Defining Politics: On History and Political Thought in Homer’s *Iliad*, With a Focus on Books 1-9

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Political Science

University of Toronto

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Abstract

The *Iliad* is a work of great literary complexity that contains profound insights and a wide-ranging account of the human condition. Some of the most important recent scholarly work on the poem has also emphasized the political dimension of Homer’s account. In this dissertation, I aim to contribute to our understanding of the *Iliad* as a work of political thought.

Focusing on books 1 through 9 of the *Iliad*, I will try to show how we can discover in it a consistent chronological or historical account, even though at many points that history is not presented in a linear way, in the poem itself. Through various references we are able to discern an historical account of the entire cosmic order. Homer focuses on the newly established Olympian gods and, therewith, their need to enforce the crucial separation between themselves and human beings: that is, between their own status as immortals, and our condition as mortals. Homer’s history of the Trojan War, in turn, conveys crucial lessons about politics and the human condition. The dissertation traces the history of the war as it emerged from a private struggle and developed into a public war. That historical narrative arc allows Homer’s readers to compare regimes that exhibit varying kinds and degrees of political phenomena. The dissertation shows that, as the *Iliad*’s history of the Trojan War unfolds it clarifies how politics stands in relation to the other spheres of human existence – that Homer’s poem provides us with a fundamental account of politics, of justice, of the promise and limits of human virtue, and of how the political and other aspects of existence serve to define one another. Further, the sphere of politics is shown to illuminate other, sometimes more pressing or more important, spheres of human existence - not least, those of family and friendship. Through considering these elements of Homer’s poem, the dissertation brings to sight a number of vital discoveries about politics and the human situation.
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1 Introduction and Literature Review

1.1 Argument of the Dissertation

Homer’s *Iliad* tells of a war between the Achaeans and the Trojans, begun after Paris and Helen left Sparta for Troy. It is structured by the story of Achilles as well as the plan of Zeus (24.25-30; 1.1-7). The *Iliad* is a work of great literary complexity that contains profound insights and a wide-ranging account of the human condition. Some of the most important recent scholarly work on the poem has also emphasized the political dimension of Homer’s account. In this dissertation, I aim to contribute to our understanding of the *Iliad* as a work of political thought.

Focusing on books 1 through 9 of the *Iliad*, I will try to show how we can discover in it a consistent chronological or historical account, even though at many points that history is not presented in a linear way, in the poem itself. Through various references we are able to discern an historical account of the entire cosmic order. Homer focuses on the newly established Olympian gods and, therewith, their need to enforce the crucial separation between themselves

\[\text{\textsuperscript{1}}\text{ See Lattimore 1951: 30.}\]

The Greek alliance amassed against Troy and her allies are variously called the “Achaeans,” “Argives,” and “Danaans.” I will refer to the first of these names, to which Homer refers almost twice as much as he does to either of the latter.

In what follows, unless otherwise indicated, quotations from the *Iliad* refer to Lattimore’s translation (1951). I have also put the spellings of proper names and locations into the Latinized form, and Americanized British spellings of words such as “favour” (which I have replaced with “favor”). I have made other minor substitutions – such as “Troy” for “Ilion” – to allow for a more efficient style and consistency.
and human beings: that is, between their own status as immortals, and our condition as mortals. Homer’s history of the Trojan War, in turn, conveys crucial observations about politics and the human condition. The dissertation traces the history of the war as it emerged from a private struggle and developed into a public war. That historical narrative allows Homer’s readers to compare regimes that exhibit varying kinds and degrees of political phenomena. My argument will be that as the *Iliad*’s history of the Trojan War unfolds it shows how politics stands in relation to the other spheres of human existence – that Homer’s poem provides us with a fundamental account of politics, of justice, of the promise and limits of human virtue, and of how the political and other aspects of existence serve to define one another. Further, the sphere of politics is shown to illuminate other, sometimes more pressing or more important, spheres of human existence - not least, those of family and friendship. Through considering these elements of Homer’s poem, we will make a number of vital discoveries about politics and the human situation.

