obligation by nature of their transcendence, the gods of the *Iliad* are frequently portrayed as understanding themselves as owed their punishment of mortals for affronts to their honor. Just as with honor in general, humans must fight for honor and pay back affronts to their honor in accordance with their own means. The gods, on the other hand, are due honor and due the punishment of those who affront them.

In Book 5, after telling Aphrodite the stories of times where Ares, Hades, and Hera suffered pains on account of their involvement in the human world, Dione ends her comfort of Aphrodite with a warning for Diomedes.

σοὶ δ' ἐπὶ τοῦτον ἀνῆκε θεὰ γλαυκῶπις Ἀθήνη·  
νήπιος, οὐδὲ τὸ οἶδε κατὰ φρένα Τυδέος υἱὸς  
ὅττι μάλ' οὐ δηναῖος ὃς ἀθανάτοισι μάχεται,  
οὐδέ τί μιν παῖδες ποτὶ γούνασι παππάζουσιν



ἐλθόντ' ἐκ πολέμοιο καὶ αἰνῆς δηϊοτῆτος.  
τὼ νῦν Τυδεΐδης, εἰ καὶ μάλα καρτερός ἐστι,  
φραζέσθω μὴ τίς οἱ ἀμείνων σεῖο μάχηται,  
μὴ δὴν Αἰγιάλεια περίφρων Ἀδρηστίνη  
ἐξ ὕπνου γοόωσα φίλους οἰκῆας ἐγείρη  
κουρίδιον ποθέουσα πόσιν τὸν ἄριστον Ἀχαιῶν  
ἰφθίμη ἄλοχος Διομήδεος ἵπποδάμοιο. (405-415)

But the goddess, gleaming-eyed Athena, has sent this one upon you;  
fool, the son of Tydeus does not know in his heart that  
whoever fights the immortals does not live long,  
nor do his children call him father on his knees,  
him having come from the war and dreadful combat.  
Therefore, let the son of Tydeus, even if he is exceedingly strong,  
be careful lest someone better than him fight with him,  
lest Aegialeia, the prudent daughter of Adrestus,  
wake her dear household servants from their sleep with her crying,  
longing for her wedded husband, the best of the Achaeans,  
the mighty wife of horse-taming Diomedes.

At the beginning of her comfort of Aphrodite, Dione tells her that it is to be expected that the gods get hurt when they get involved in human affairs (382-384). She knows that Diomedes was only a tool used by Athena to harm Aphrodite and that the true fight lay between them, not between Diomedes and Aphrodite. While Dione recognizes the true source of Aphrodite's wound, Athena, and that Diomedes was only her tool, she reveals that there is a price to pay for harming a god, even if one was only used as an instrument by another god.

While Dione's warning for Diomedes does not include any explicit plan for punishing him and avenging themselves, there is no doubt that her words of caution have a threatening tone. Her vague cautions reflect the picture of divine punishment outlined above. The gods work from behind the scene to weave pains and sufferings for human agents of insult. Those who fight the gods do not live long lives, not because a god will immediately confront them and kill them, but because they will live their lives with a god

as an enemy, with a god always looking to see how he or she can bring pain and suffering upon the individual. The god might aid a stronger hero in battle against the agent of the insult or the god might destroy the agent's children so that he is no longer called a father. The gods are characterized as satisfied to work through these secondary causes. They themselves do not generally avenge their insults personally.

In a passage previously discussed, Zeus muses about ending the war and saving Troy, provoking Hera. She responds:

αἰνότατε Κρονίδη ποῖον τὸν μῦθον ἔειπες·  
πῶς ἐθέλεις ἄλιον θεῖναι πόνον ἢ δ' ἀτέλεστον,  
ἰδρῶ θ' ὄν ἰδρωσα μόγῳ, καμέτην δέ μοι ἵπποι  
λαδὼν ἀγειρούσῃ, Πριάμῳ κακὰ τοῖό τε παισίν.  
ἔρδ'· ἀτὰρ οὐ τοι πάντες ἐπαινέομεν θεοὶ ἄλλοι. (4.24-29)

Most dreadful son of Cronos, what a thing you have said!  
How you are willing to make my labor ineffectual and fruitless,  
and the sweat from my toil; my horses labored for me,  
gathering the host, ills for Priam and his sons. Do as you please—  
but all the other gods, we do not praise you.

It is to this response that Zeus marvels at Hera's hatred and asks Hera what Priam and his sons have done to anger her so (30-49). Though Zeus yields and tells Hera to do as she pleases, he warns her that she must never let their quarrel grow into a great conflict between them. After Hera offers up to Zeus for destruction her three most beloved cities of the Greeks, she appeals to her rights as a god to seek Troy's destruction.

ἀλλὰ χρὴ καὶ ἐμὸν θέμεναι πόνον οὐκ ἀτέλεστον·  
καὶ γὰρ ἐγὼ θεός εἰμι, γένος δέ μοι ἔνθεν ὅθεν σοί,  
καί με πρεσβυτάτην τέκετο Κρόνος ἀγκυλομήτης,  
ἀμφότερον γενεῇ τε καὶ οὖνεκα σὴ παράκοιτις  
κέκλημαι, σὺ δὲ πᾶσι μετ' ἀθανάτοισιν ἀνάσσεις. (57-61)

But it is necessary that my labor not be made fruitless;  
for I myself am also a god, and my birth comes from where yours does,  
and Cronos, crooked in counsel, begat me as the oldest goddess,  
both in birth and on account that I am called your consort,

and you rule among all the immortal gods.

Hera's labor must end in success because she is not only a goddess, but because she is the foremost of all the goddesses. Like Zeus, she is a child of Cronos, and as Zeus is the king of all the gods, Hera is the queen. Hera's rank as goddess and highest of goddesses makes the punishment of those who insulted her her due.

Book 24 begins with Achilles still stricken by grief over Patroclus' death. Unable to sleep, he either wanders along the beach or ties Hector's corpse back behind his chariot and drags him around Patroclus' burial mound (1-18). But Apollo, pitying Hector, does not allow Hector's corpse to decay (18-21). The poet reports that all the gods pity Hector and that they all have concocted a plan to have Hermes steal Hector's corpse away (22-26). All are pleased but Hera, Athena, and Poseidon. Exasperated at their sustained wrath, Apollo addresses the gods and argues for them to release Hector's corpse. He brings to their attention the fact that Hector always sacrificed to them as well (33-38). He also argues that Achilles has begun to indulge his anger beyond what is proper for mortals and that many other mortals have suffered dearer losses than he has (39-54). He says that Achilles must be careful lest the gods turn on him in their anger (53-54). Hera, in her anger, addresses Apollo's arguments.

