

Homer's Heroes

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Please Silence Cell Phones

Homer's Heroes

- Achilles:
 - Passionate
 - Transparent: he IS what he SEEMS
 - Arete: Excellence in battle
 - Hubristic in his abandonment of civility—but he returns to civility in the end.
- Odysseus:
 - Passionate
 - Complex: his face and words do not always reflect his heart
 - Clever: He uses deception to achieve his ends
 - Hubristic in taking advantage of Xenia

Haffa Theory: Homer as First Philosopher of the West

- Philosophy defined as Questioning traditional ideas of ethics and custom
- Achilles as the Anti-hero who questions
- Achilles as the first great figure of **Individualism**
- Yet, Achilles struggles to seek out his own code
- In the end, Achilles will go beyond mere individualism toward a **universalism** that is the hallmark of a second concept fundamental to Western civilization: **Humanism.**

Traditional Heroic Code

- Overriding Principle: **Fight for your Comrades**
- Protect Slain Comrades from Despoilment
- Despoil the Armor of your Enemy
- Leaders should reward good warriors with Booty
- **Honor** is won by battlefield exploits; Honor (how others view you) is the Supreme Ethical concern
- **Booty** is a visual symbol of your success in war
- Treatment of Defeated Enemy: Slay; Ransom; Enslave

Honor in Book 1, Achilles

■ “My honors never equal yours,
Whenever we sack some wealthy Trojan stronghold—
My arms bear the brunt of the raw, savage fighting,
True, but when it comes to dividing up the plunder
The lion’s share is yours, and back I go to my ships,
Clutching some scap, some pittance that I love,
When I have fought to exhaustion.

No more now—

Back I go to Phthia. Better that way by far,
To journey home in the beaked ships of war.
I have no mind to linger here disgraces,
Brimming your cup and piling up your plunder.”

Embassy Scene: Book VIII

- Odysseus repeats the offer of Agamemnon, leaving out the last words and then says: “All this he would extend to you if you will end your anger. But if you hate the son of Atreus all the more, him and his troves of gifts, at least take pity on all our united forces mauled in battle here—they will honor you, honor you like a god. Think of the glory you will have in their eyes!”



Achilles Rejects Traditional Honor

- “No, what lasting thanks in the long run for warring with our enemies, on and on, no end? One and the same lot for the man who hangs back and the man who battles hard. The same honor waits for the coward and the brave. They both go down to Death, the fighter who shirks, the one who works to exhaustion. And what’s laid up for me, what pittance? Nothing—after suffering hardships, year in, year out, staking my life on the mortal risks of war.”
- The Choice of Achilles and his Two Fates decreed by Zeus
- The honor of Man (Agamemnon and his Ransom) vs the Honor of Zeus: “What do I need with honor such as that? I say my honor lies in the great decree of Zeus.”

Hector's Supplication Denied

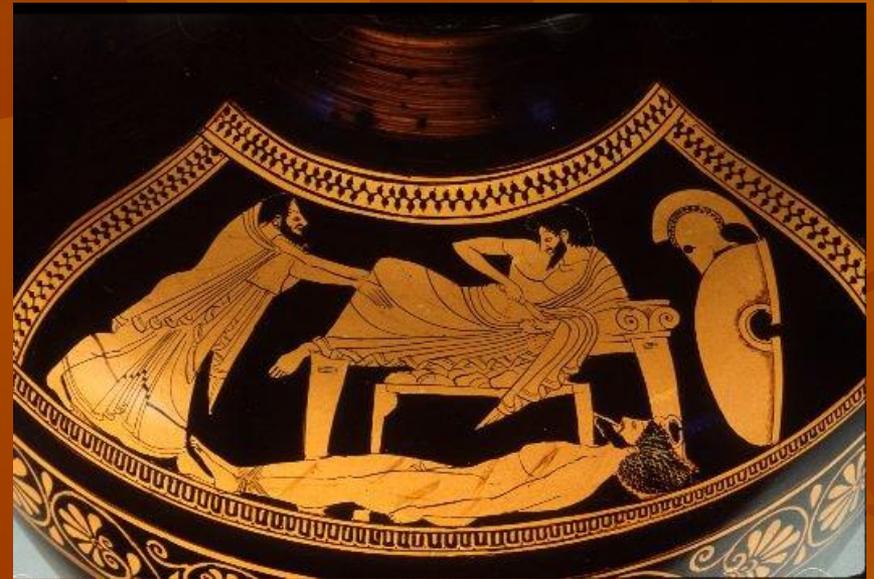
- “Beg not me, dog, by knees or parents! Would that wrath and fury might bed me to carve thy flesh and eat it raw, because of what you have done...no man shall ward off the dogs from thy hed; no, not though they should bring here and weigh out ransom ten-fold...not even if they should promise me thy weight in gold...but dogs and birds shall devour thee utterly.”

Desecration of Hector's Body

- The Greeks all stab his body
- Body is Dragged
- Gods tell Achilles that his wrath is too extreme
- The desecration of Hector's body transcends normal battle field ethics. Although the Greeks understood the wrath of Achilles at the death and despoilment of his comrade, grief has normal limits.

- “Remember thy father, O Achilles like to the gods, whose years are as mine, on the grievous threshold of old age. ...Pity me...I had fifty sons slain by the sons of the Achaians and this one, Hector, was the only one left to me...I have endured what no other mortal on the face of earth hath yet endured, to reach forth my hand to the face of him that hath slain my sons.”

Priam's Supplication



Xenia and the Odyssey

- Xenia in the ancient world; Lot and the Angels of the Lord; Inanna and Enki
- Xenia is the central theme in the Odyssey and parallel structure using Xenia is the basis of the plot structure
- Xenos: Stranger, Friend, Begger
- Zeus Xenios: Zeus is the protector of strangers, beggars, and suppliants
- Why was it so important?

Odysseus and Helen

- Story about Odysseus and Troy told by Helen:
- Shows how clever Odysseus is and ties together his Homecoming and the War
- “He had, first, given himself an outrageous beating and thrown some rags on—like a household slave—then slipped into that city of wide lanes among his enemies. He looked...like a beggar...But I knew him...” He goes on to learn of the Trojan’s plans and slays several as he escapes.

Odysseus and Cyclops: Hospitality Gone Wrong

- Show what can go wrong when Xenia is not respected.
- But is the Cyclops, Polyphemus, alone to blame?
- Both violate hospitality and the result is tragic for both
- Odysseus, like Achilles, has a flaw—Hubris. And both will suffer as a result.

Odysseus' Homecoming: lesson learned

- He comes in disguise as a beggar
- Only his trusted servants learn his identity
- He slays the suitors thanks to his deception, but also the loyalty of son and servants.
- Odysseus is a hero because of his cleverness, but also the loyalty he inspires in those close to him.
- Penelope is the ultimate symbol of this loyalty.

Summary

- Love of Comrades and Desire for Honor were the basis of Battlefield Ethics
- Achilles questions the traditional ethics
- Passion drives Achilles from one extreme to another
- Achilles, though extreme, was able to pity his enemy and achieves a universal observation of common Humanity of Man that transcends the battlefield.
- Odysseus is the Clever Hero
- He uses Cleverness to succeed in war and to get home.
- The other side of Odysseus is the Father, Son, Husband and Master who loves and protects his Kin.