### 1.2 Secondary Literature on Homer’s *Iliad*

The Homeric scholarship is vast, and can be approached by recognizing several significant and rich interpretative approaches.\(^2\) We can refer to the first category of studies as literary and cultural accounts of the poem, and to the second as political accounts. I aim to contribute to both

\(^2\) Griffin writes that “[n]obody who writes on Homer has read everything, ancient and modern, that has been written about the poems. Each of us finds some more suggestive and helpful, some less, among the works of his predecessors” (Griffin 1980: xiii). Whitman (1958: x) and Schein (1984: x) write much the same. Of course, while it is also true that, as Edwards states, “no interpretation of a serious classic will remain canonical for long” (1987: 317; cf. 231), some will always be better than others.
of these general approaches to the *Iliad* in showing that there is more to be learned from each of them than has thus far been appreciated. The respective main areas of scholarship on the *Iliad* can often be brought closer together – at times, to correct, at others, to confirm and augment, one another. I understand Homer’s *Iliad* to be unified most of all by its political themes. I also believe that by engaging in a wider and more thorough dialogue with the varied scholarly literature our account of the poem’s unity of thought can be further explicated. Before turning to political accounts of the *Iliad*, then, I will try to outline the main points of the literary and cultural accounts, starting with the question of the unity of Homer’s *Iliad*.

### 1.2.1 The *Iliad* as a Literary and Cultural Poem – The Question of Unity

#### 1.2.1.1 Aristotle and the Unity of the *Iliad*

Modern interpretations that question the *Iliad*’s unity stand in contrast to the best ancient authorities, who were certain of the unity of Homer’s works.\(^3\) In the *Poetics*, Aristotle emphasized the unity of Homer’s epics, in contrast to other epics that were also about the Trojan War or the events surrounding it.\(^4\) He states that the *Iliad* focuses on one part of the Trojan War, even though the war was understood to have had a beginning and an end, and to have been comprised of various events or parts. In this way the Trojan War would have been no different from any war or, for that matter, any span of time. Homeric epic differs from histories, though, because histories do not reveal “a single dramatic action but rather a single time, everything that

\(^3\) For a recent work that incorporates ancient commentators, see Griffin 1980.

\(^4\) *On Poetics* 1459a30-b4.
happened in that time about one or several people, each part of which relates to one another in a haphazard way.” Aristotle also states that most poets follow the historians’ practice of focusing on various events. That meant that each significant part of the Trojan War would have provided material for a self-contained or unified dramatic work, as Aristotle notes in contrasting the *Iliad* with two other poems called the *Cypria* and *Little Iliad*.

Those two poems, together with several others, were collectively referred to in antiquity as “the Epic Cycle,” and they survive today only in summary form. The term refers to their status as poems that took up subjects that had been left out by the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* – they formed a cycle in the sense that they were written about events “surrounding” Homer’s poems – where they recounted many events preceding the Trojan War, following Odysseus’s return home, and much in between, that had not been included by Homer. There are significant differences as to form and substance between the Homeric and the Cycle poems. The Cycle poems seem to depend on older traditions of oral poetry that were in practice long before Homer. Modern scholars who have undertaken linguistic and stylistic analyses suggest that the latter were less developed or more primitive than the Homeric epics. That the Cycle epics together formed an interlocking sequence also suggests that they lacked the monumentality of Homer’s epics. The point is reinforced by the looseness of focus that marked the Cycle poems. In keeping with

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5 *On Poetics* 1459a22-25. Aristotle does not discuss how certain histories – in particular, those by Herodotus or Thucydides – contain their own kinds of literary unity. On how Thucydides’ history is governed by an inquiry into constant parameters of human beings’ political nature, see Orwin 1989.


Aristotle’s judgment, the Cycle poems do not seem to us to have subordinated their many actions and events to a major plan. In reference to the *Little Iliad*, Aristotle suggests that his summary-list of its main actions (which is much the same as that which has survived to us) makes clear enough that it is too overburdened by so many actions and events. Taken together, the main objective of the Cycle poems seems to have been to achieve completeness of plot, the inclusion of many actions and events, as if from a check-list. It is difficult to imagine how a meaningful dramatic unity could have been constructed from so many goings-on. It is not difficult to understand how, by Aristotle’s time, the *Little Iliad* had provided the respective dramatic actions for at least eight works of tragedy.