εἴη κεν καὶ τοῦτο τεὸν ἔπος ἀργυρότοξε  
εἰ δὴ ὁμῆν Ἀχιλῆϊ καὶ Ἑκτορι θήσετε τιμὴν.  
Ἑκτωρ μὲν θνητός τε γυναῖκά τε θήσατο μαζόν·  
αὐτὰρ Ἀχιλλεύς ἐστι θεᾶς γόνος, ἣν ἐγὼ αὐτὴ  
θρέψα τε καὶ ἀτίτηλα καὶ ἀνδρὶ πόρον παράκοιτιν  
Πηλεΐ, ὃς περὶ κῆρι φίλος γένητ' ἀθανάτοισι.  
πάντες δ' ἀντιάσθε θεοὶ γάμου· ἐν δὲ σὺ τοῖσι  
δαίνυ' ἔχων φόρμιγγα κακῶν ἔταρ', αἰὲν ἄπιστε. (56-63)

This would be as you have said, lord of the silver bow,  
if indeed you give Achilles and Hector equal honor.  
But Hector was mortal and he nursed at a mortal woman's breast;

but Achilles is the son of a goddess, whom I myself  
raised and tended to and gave as a wife to the man  
Peleus, who has become dear to the hearts of the immortals.  
And all of you gods went to the wedding; and you partook of the  
feast among them, holding your lyre, you partner of ills, ever unfaithful.

Just as the gods are entitled to the punishment of those who insult, affront, or harm them by nature of their rank as gods, Achilles is understood by Hera as entitled to his vengeance in accordance with his honor and rank. Hera recognizes that if Achilles were some ordinary mortal, his relentless punishment of Hector and his family would be excessive. However, since Achilles is no ordinary mortal, but the son of a goddess and a man dear to the gods, Achilles enjoys a special rank and honor among the gods and mortals, one which entitles him to special privileges. While Achilles is not a god, these words of Hera explicitly outline the principle I have been describing. Rank makes the punishment of those who have affronted or harmed an individual one's due. The gods' rank and transcendence entitle them to punish those who insult and harm them, whereas human beings have to fight for their vengeance according to their own means.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Divine and Human Conditions

In order to win honor and vengeance, human beings must struggle and fight. The gods, on the other hand, though intimately concerned like humans with honor and vengeance, are due honor and vengeance because of their transcendence, that is, because of their ontological rank as gods. Apart from making honor and vengeance the gods' due, the transcendence of the gods has another significant consequence for the gods' interactions with human beings. Human beings must practice self-restraint in the honor culture or risk the destruction of their societies. The gods, because of their transcendence, do not have to practice this restraint.

The dangers of an honor culture to organized and stable society are obvious. In a society without a universally recognized authority, matters of justice largely become the concern of individuals. Without recognized courts, judges, and laws, resolving disputes, affronts, and perceived injustices becomes the responsibility of individuals, families, and clans. Without recognized and established rules for action, individuals are prone to excess in their own reactions to perceived injustices. When justice is primarily the responsibility of the individual, it is clear how the taking of an eye can be paid back with the taking of a life instead of only an eye, thus fueling an endless cycle of vengeance that destroys individuals, families, clans, and societies.

The *Iliad*, with wrath and anger as central themes, is sensitive to human society's vulnerable to destruction at the hands of excess. While the heroic society of the *Iliad* has certain shared values and expectations that allow for one's actions to be praised or

criticized by the culture as a whole, it ultimately does not have recognized and established judges, courts, and laws that wield the sufficient authority necessary to legitimately and firmly constrain the actions of the members of its society. Donna Wilson, in her book *Ransom, Revenge, and Heroic Identity in the Iliad*, touches on this dynamic that lurks behind the society of the poem.<sup>1</sup>

In her book, Wilson outlines a detailed account of the different ways reciprocity is manifested in the epic and how these ways speak to the values of the epic. She proposes that reciprocity and disputes of honor in the *Iliad* largely fall into two primary categories and a third where the two are mixed.<sup>2</sup> *Apoina* is the Greek word for ransom and recompense and is used by Wilson to characterize a type of reciprocity in disputes of honor where the gains in honor of the agent of the insult are preserved.<sup>3</sup> In this type of reciprocity, the patient of the insult (i.e. the sufferer) recognizes and accepts his or her loss of honor to the agent of the insult. The patient offers ransoms, or *apoina*, to the agent in the hopes of getting back that which was lost to the agent, which is most often a loved one captured. The gains in honor made by the agent are preserved because even though he or she gives up what was taken, he or she receives ransoms of equal or greater worth in its stead.

*Poinē* is the Greek word for satisfaction or penalty and is used by Wilson to characterize the type of reciprocity in disputes of honor in which the gains in honor of the agent of the insult are taken back by the patient of the insult such that the previous

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1. Donna Wilson, *Ransom, Revenge, and Heroic Identity in the Iliad* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=78341&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

2. Wilson, *Ransom, Revenge, and Heroic Identity*, 16-17.

3. Wilson, *Ransom, Revenge, and Heroic Identity*, 16.

balance of honor between the two is restored.<sup>4</sup> In *poinē* type exchanges, the movement of honor from patient to agent is followed by a reciprocal exacting of honor from the original agent by the original patient.<sup>5</sup> This type of exchange is most often seen in the *Iliad* when a fighter slays an enemy as payback for an earlier affront, such as an insult or killing of a friend or family member.

While Wilson's account of the modes of reciprocity of the epic is not undisputed, her analysis illustrates the many considerations that weigh on Homeric heroes in issues of honor and reciprocity and the many measures available to them. Her analysis also shows how issues of honor and reciprocity in Homeric society are prone to excess. Wilson uses the words *mētis* and *biē* to describe the different forces at work in these concerns of excess in disputes of honor and reciprocity.<sup>6</sup> *Mētis* is one Greek word for wisdom and prudence and *biē* is the Greek word for physical force or violence. She writes:

Winning without resorting to *biē* or, once victory has been achieved, limiting one's prerogative for the welfare of the collectivity—demonstrated by willingness to accept *apoina* or to be constrained by conventional limits on *poinē*—is aligned with *mētis*, or self-restraint. Refusing *apoina* and taking (or wishing for) unlimited *tisis* is conversely aligned, through the mixed type theme, with *biē*, violent force.<sup>7</sup>

Wilson uses *mētis* to denote the wisdom, prudence, and self-control individuals of the epic need in order to restrain themselves in matters of reciprocity and vengeance. An individual must have *mētis* to act in such a way that is proportionate to the offence suffered. Wilson uses *biē* to denote the physical force and violence members of the honor

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4. Wilson, *Ransom, Revenge, and Heroic Identity*, 16.

5. Wilson, *Ransom, Revenge, and Heroic Identity*, 16.

6. Wilson, *Ransom, Revenge, and Heroic Identity*, 136-137.

7. Wilson, *Ransom, Revenge, and Heroic Identity*, 137.

culture use in settling disputes of honor and reciprocity. Human beings must win and protect their honor by fighting and competing with each other. *Biē* is the force an individual's *mētis* guides and restrains in issues of honor and reciprocity.

The unbridled pursuit of *tisis*, that is, vengeance or punishment, results in the breakdown of ordered and civilized society. When one answers the loss of an eye with the taking of a life, individuals, families, and clans destroy themselves in a cycle of unending and unrestrained vengeance. According to Wilson, the story of Achilles is the story of his journey to the brink of ordered, civilized society and back.<sup>8</sup> In the epic, Achilles' unrestrained anger first nearly brings the Greeks to complete destruction, and then he nearly brings the gods to chaos after Patroclus is killed and he refuses to surrender Hector's body.<sup>9</sup> Finally, Achilles is brought back to ordered, civilized society when he accepts the ransoms of Priam for Hector's body.

One image frequently used by Homer to illustrate the type of unrestrained anger that leads to societal dissolution is that of *omophagy* and cannibalism. For the Ancient Greeks, as with most other cultures, cannibalism was a mark of savagery, ferocity, and loss of civilization. The force of this savagery and ferocity is closely connected to the force of unrestrained *biē* in matters of honor and reciprocity as both include components of one's loss of control. In the former it is the loss of civilization and rational control, while in the latter it is the loss of one's *mētis*. In Book 22, Hector asks Achilles to agree that the victor will respect the corpse of the loser and ransom his body to his side (247-259). Wilson writes, "Achilleus refuses Hektor's offer and wishes instead that he could

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8. Wilson, *Ransom, Revenge, and Heroic Identity*, 140.

9. Slatkin, "The Wrath of Thetis," 428.



eat Hektor raw. His wish registers his cultural liminality and evokes the most disturbing prospect of the mixed-type theme. Homer thus implicates him in the dissolution of social, and potentially cosmic, order.”<sup>10</sup> Achilles’ refusal to accept what would be conventionally acceptable ransoms, but desire instead to destroy Hector’s corpse and make his family suffer as much as possible, illustrates the type of unrestrained anger that leads to society’s dissolution and the connection between *omophagy* and this danger of excess.

The human characters of the epic must restrain themselves in their pursuits of punishments for affronts or else risk the dissolution of their societies. The gods, however, because of their transcendence, do not need to practice this restraint. Just as the gods’ transcendence makes them “ontologically secure” from the consequences of their interventions and meddling, their transcendence makes them secure from and immune to the consequences their interventions and meddling have for their society on Olympus. Just as in Book 5 Aphrodite and Ares are never truly in danger from their wounds but are healed and returned to sublime divinity, the integrity of Olympus is never truly jeopardized by involvement in matters of honor as human society is.

In Book 4, Zeus jokes with Hera about ending the war and saving Troy (1-19). He marvels at Hera’s hatred of Troy when she responds with great anger.

τὴν δὲ μέγ’ ὀχθήσας προσέφη νεφεληγερέτα Ζεὺς·  
δαιμονίη τί νύ σε Πρίαμος Πριάμοιο τέ παῖδες  
τόσσα κακὰ ῥέζουσιν, ὃ τ’ ἀσπερχὲς μενεαίνεις  
Ἰλίου ἐξαλαπάξαι ἐϋκτίμενον πτολίεθρον;  
εἰ δὲ σύ γ’ εἰσελθοῦσα πύλας καὶ τείχεα μακρὰ  
ὦμόν βεβρώθοις Πρίαμον Πριάμοιο τέ παῖδας  
ἄλλους τε Τρῶας, τότε κεν χόλον ἐξάκესαιο. (30-36)

And having been greatly angered, cloud-gathering Zeus addressed her;

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10. Wilson, *Ransom, Revenge, and Heroic Identity*, 140.

Goddess, how do Priam and his sons now work such great evils  
against you that you vehemently desire to utterly destroy  
the well-built city of Ilium?  
If, at least, you should devour raw Priam, his sons, and the  
other Trojans, having yourself gone through the gates and long walls,  
then would you have completely appeased your wrath.”

Zeus, using an illustration of *omophagy*, reveals that Hera’s hatred of the Trojans is truly great. It is unrestrained. Just as Achilles would like to devour Hector raw, Hera would like to devour the Trojans raw. Hera’s answer to Zeus dispels of any possibility that Zeus is unfairly exaggerating her hatred. Zeus says that since he is willing to give up Troy in order to appease Hera, he expects Hera to do the same for him in the future (37-49). Immediately and without pause Hera offers up her three most beloved cities of the Greeks to Zeus for destruction, saying she will not lift a finger to defend them (50-61).

Among human beings, unrestrained and insatiable anger, wrath, and hatred lead to the dissolution of civilized and ordered society—a type of wrath illustrated in the *Iliad* with images of *omophagy* and cannibalism. The gods of the poem are clearly no strangers to this type of wrath. The word that begins the poem, *mēnis*, or wrath, while in that place referring to that of Achilles, is usually limited to describing that of a god.<sup>11</sup> Because the gods’ transcendence insulates them and their society from any meaningful consequences of their actions, the gods do not have to restrain themselves or their wrath. Where a human being’s overindulged wrath leads to the destruction of the society the human being himself lives in, a god’s overindulged wrath leads only to the destruction of the society human beings live in, not the society the god lives in.

In fact, the unquenchable wrath of Hera does lead in the epic to the dissolution of a civilized and ordered society—it leads to the annihilation of Troy. Troy is utterly

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11. Slatkin, “The Wrath of Thetis,” 424.

destroyed because Hera does not restrain her wrath. While the poet is ambiguous concerning the causes of the war and the gods' hatred of Troy, Zeus and Apollo's marvel throughout the epic at the severity of Hera's hatred point to her hatred of Troy exceeding what is proper for whatever insult did occur. Just as organized and civilized human society collapses when the normative punishment for taking an eye becomes the taking of a life, organized and civilized human societies collapse when a god, with wrath unrestrained, takes a whole city and people as the price for an insult to his or her honor. Nevertheless, this level of unrestrained anger and wrath is permissible for the gods because their transcendence protects them from the consequences of such anger and wrath—they ultimately do not live in the societies their anger destroys.

Overall, the consequences of Homer's theology on how the gods interact with human beings seem to make for a very pessimistic picture for human life. Human life is characterized by struggle, competition, and fighting. The gods, on the other hand, are due honor by nature of their transcendence and ontological rank, that is, who they happen to be in the universe. In addition to being owed honor, the gods are due the punishment of those that affront them. Whereas human beings must fight those that insult them according to their own ability, the gods work out ills for perpetrators from behind the scenes, viewing these punishments as their due. On top of this, the transcendence of the gods, their immunity to the consequences of their meddling, allows for them to not restrain themselves in their searches for vengeance.

In her book, Wilson says that the central problem of the *Iliad* is “the inhibiting of elite forms of competition (the fluid martial prowess system) that would otherwise produce the best leaders and displace destructive *eris* (that is, the strife that comes from

competition).”<sup>12</sup> In other words, according to Wilson, the central problem of the epic is the inhibition of the best from becoming what he or she is meant to be. As we have observed, honor largely comes from two sources, inherited rank and one’s own martial prowess. In the *Iliad*, the best, as yielded by the fluid martial prowess system, is stifled by an inferior championing the fixed rank system. Achilles, certain of his unrivalled greatness, is incensed by the demands of a man who is less than him in strength and might, but who commands the whole Argive force and wields a scepter given him by Zeus. Achilles, to intimately make known not only his greatness, but the precedence of martial prowess over rank in matters of honor, withdraws from the fighting. He hopes to show the Greeks just how much his great strength carries them.