Aristotle praises Homer, on the other hand - and for appearing to have spoken “in a divine way” - in creating, from one part of the Trojan War, a poem that has its own beginning, middle, and end. It constitutes, on the biological analogy of a complete animal, a living unity. As regards the “part” of the Trojan War to which Aristotle refers, Homer situates the story of the *Iliad* during several weeks in the war’s final year, and tells of one man’s set of actions and the experiences or sufferings that attend those actions. The poet announces this in the proem to the *Iliad*, where he asks the Muse to sing to him of Achilles’ rage (*mēnis*) and its disastrous effects on the Achaeans, through all of which the will of Zeus was accomplished (1.1-7). As such, according to Aristotle, Homer achieved the poetic unity appropriate to tragedy.

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8 See Whitman 1958: 181-82.

9 *On Poetics* 1459a30-33, 17-22; 1451a28-30.

10 *On Poetics* 1459b3-5; cf. 1456a16-19, 1462b10-12, and 1459b15-16. For an analysis of the *Iliad* that relies on Aristotle’s account of tragedy in the *Poetics*, see Redfield 1994.
1.2.1.2 Modern Accounts of the *Iliad* as Lacking in Unity

If the *Iliad* (and *Odyssey*) had not come down to us, however, and we had only Aristotle’s discussion to go by, we would not appreciate how different Homer’s epic is from any of the tragedies by Aeschylus, Sophocles, or Euripides, that have come down to us. However, the *Iliad* contains much more than any of those tragedies. Its 15,693 lines contain assembly and council meetings; extensive battles between the Achaeans and Trojans, often with a focus on individual scenes of combat between prominent fighters on both sides; meetings, both public and private, between allies, friends, and spouses; interactions between gods; as well as numerous and varied stories about mortals, gods, or the relations between them. From time to time Homer also mentions alternative possibilities, where the events in the poem could have gone in different directions than they do. All the while there are flashbacks and flash-forwards, references from the poem’s present to its distant past and its distant future. The stories are often told by Homer’s characters, in dialogue, whether in recounting their own experiences or those of predecessors from generations past. The poem often moves from one place, or perspective, to another, so that while its main locations are the city of Troy, the Achaeans’ entrenchment on the shore, and the battle plain between, but often Homer moves east and west of this setting, to the places from whence the non-Trojan fighters came (such as Lykia, or Argos); or where the gods range (Olympus or to the land of the Aithiopians [1.423-24]); or to rustic or wild places, brought to sight through the poet’s many similes. As Donald Lateiner writes, Homer unexpectedly spirits away the audience to anonymous Balkan, Anatolian and unspecified homely locales of the similes. We observe – often through the eyes of solitary witnesses on the spot, but at a distance – a peaceful snowy forest, a threatened midnight farmstead, stormy Aegean seas, and unpoliced upland pastures – but also working women and playing children (e.g. dyer and
While the beauty of such images is undeniable, do they – and all of the other material contained in the vast, enormous work – contribute to its unity?

The longest-standing scholarly divergence in modern scholarship on the *Iliad* was between, on the one hand, those who account for it as the product of many oral singers, which therefore lacks unity, and on the other, those who understand it to be the unified composition of a single poet. The view that - given the amount and variety of its material - the *Iliad* lacks unity, was long bound up with the question of its authorship - “The Homeric Question.” Friedrich August Wolf argued in *Prolegomena ad Homerum* (published in 1795) that the name “Homer” was a generic name attached at the end of a long line of bards who over time added to the poem, the original authorship of which could not be traced. The work of the *Alteuromwissenschaft*, the new science of classical studies to which Wolf’s book gave rise, would be to excavate the Homeric texts in order to discover their different levels of construction, much as one looks for different objects in the layers of soil at an archeological dig. Wolff’s account began what came to be known the “analytical” tradition.


12 In antiquity there was a version of this debate, as to whether the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were composed by different authors (the “separatist” position) or the same author (the “unitarian” position) (Schein 1984: 37-38). For an overview of the modern debate, see Schein 1984: 1-44. For a discussion of the debate stemming from Vico, see Ahrensford 2014: 9-20.