If the central crisis of the *Iliad* is the inhibition of the best from becoming what he or she was meant to be, Homer’s theology and his characterization of the forces that constrain human beings show this central crisis to be the central crisis of all humanity in the epic. Human life in the epic is characterized by struggle, competition, and fighting, through which humans have the ability to reach godlike heights but most often fail. Regardless of whatever heights humans do reach, they are always at the mercy of a fixed rank system that is unchangeable and insurmountable. Patroclus, Hector, and Achilles might be the greatest of their peers and the foundations of their comrades, families, and peoples, but all it takes for their permanent destruction is the swat of a god’s hand or a god’s trick. Though one might work and fight to be the greatest of all humans, all human beings are unequivocally and without exception less than the least god.

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12. Wilson, *Ransom, Revenge, and Heroic Identity*, 138. Parentheses mine.

This wretched condition of humanity might be what Zeus has in mind when he utters those famous words in Book 17 mourning the suffering of the divine horses given to Achilles, who themselves are mourning for Patroclus. Zeus pities the horses:

ὦ δειλῶ, τί σφῶϊ δόμεν Πηληϊΐ ἄνακτι  
θνητῶ, ὑμεῖς δ' ἐστὸν ἀγήρω τ' ἀθανάτω τε;  
ἦ ἵνα δυστήνοισι μετ' ἀνδράσιν ἄλγε' ἔχητον;  
οὐ μὲν γάρ τί πού ἐστιν ὀϊζυρώτερον ἀνδρὸς  
πάντων, ὅσσοι τε γαῖαν ἐπι πνέει τε καὶ ἔρπει. (443-447)

Oh wretched ones, why did we give you to lord Peleus,  
the mortal, you all being ageless and immortal?  
Was it so that you might suffer pains among wretched mortals?  
There is nothing more wretched than humanity, I suppose,  
as much as breathes and creeps upon the earth.

Zeus' pitying of the divine horses tracks with a theme that appears in many places throughout the epic—the theme of that which is due something not receiving its due. Just as the horses are due divine sublimity by nature of being divine but do not receive it, Thetis is due the privileges that come with being divine but does not receive them because of her forced marriage to a mortal. Achilles himself is another example. In the human world among mortal fighters, he is denied material honors that are due him as the best of the Achaeans. However, there lurks throughout the epic hints of the denial of him of ontological honors in the cosmological realm that are implicitly understood as due him by nature of being the would-be son of Zeus.<sup>13</sup> Achilles is said many times by himself and his mother to be due great honor among the mortals as recompense for his short (and mortal) life (e.g. 1.502-508, 9.410-416, and 21.272-283).<sup>14</sup> This theme, manifested in many places throughout the epic, speaks to the piteous suffering of humanity as a whole.

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13. Slatkin, "The Wrath of Thetis," 421.

14. Slatkin, "The Wrath of Thetis," 432.

P. V. Jones argues that the poet maintains a logical contradiction in the *Iliad* in order to fulfill the narrative needs of his tale.<sup>15</sup> On the one hand, the *Iliad* is an epic that seeks to tell the story of the remarkable lives and deeds of great warriors in the hopes of preserving their glory for all ages. On the other hand, the *Iliad* is a revelation and a peek into the cosmological forces that influence and decide the fates of human beings great and small alike. Jones suggests that sometimes, the poet emphasizes one side of this world and at other times emphasizes the other side. Jones writes:

Broadly, it is a world which maintains a balance between free human activity and all-powerful divinities imposing their will on and constantly intervening in the cosmos, a world in which there is some sense of balance of forces between man, fate and the gods, where it is possible for men to play a full and free part. Strictly, this world-view is irrational, of course. If gods are all-knowing and all-powerful, men cannot be free. But the conceit allows Homer to compose epic, and to have his cake and eat it, by juxtaposing the two worlds and focusing now on one, now on the other.<sup>16</sup>

Jones argues that Homer preserves this contradiction in order to help portray the human condition as tragic, especially the tragedy surrounding Achilles. He writes, “Achilles must be seen to be acting as a free agent, otherwise the epic and Achilles’ story would become mere melodrama: mere Cyclic epic. As it is, it becomes tragic.”<sup>17</sup>

According to Aristotle, the purpose of tragedy is catharsis (*Poet.* 1453a), the purging of one’s emotions such that one can understand the human and divine natures better.<sup>18</sup> Tragedy explores the natures of sorrow and suffering and investigates the ways in which human beings bring them upon themselves unwittingly or experience them out

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15. Jones, “The Independent Heroes,” 117.

16. Jones, “The Independent Heroes,” 116-117.

17. Jones, “The Independent Heroes,” 117-118.

18. Adamson, *Classical Philosophy*, 298.

of no fault of their own.<sup>19</sup> As Aristotle noted in his *Poetics*, if a tragedy is to be profound it must be authentic.<sup>20</sup> As Jones describes, a poor tragedy can easily become worthless melodrama. If the characters are neither realistic nor responsible, and the events not plausible, one is left with a story that is ultimately meaningless. The *Iliad* tells the story of human beings fighting for those they love and for the things they want. The story of the *Iliad* is tragic because it tells how these human beings fail, regardless of how hard they work, both because of their own faults and for reasons that are outside their control—just as most humans are wont to do in their lives.

The *Iliad* is unclear in the matters of free-will and human agency, and I would agree with Jones in arguing that at times the poet emphasizes human free-will and free agency while at other times he emphasizes the overbearing power of the gods and fate. Nevertheless, it is not the case that the human heroes of the epic are incapable of meaningful action. First of all, it is not evident that human free-will and agency are completely constrained by the cosmological forces of the *Iliad*. The epic speaks ambiguously concerning this, as the gods of the *Iliad* are clearly not all-knowing and all-powerful and the fate of the epic is not so constraining that all events are preordained. Nevertheless, the forces that bear on humans are great. However, even in the face of these seemingly insurmountable forces, the values of the epic allow for meaningful human action. This is of crucial importance because it shows that in spite of the tragedy of the epic and the tragedy of the epic's portrayal of the human condition and the forces

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19. R. B. Rutherford, "Tragic Form and Feeling in the *Iliad*," in *Oxford Readings in Homer's Iliad*, ed. Douglas L. Cairns (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 262-263.

20. Aristotle discusses the type of character a tragedy requires in the thirteenth chapter of his *Poetics*, 1453a. A tragic character must be good, but not the most virtuous, and the tragic character must fall because of a weakness rather than because of vice.

that bear on the epic's humans, the values of the epic still allow for human successes and victories, that is, for meaningful human action.

If the meaningfulness of human action is merely a function of how free and able humans are to change the course of their lives and the events around them, it would seem that the human action of the *Iliad* is not very meaningful given the great power of the gods and fate. However, the heroes, society, and culture of the epic are not concerned with victory and success nearly as much as they are with standing and fighting. Meaningful human action in the epic is not having the power to save oneself and one's people from outside forces. Rather, it is standing and choosing to fight in spite of the greatness of those forces. In this way, human action that is fated or doomed to fail can still be meaningful, at least in the honor culture of the epic. Ideal human beings are not those that have the power and freedom to bend the courses of their lives and the events around them to their will. Ideal human beings are those that stand up under the overbearing weight of these forces and fight them even if success is impossible.

In Book 6, Hector returns to Troy in order to find Paris. Before he goes back out to battle, he sees his infant son and speaks with his wife, Andromache (390-403). His visit with his family here is the last time he will see them. Andromache begs Hector to stay behind the walls and not go back out to fight (407-439). Hector is grieved to think of losing his family, but he recognizes his duty to his people and the importance of his fighting for honor and glory.

ἦ καὶ ἐμοὶ τάδε πάντα μέλει γύναι· ἀλλὰ μάλ' αἰνῶς  
αἰδέομαι Τρῶας καὶ Τρωάδας ἐλκεσιπέπλους,  
αἷ κε κακὸς ὥς νόσφιν ἄλυσκάζω πολέμοιο·  
οὐδέ με θυμὸς ἄνωγεν, ἐπεὶ μάθον ἔμμεναι ἐσθλὸς  
αἰεὶ καὶ πρῶτοισι μετὰ Τρώεσσι μάχεσθαι  
ἄρνύμενος πατρός τε μέγα κλέος ἢ δ' ἐμὸν αὐτοῦ.



εὖ γὰρ ἐγὼ τόδε οἶδα κατὰ φρένα καὶ κατὰ θυμόν·  
ἔσσεται ἡμαρ ὅτ' ἂν ποτ' ὀλώλῃ Ἴλιος ἱρὴ  
καὶ Πριάμος καὶ λαὸς ἐϋμμελίῳ Πριάμοιο. (441-449)

Indeed, all these things are also a care to me, woman, but I would be horribly ashamed before the Trojans and the women with flowing robes if far off like a coward I sought to escape the war. But my heart does not bid me to flee, since I have learned to be brave and to always fight among the foremost of the Trojans, winning my father's glory and my own there. Nevertheless, I know this well in my heart and in my soul; the day will come when sacred Troy will be destroyed, and Priam and Priam's people, Priam of the ashen spear.

Here, Hector is certain that Troy's destruction is inevitable. As the rest of his conversation makes clear, Hector is not only certain of a vague defeat of Troy, but he is certain also of his son's being orphaned or killed, his wife's abduction and oppression into sexual slavery, and his father and people's slaughter (450-465). In the face of this certainty, Hector neither flees nor makes provisions for his family or people's escape. The only acceptable course of action is to stand and fight and die. If defeat and death are inevitable, the only conceivable option is to stand and fight and die in a way that honors and glorifies oneself and one's family and people. The culture of the heroic society and its values would praise Hector's decision and hold him up as an example of what humans ought to be. While the tragedy of his fall and Troy's fall is obvious, there is still room for human excellence in this situation, for meaningful human action.

In order for the human action of the epic to be meaningful, even according to the values of the epic, it is necessary for the human characters of the epic to have basic, metaphysical freedom. While humans might not have significant freedom to control the course of their lives and the events around them, they must have the basic freedom and capacity to choose to run or resist the forces that bear on them, or the action is

meaningless regardless of whatever values the culture shares. Overall, as Jones notes, the epic is highly ambiguous concerning the true freedom of the human characters. At times, the poet stresses human actions and choice while at other times the poet stresses the power of fate and the gods. This ambiguity should be enough to grant that the humans of the epic at least have the most basic metaphysical freedom to choose how to act such that every human action is not prescribed or preordained by fate. After all, as noted, the gods are not described as all-knowing and all-powerful and fate not as unambiguous and all-binding in such a way that would destroy this basic metaphysical freedom for humans.

Tragedy relies on a balance between human agency and responsibility and forces outside of humanity's control. While the existence of only one event that must necessarily happen no matter what is enough to tempt us to the thought that all human action is metaphysically constrained, if we acquiesce to this picture, we must reject what makes the *Iliad* compelling—the choices its characters make in the face of their circumstances. If the one instance in which Zeus strikes fear into Hector and makes him a coward is to be understood as destroying *all* of his freedom, we must reject the meaningfulness of such decisions as Hector's and Achilles' to give one's life for greater things, and thus reject the greater meaningfulness of the poem as a whole. The poet's ambiguity concerning these issues is intended to lead us to the exploration and examination of why things happen the way they do, not to the resignation that *all action* is meaningless and preordained. The message of the *Iliad* cannot be that Achilles and Hector were merely metaphysically forced to act in the way they did, regardless of how little they were able to accomplish for themselves, their loved ones, and their people.

Homer's theology makes for a very pessimistic and tragic outlook on the human condition. Human life is characterized by struggle and competition where the divine life is characterized by the opposite. The gods live in divine sublimity and ease and enjoy privileges due them by nature of who they happen to be in the universe, privileges which include owed honor and unrestrained vengeance for affronts. This theology reveals that the central crisis of the epic is largely the central crisis of the humanity of the epic: that which is meant to be the best is inhibited by unchangeable and insurmountable forces. Humans, who live their lives through struggle and often reach astonishing heights, can never overcome the gods who enjoy privileges that come with their inherited rank. This crisis tracks with the nature of tragedy and a theme that appears frequently in the epic, the denial of dues. Nevertheless, despite this tragic and pessimistic evaluation of the human condition, the honor culture and the values of the epic still allow for meaningful human action. For the honor culture, standing and fighting in the face of insurmountable forces is much more important than having the power and ability to be victorious over these forces.

This attitude and will to fight is remarkable in not only its recognition of the apparent tragedy of human existence, that is, of humanity's constraint by forces outside its control, but in its apparent acceptance of it. The *Iliad* recognizes the tragedy, but it does not morally condemn this condition. The *Iliad*, while seeing its world as utterly tragic and pitiable, does not view its world or the gods as unjust. Overall, the tone of the epic concerning any rightness or wrongness of this situation is merely that one wants to try one's hardest to be on the winning side of any struggle while pitying the plight of those who lose and suffer. The jump from the pity of the human condition and the

recognition of its tragedy to moral condemnation of the forces that bear upon humans is a jump that the poem does not make. While the tragedy of the condition is recognized many times, each time it arises there is the attending understanding that this is merely the way it is for humans. It is obvious that humans desire more than to be ground down by warfare and killing, but the desire for something else does not mean one is actually owed something else. After all, the epic describes a humanity that loves fighting and killing almost as much as it hates losing friends, family, and other loved ones.

Throughout the poem, the juxtaposition of the human characters' true sensitivity to human suffering and the costs and horrors of war with their simultaneous willingness and eagerness to inflict pain and suffering on others is striking. The words and actions of many of the poem's human characters attest to there being a clear disconnect between their ability to recognize wrongness in their own pain and suffering and to understand that such pain and suffering is equally bad, terrible, or "wrong" to and for others. In the world of the epic, one's own suffering is bad while that of an enemy is obviously good.