Between Wolff’s time and the mid-twentieth century, much of Homeric scholarship was taken up with the Homeric Question. The analytic account of the *Iliad* emphasized its oral composition over the course of centuries. In the nineteenth century, inconsistencies contained in the poem were taken as evidence of that oral tradition, accounted for as inevitable given its composition by many bards. To some analysts this meant, in effect, that the entire *Iliad* was reduced to mere fragments.\(^{14}\) In the twentieth century, joined by Milman Parry and those he influenced, the analysts posited a theory of oral composition. According to this theory, the *Iliad* could not have been the product of a single poet; instead, many poets composed it as they modified its story in the midst of their various iterations through the centuries. The analytic theory denied the possibility of an over-arching unity or vision such as a single author could have achieved. The academic studies it produced, looking to the method of composition rather than the poem itself, thus failed to observe its fundamental unity.

1.2.1.3 Modern Accounts of the *Iliad* as a Unified Work, and the Role of History in the Poem

As against the analytic approach, other twentieth century studies by “unitarians” demonstrated the poem’s unity.\(^{15}\) Books by G. E. Owen, Cedric H. Whitman, W. Schadewaldt, James M. Redfield, Seth L. Schein, and Mark W. Edwards, could broadly be called “Aristotelian” for demonstrating anew, in various ways, what the classical philosopher had stated in the *Poetics*

\(^{14}\) See Griffin 1980: xiii.

\(^{15}\) “The most rigorous and elegant accounts of the poem and its workings – however different their thematic and linguistic preoccupations – have addressed the poem as a totality” (Slatkin 2011: 6 n. 17).
about the epic’s structural unity and its focus on character, and its status as a tragedy.\textsuperscript{16} Such works went together with, or would be accompanied by, the efforts of scholars such as Karl Reinhardt, Jasper Griffin, and Oliver Taplin, who made clear the poet’s technical skill and guiding hand in his use of themes, symbolic scenes and significant objects, and the quality of his characterization.\textsuperscript{17} A landmark article by Griffin also augmented the Aristotelian argument about Homer’s achievement of tragic unity. Griffin demonstrated that Homer was unique in his time for presenting a realistic account of the human situation, by contrast to the more fabulous and fantastical stories told in the poems that comprised the Epic Cycle.\textsuperscript{18} These and other works provided a detailed view of Homer’s depiction of men’s relation to the gods, the warrior ethic that prevailed in Homeric society – with its relationships and categories of understanding between enemies and friends - and of domestic relations. Altogether, unitarian scholars showed

\begin{itemize}
  \item[16] Owen 1946; Whitman 1958; Schadewaldt 1997a, 1997b; Redfield 1975; Schein 1984; Edwards 1987.
  \item[18] Griffin 1977; cf. Edwards 1987: 68. Although only summaries of the Cyclic poems have come down to us, these contain enough material for the purposes of Griffin’s argument. Incidentally, Griffin’s discussion could be compared with Aristotle’s, noted above, of how the Cycle poems contain elaborate plots, but little character development, where by contrast the \textit{Iliad} provides a realistic account of character (\textit{Poetics} 1459a32-b18). Although Nagy (1999: 8) emphasizes the local flavor of the Epic Cycle poems, as distinct from the Panhellenic quality of the \textit{Iliad} and \textit{Odyssey}, he does not thereby refute Griffin’s point.
\end{itemize}
Homer’s vision of tragic realism, achieved in a poem characterized by thematic unity, depth, and majesty.\textsuperscript{19}

Further, what had become the tired if vexed debate about authorship or composition in Homeric scholarship also came to be replaced by a focus on how – while there is much evidence that Homer was preceded by a longstanding oral tradition – he was able to innovate upon that tradition for his own purposes.\textsuperscript{20} To the theory of oral composition scholars have added comparisons between Homeric and other early hexameter poems, and all of these have shown, for example, that the use of \textit{ekphrasis}, of ring composition, various stock epithets, type scenes, and themes were all traditional to oral poetry.\textsuperscript{21} Yet scholars have demonstrated that Homer employed these in unique ways in order to meet the dramatic requirements of his own story.\textsuperscript{22} Thus, as Schein writes of typical battle scenes, “the poet could rely on his audience to appreciate both the fulfillment of the norm and artful variations on it.”\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{19} As to that question of composition, Schein notes that while Homer stands at the end of the oral tradition, he also inaugurates the written one, which would have made more likely the achievement of the poem’s unity and consistency (1984: 13). See Taplin 1995: 36 and references.