In Book 14, the battle continues to rage between the Greeks and the Trojans. In one corner of the battlefield, the Trojan Acamas slays the Greek Promachus. After killing him, Acamas boasts over his corpse to the Greeks:

Ἀργεῖοι ἰόμωροι ἀπειλάων ἀκόρητοι  
οὐ θην οἴοισίν γε πόνος τ' ἔσεται καὶ οἴζυς  
ἡμῖν, ἀλλὰ ποθ' ὧδε κατακτενέεσθε καὶ ὕμμες.  
φράζεσθ' ὥς ὑμῖν Πρόμαχος δεδμημένος εὔδει  
ἔγχει ἐμῷ, ἵνα μή τι κασιγνήτιό γε ποινὴ  
δηρὸν ἄτιτος ἔη· τῷ καὶ κέ τις εὖχεται ἀνὴρ  
γνωτὸν ἐνὶ μεγάροισιν ἀρῆς ἀλκτῆρα λιπέσθαι. (479-485)

Boasting Argives, insatiate in threats,  
suffering and misery indeed will not be ours alone,  
but you all will also be slain in this way.  
Consider how Promachus sleeps before you, having been subdued

by my spear, so that the satisfaction for my brother, at least, would not be unpaid for too long; thus men pray that a kinsman is left in his halls as an averter of calamity.

Hearing the boast of Acamas, anguish seizes the Argives. The Argive Peneleos, angered the most, charges Acamas. Thrusting his spear at Acamas, he misses and strikes the Trojan Ilioneus instead, stabbing him through the head (487-492). Unsheathing his sword, Peneleos severs Ilioneus' head from his neck and hoists the head, still skewered on his spear, into the air (493-500). Victorious, Peneleos has his own boast for the Trojans.

εἰπέμεναί μοι Τρῶες ἀγαυοῦ Ἴλιονῆος  
πατρὶ φίλῳ καὶ μητρὶ γοήμεναι ἐν μεγάροισιν·  
οὐδὲ γὰρ ἦ Προμάχοιο δάμαρ Ἀλεγηνορίδαο  
ἀνδρὶ φίλῳ ἐλθόντι γανύσσεται, ὅππότε κεν δῇ  
ἐκ Τροίης σὺν νηυσὶ νεώμεθα κοῦροι Ἀχαιῶν. (501-505)

Trojans! Go tell the dear father and mother of  
noble Ilioneus to mourn in their halls;  
for nor will the wife of Promachus, the son of Algenor,  
be gladdened at her dear husband's return, whenever indeed  
we young men of the Achaeans return home from Troy with our ships!

This exchange between Acamas and Peneleos not only reveals the cyclical nature of vengeance and the honor culture, but the remarkable absence of empathy in the poem.

Peneleos consciously associates the pain and suffering of Ilioneus' parents and Promachus' wife. He recognizes tragedy in the sorrow and grief his friend's wife will bear upon the loss of her husband, but he fails to see any similar wrongness in the sorrow and grief his enemy's parents will bear. Anyone who believes that the *Iliad* is a scathing commentary on the moral injustices and ironies of such an honor culture must account for the overwhelming approval and embrace of fighting, slaughtering, and killing by the characters of the epic. The poem frequently depicts the astonishingly great pain and

suffering those who lose loved ones in this system experience. Often, it seems that just when the suffering characters are about to morally condemn this wretched system of slaughter, they instead bemoan that they cannot eat their enemies raw and inflict ten times as much pain and suffering on them. To modern sensibilities which are so far removed from this system and to which the moral ironies of this system are obvious, moral condemnation can appear implicit in their grief. Nevertheless, this morose perception can only be an illusion when the Homeric response to suffering and pain is only the desire to inflict greater pain.

Promachus' death provokes the desire in his allies to slay his killer, not put an end to or even question the system that normalizes this killing. The only comfort to his wife's pain and suffering is that her husband's allies made sure that his enemy's parents are also grieving and suffering. Achilles' acts of unrestrained rage in the final books of the epic also reflect this lack of a capacity to empathize and the poem's lack of moral condemnation of this condition of humanity. When Achilles slays Lycaon in Book 21 after he asks him to spare him, Achilles boasts over his corpse saying that he is glad that the fish will eat his corpse and that his mother will not have her son's body to lay out and bury (122-127). He also says that he hopes to slay as many Trojans as possible to avenge Patroclus' loss (128-135). Achilles can feel the overbearing weight of pain and suffering caused by Patroclus' death and sense its "wrongness," that is, that it is in some way sad, wrong, and bad for one to lose a loved one in this way, but he cannot understand how the human sacrifice of twelve Trojan youths at Patroclus' funeral inflicts the terror of this same pain and suffering and its "wrongness" and "badness" on others (23.173-176).

The meeting of Priam and Achilles is the only place in the epic where empathy is able to clearly cut through the killing and the rage. Priam's pleas that Achilles remember his father are enough for Achilles to temporarily see from Priam's perspective (477-506). It finally becomes clear to Achilles that just as Peleus suffers, deprived of his son, so does Priam, deprived of his fifty. They weep together for a time, but Achilles puts an end to it.

ἀλλ' ἄγε δὴ κατ' ἄρ' ἔζευ ἐπὶ θρόνου, ἄλγεα δ' ἔμπης  
 ἐν θυμῷ κατακεῖσθαι ἐάσομεν ἀχνύμενοί περ·  
 οὐ γάρ τις πρῆξις πέλεται κρυεροῖο γόοιο·  
 ὥς γάρ ἐπεκλώσαντο θεοὶ δειλοῖσι βροτοῖσι  
 ζῶειν ἀχνύμενοις· αὐτοὶ δέ τ' ἀκηδέες εἰσί.  
 δοιοὶ γάρ τε πίθοι κατακείται ἐν Διὸς οὔδει  
 δώρων οἷα δίδωσι κακῶν, ἕτερος δὲ ἐάων·  
 ᾧ μὲν κ' ἀμμίζας δώη Ζεὺς τερπικέραυνος,  
 ἄλλοτε μὲν τε κακῷ ὃ γε κύρεται, ἄλλοτε δ' ἐσθλῷ·  
 ᾧ δέ κε τῶν λυγρῶν δώη, λωβητὸν ἔθηκε,  
 καὶ ἐ κακῇ βούβρωστις ἐπὶ χθόνα διᾶν ἐλαύνει,  
 φοιτᾷ δ' οὔτε θεοῖσι τετιμένος οὔτε βροτοῖσιν. (522-533)

But indeed come, take a seat. We will allow that  
 pains lay in our hearts alike, though we grieve;  
 for nothing is accomplished from chilling weeping.  
 For the gods have spun out that wretched mortals live  
 grieving while they themselves are without cares.  
 For two large jars sit on the floor of Zeus, one of which  
 gives such things of bad gifts, and the other such things of good gifts.  
 To the one thunder-loving Zeus gives a mixed lot,  
 he chances upon bad things at some times and good things at others.  
 But to the one he gives miserable things, he has made despised,  
 and terrible hunger drives him upon the divine earth,  
 and he wanders honored neither by gods nor mortals.

Interestingly, recalling the absoluteness of this human condition is that which puts an end to the grieving, not that which prompts it. Achilles and Priam do not grieve because they live such lives as humans that are destined to be beaten down by forces outside their control, they grieve because they suffer woes. While this is the one place in the epic where empathy prevails when it is nearly completely absent elsewhere, in this instance

even the characters do not condemn the condition of the humans of the epic but rather accept it.

While Achilles is finally able to restrain his wrath after Priam is able to make him think of his own suffering father, he still only recognizes that the tragedy and piteousness of this condition lies in the fact that humans suffer inevitable woes, not in the fact that this condition is characterized by humans causing each other pain and suffering. In this way, even in the one moment of the epic where empathy prevails, where the tragedy and moral ironies of the system might finally be recognized, this condition of humanity, its bondage to competition, fighting, and killing, and its suppression by forces outside its control, is not condemned as wrong, but only pitiful and tragic.

The poem's matter-of-fact acceptance of this human condition and lack of moral condemnation or criticism of this pitiable condition speaks almost as much to the condition of the humans of the epic as the fact that the condition is so piteous and tragic. Humans destined to defeat by forces outside their control who cry injustice and wrong are significantly different humans than those who, bound by forces outside their control, accept it matter-of-factly merely as a fact of human life. The human characters of the epic are bound by forces outside their control, forces that are always insurmountable and often unrestrained. However much a human being works to become great or to protect oneself and one's family or people, the forces of the divine are always in the position of constraining or destroying the individual and his or her endeavors and loved ones. While the gods sometimes intervene directly, warring humans themselves are often the agents of this constraining and destroying action, as Dione says to Aphrodite in her comforts.



Just as Homer's theology reveals that the primary crisis of the epic is largely the primary crisis of all humanity in epic, his theology plays a significant role in explaining this attitude of resignation—his human characters' willingness to accept their inevitable suffering and to continue causing suffering and participating in a system that makes them the agents of pain and suffering in spite of their intimately sensitivity to the horrors of such things.

The recognition that "all men die" appears frequently throughout the epic, recognized by both gods and men. Interestingly, when this ontological fact, this fact of human life, is invoked, it is almost always to justify the killing or death of a human being.<sup>21</sup> The gods can let humans die or facilitate their deaths because humans inevitably die anyway. Homeric warriors can slaughter each other and show no mercy because they all will inevitably die anyway. Where the honor culture makes the manner in which one dies of extreme importance to the individual, the ontological fact that all humans inevitably die makes death as a whole unimportant.

Achilles comforts Lycaon in Book 21 by telling him that all men must die (99-113). Whether Lycaon dies now at Achilles' hand, weeks later in Troy during the sack of the city, or even years or decades later, Lycaon will die a permanent death. This is obviously little comfort to one begging for his life, but it is Achilles' justification for killing and his rationale behind his killing. All individuals must fight according to their *own* strength and martial prowess for their *own* elevation. If one falls in battle, either not

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21. Hera justifies Zeus' letting Sarpedon die in Book 16 by reminding him of the fact that all men inevitably die (441-443). Athena similarly justifies Zeus' letting Hector die in Book 22 by reminding him of the same fact (179-181).

strong enough to win victory or merely unfortunate, he dies—he merely meets that which is already unavoidable, inevitable, and to be expected for all human beings.

Homer's theology accounts for this attitude of resignation that persists among the human characters of the epic. The rigidity of his account of the gods' nature leaves no room for it to be any other way for human beings. The gods enjoy privileges in accordance with their transcendence and rank, that is, who they happen to be in the cosmos, and humans do not, in accordance with what they happen to not be. The generation of heroes that was intimately related to the gods, and thus able in many cases to reach divinity, has passed away. As Odysseus says in Book 14, his generation is destined to be ground down to the last man in war and brutal fighting (83-87). There will be many great men, but none who overcome or are granted to overcome their ontology, their deaths. Homer's theology sharply separates humans from the gods. While Homer's gods are significantly similar to the human characters in their desires, loves, concerns, and values, the gods are sharply separated from the human characters in their ontology. However much the gods are like human beings, no human being can escape his or her ontology and be like the gods. This ontological fact and the human characters intimate sensitivity to it explain the resigned acceptance of their condition.

Homer's theology not only explains the human characters resigned acceptance of their position under the nonnegotiable power of the gods, but their willingness to continue to participate in the system that perpetuates pain and suffering. All humans inevitably die. In the same way that this nonnegotiable ontological fact leads to the resigned acceptance of one's own death, it leads warriors to accept the killing of others. In a similar way, the fact that all humans suffer inevitable woes explains why individuals

do not refrain from inflicting pain on others in spite of their sensitivity to these horrors. Human beings suffer under both the weight of the gods' ontological privileges and the system of vengeance in which both gods and humans participate. The same resignation that accepts inevitable oppression by divine forces accepts inevitable oppression by other humans. After all, oppression at the hands of the divine most often comes through other humans. Humans are bound to suffer woes in life. The loss of loved ones is tragic and horrendous; but if one refrains from inflicting that sort of pain on others, a Homeric warrior will be the only one suffering inevitable woes without taking at least some satisfaction in harming enemies and winning glory and honor. Human beings are willing and eager to kill and slaughter in spite of an intimate sensitivity to the terror and horror of losing their own loved ones, because their own refraining from this system will not benefit themselves but their enemies. Woes from the gods directly or through other humans are inevitable. Refraining from this system of killing only helps one's enemies suffer less, it does not stave off inevitable woes from the individual.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Conclusion

In Book 12, the Trojans storm the Greek ramparts (443-471). Following Hector's lead, Sarpedon exhorts Glaucus as they prepare to jump into the fray.