\textsuperscript{20} Redfield (1994: xi) writes: “[F]or me, as for others, the Homeric Question has become the question of Homer’s sources.”

\textsuperscript{21} See Graziosi and Haubold 2005: 35 and references.


\textsuperscript{23} Schein 1984: 12.
Homer’s use of such techniques goes some way in explaining the sprawling quality of the *Iliad*. So do his references and allusions. There is evidence in the *Iliad* of various stories from different traditions - local or more Panhellenic - to which Homer refers or alludes. However, stories also could have been left out, or included, as the poet saw fit. Scholars have shown that those that remain were included – often just referred or alluded to, and often revised or re-shaped - in order to accord with the given matters Homer wished to describe. Homer certainly included a large amount of material in addition to telling the “real time” or “present” story of the *Iliad*, which itself spans only several days. He included so much, as Gregory Nagy has discussed, in order to present a comprehensive poem that would be truly Panhellenic, as it takes into account stories and practices from many local religious traditions.\(^{24}\) At the same time, Homer’s references and allusions also make the poem more monumental in itself, more captivating and more resonant.

Indeed, such resonances become more powerful in light of the more or less common set of stories known across the Greek world, which told the overarching history of the cosmos, the gods, and the human condition. The two main sources that stand out amongst the others to establish this point are Hesiod’s poems - the *Theogony*, the *Catalogue of Women* (attributed to Hesiod), and *Works and Days* - and the summaries of the Epic Cycle that have come down to us. These works tell the history of the cosmos and the struggle that leads to the order presided over by Zeus and the other Olympian gods. They also tell of the age of heroes who were the offspring of the gods but who would not live to challenge the Olympians. The references to the Olympian order that reverberate throughout the *Iliad* make sense only in connection with the Hesiodic

account. I will rely on those discoveries about the poem in order to explain the role of the gods in relation to mortals, as well as how the mortals in the poem are limited in that they can never possibly achieve the immortal status of the gods.

Also important to my interpretation of the poem as containing a history, which in turn contains a grand account of political thought, is work by “neo-analyst” scholars and those influenced by the neo-analysts. Neo-analysts were reminiscent of the analysts in that they sought to explain the presence of material in the Iliad that points to a larger tradition to which Homer belonged. Additionally, the neo-analysts have demonstrated that the poem contains references and allusions found in the Epic Cycle as well as in Hesiod, to events from before and after the Trojan War – from the Judgment of Paris to Troy’s destruction to the Achaeans’ homecoming. Despite the length of the epic and all that it includes, we may add, such inclusions are made with a softness of touch characteristic of great literary artistry.

25 Slatkin 2011: 2, 28, 159-60; Lang 1983.

26 The story of Zeus’s rape of the child, Leda, after the god has taken the form of a swan, is itself completely foreign to the realism of the Iliad and to Homer’s taste. Nonetheless, among other things, Yeats (1996: 121) so memorably conjures up the course of human events in stating that that rape would lead, in turn, to “the broken wall, the burning roof and tower, and Agamemnon dead.” For Homer’s reference to those subsequent events, see Iliad 12.10-16.

Prominent among the scholars - “neo-analysts” and those influenced by them - who discuss the Epic Cycle and Hesiodic accounts in relation to Homer are: Rheinhardt 1998; Kakridis 1949; Kullmann 1960; Dowden 1996; Morrison 1992a, 1992b; Graziosi and Haubold 2005; Slatkin 2011. Mention should also be made of the Homeric Hymns, which tell in more detail of the births of the Olympian gods and their place in the divine order. These are also part of the same general narrative that runs from the Theogony to the end of the Epic Cycle.