Γλαῦκε τί ἢ δὴ νῶϊ τετιμήμεσθα μάλιστα  
ἔδρη τε κρέασίν τε ἰδὲ πλείοις δεπάεσσιν  
ἐν Λυκίῃ, πάντες δὲ θεοὺς ὥς εἰσορώσι,  
καὶ τέμενος νεμόμεσθα μέγα Ξάνθοιο παρ' ὄχθας  
καλὸν φυταλιῆς καὶ ἀρούρης πυροφόροιο;  
τῷ νῦν χρή Λυκίοισι μέτα πρώτοισιν ἐόντας  
ἐστάμεν ἡδὲ μάχης καυστείρης ἀντιβολῆσαι,  
ὄφρα τις ᾧδ' εἴπῃ Λυκίων πύκα θωρηκτάων·  
οὐ μὰν ἀκλέεες Λυκίην κατά κοιρανέουσιν  
ἡμέτεροι βασιλῆες, ἔδουσί τε πίονα μῆλα  
οἶνόν τ' ἔξαιτον μελιιδέα· ἀλλ' ἄρα καὶ ἱς  
ἐσθλή, ἐπεὶ Λυκίοισι μέτα πρώτοισι μάχονται.  
ὦ πέπον εἰ μὲν γὰρ πόλεμον περὶ τόνδε φυγόντε  
αἰεὶ δὴ μέλλοιμεν ἀγήρω τ' ἀθανάτω τε  
ἔσσεσθ', οὐτέ κεν αὐτὸς ἐνὶ πρώτοισι μαχοίμην  
οὐτέ κε σὲ στέλλοιμι μάχην ἐς κυδιάνειραν·  
νῦν δ' ἔμπηξ γὰρ κῆρες ἐφ'esτᾶσιν θανάτοιο  
μυρίαί, ἃς οὐκ ἔστι φυγεῖν βροτὸν οὐδ' ὑπαλύξαι,  
ἴομεν ἢ ἐ τῷ εὖχος ὀρέξομεν ἢ τις ἡμῖν. (310-328)

Glaucus, why have we been honored most in Lycia  
with seats of honor, cuts of meat, and full cups?  
Why do all look upon us as gods?  
Why are we bestowed great land on the banks of the Xanthus,  
a fine tract of wheat-bearing plow land and vineyards?  
Therefore, it is now necessary for us to make our stand among  
the foremost Lycians and partake in the raging battle,  
so that someone of the heavily armed Lycians may say;  
'Indeed, no inglorious men are lords throughout Lycia,  
our kings, they eat fat sheep and drink the choice, honey-sweet  
wine; but their strength is also great,  
since they fight among the foremost Lycians.'  
My friend, if only we were destined to be forever  
ageless and immortal, having escaped this battle,  
neither would I myself fight among the foremost men

nor send you off to ennobling battle.  
But now, the many fates of death draw near to us  
alike, whom it is not possible for a mortal to escape or avoid.  
Let us go and either give glory to or get it from someone!

Sarpedon's exhortation aptly summarizes all that I have been arguing in this paper concerning the nature of the gods and how this theology weighs upon the mortal characters of the epic.

Human life is characterized by competition, fighting, and participation in raging and ennobling battle. In the face of permanent death, humans must fight for glory and honor in order to preserve their memory past death. While rank is important to the human characters of the epic in matters of honor, martial prowess and strength are the things which primarily characterize the human system of honor. The kings of Lycia enjoy the choice cuts of meat, finest wine, and loveliest land and are honored like gods in part because they are kings, but they are kings and enjoy these great honors because they are elite fighters and because their strength is great. Their martial prowess justifies the great honors they receive from their countrymen and women. Their great strength and prowess in battle are the answers to Sarpedon's rhetorical questions of why they are honored so greatly.

Nevertheless, Sarpedon admits that if only they were ageless and immortal, he would never again fight himself or send his friend to fight. The gods, unlike humans, do not fight for their honor. While intimately concerned with matters of honor like humans, they are entitled to honor in accordance with their cosmological rank. If Sarpedon and Glaucus were *destined*, like the gods, to forever be ageless and immortal, they would enjoy the same great honors they do on earth, only they would enjoy them in sublime bliss and not only intermittently in the periods of rest between raging war and battle.

Regardless of what Sarpedon would like, he recognizes that he is not destined to this life, that he does not enjoy this ontology. Rather, he recognizes that the fates of death stand before him and his friend and all human beings. Sarpedon can dream of what he would like, but his fate as a mortal and the inevitability of death constrain that dreaming to only four lines. For a mortal for whom this fate is inescapable and unavoidable, the only option is to fight and either win glory or give it to another. Just as with Achilles and Priam, there is a recognition of the tragedy of this condition, but there is no moral indignation or condemnation of this condition. Human beings are fated to die and suffer. While these things are inevitable and while it is sad that humans do suffer woes, the poem does not offer any condemnation of this condition of humanity as unjust. After all, the humans that are intimately sensitive to the horrors of losing friends and loved ones are just as eager to inflict the same horrors on others in their pursuit of vengeance, glory, and honor.

The story of the *Iliad* is a story primarily about human heroes. Nevertheless, this story of human heroes cannot be told without reference to the gods who live and rule over them. The condition of the human characters of the epic cannot be understood without understanding the nature of the gods of the epic. While many have sought to excise the gods from the poem with either thorough allegorization or arguments that conceive of the gods merely as the artifacts of primitive peoples and ways of thinking, the gods of the *Iliad* must be understood as unique characters that think, feel, and act in the story in accordance with their own desires.

The gods' simultaneous immanence and transcendence combine to ensure that they involve themselves frequently in human affairs while enjoying significant privileges

and protections. They intervene in human affairs such that they can interact with humans either as friends or enemies. With their shared concern for honor and the gods' interventions, humans find themselves in situations in which they can honor or affront gods. Like humans, the gods are angered by affronts to their honor and take these insults very seriously. However, the same transcendence and ontological rank that makes honor the gods' due, also makes punishments for affronts their due. In addition to this, because of their transcendence, the gods do not have to restrain themselves like humans in their pursuits of vengeance.

While this situation makes for a very pessimistic picture of the human condition, the human characters do not morally condemn it, but merely recognize it as tragic. The human characters resolutely accept their destinies to both suffer great woes as well as inflict them on others. The human characters are remarkably willing, in spite of their sensitivity to the horrors of war and the loss of loved ones, to participate in the system that produces their woes. Confronted with the loss of loved ones, they pity their tragic condition of suffering but resolve to cause their enemies even greater suffering.

Homer's theology explains and accounts for this resigned acceptance. Homer's theology leaves no room for alternatives. Sarpedon would live with his friend in divine sublimity and escape the raging war if he could. But given that he simply cannot, he accepts that he must fight and die and try his best to win glory as a human who is destined to die. The human characters of the epic accept their fates of suffering and causing suffering because they are intimately aware that there is no alternative. They kill in spite of a profound understanding of the horrors of war and the loss of loved ones because killing and warfare is one of the means through which this inevitable suffering

comes. The gods, who punish affronts and insults, use humans and human wars to get back at their mortal enemies. Refraining from this system does the individual no benefit. If he or she refrains from this system, the individual will still suffer inevitable woes through this system, either from the gods or other mortals, and will merely benefit enemies by denying them their inevitable suffering. The same fact that all humans die is justification both for enduring death and causing death.

This worldview, while in this case arising in circumstances very much different from any of today's world, has arisen from questions and concerns that are universal to all human beings, questions concerning pain, suffering, loss, death, revenge, fortune, and human flourishing. While the *Iliad* is only one exploration of these questions and concerns, its exploration of these matters is pertinent to all human beings who experience them. While the world that produced the poem might be significantly different from today's world, the questions and concerns it has explored in the *Iliad* are not different from those that weigh on human beings today. While no paper, poem, novel, film, or piece of art can definitively answer these questions, the exploration of them is profitable, as one individual, society, or people's exploration of these questions can be of significant value to others.



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