27 “[T]he poet uses characters’ guesses about the future as well as authoritative prophecies to extend the narrative
There are even many references to the world of “the present,” for Homer’s auditors, which would correspond in large measure to Hesiod’s *Works and Days*. Thus, as Barbara Graziosi and Johannes Haubold write:

> Early hexameter poems share an understanding of the overall shape of history: first Earth and Heaven, then the birth of the gods, then the Olympian order, then birth of the heroes, the Theban and the Trojan Wars, the traumatic end of the heroic age, and ultimately the world as it is today.

And “by virtue of their peculiar tone and scope, the Homeric texts foster a sense of context and resonance, within a wider narrative of cosmic change through time” that they more or less shared with the other early Greek poets.\(^{28}\) As we have noted, moreover, Homer evokes more pathos in his epics than do the other early poets. It would seem, then, that as far as the poetic experience went, while depending on the common history which the other poems also evoked or described, Homer’s first auditors continued to participate more fully in what they understood to be the very history of the cosmos and the human condition.

Yet it would certainly be wrong to think that the poem aims merely to incorporate a large number of stories or fables in some encyclopedic fashion. The best studies go beyond the search for Homer’s sources, and show appreciation for the *Iliad*’s unity of plot and character. Thus, in thinking through how the history of the Olympian order and Trojan War take its place – past, to events beyond its conclusion, such as Achilles’ death and the fall of Troy in the *Iliad*. Although he directs the audience’s sympathies and judgements, he does not force a single interpretation, and his guidance is usually unobtrusive” (Scodel 2004: 54).

\(^{28}\) Graziosi and Haubold 2005: 40-41.
present, and future - within Homer’s own epic, we can enjoy a greater participation in the *Iliad*’s unity, for all-encompassing history often appears obliquely, so that references to it still take their place in a unified work. To indicate how Homer effects such literary artistry, we can note one of the most important examples of a set of allusions in the work, those concerning the goddess, Thetis. As we shall discuss in chapters 2 and 4, Thetis’s role will help to define her son Achilles’ experience and, therewith, to clarify to it is impossible for a mortal to gain immortality.

Now, largely banished from Homer – or included only in small doses, like inoculations – are references to the non-Olympian powers and the cults of the chthonic world and the heroes. Rather, the focus is on the Olympians; or, it is on the Olympians in so far as they have recently ascended to the height of cosmic power. As Laura Slatkin demonstrated in her seminal work, *The Power of Thetis*, there are rich allusions to that goddess – which are adumbrated in other texts from the Greek religious tradition, including later poems by Pindar and Aeschylus - allusions that propel forward the poem’s plot and meaning. Thetis was a goddess of great cosmic power in the old order before the Olympians became supreme. Nevertheless, the tradition referred to a prophecy that she would bear a son who would be “stronger than his father,” which meant that Zeus’s romantic intentions toward her were particularly dangerous. To save the cosmos from returning to disorder, the Olympians then arranged a wedding between Thetis and the mortal, Peleus. In the *Iliad* various references are made to Thetis’s cosmic power,

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29 On the various aspects of Greek religion, see, for example, Vernant 1987.

to her and Peleus’s wedding, and to the expectation that their son, Achilles, experiences – namely, that he will gain Zeus’s honor and even a kind of immortality.

The Iliadic treatment of the traditional accounts coincides with a realistic approach to human psychology and experience. In keeping with Griffin’s insight into the realism of Homer’s epics as distinct from the more fabulous poems of the Epic Cycle, Slatkin shows how the themes of immortality and mortality are treated in each case. The Cyclic poem, *Aethiopis*, tells that, after Paris and Apollo strike him and he is set upon the funeral pyre, Thetis grants Achilles an immortal existence on Leuke or the “White Island.”  

In contrast to the poems of the Epic Cycle (or the Hesiodic poems, for that matter), where heroes such as Achilles are granted immortality in blissful places such as the White Island or the Isles of the Blessed, no Homeric character – neither Zeus’s son, Sarpedon, nor Achilles – is granted or promised any afterlife comparable to that of the gods, only the afterlife that mortals are fated to, in Hades.  

At the same time, in the *Iliad*, as many scholars have noted, the immortals – whose lives on Olympus are characterized by ease and frivolity – while less vulnerable, are less dignified and noble than the best human characters. Further, the *Iliad* is of course primarily a meditation on the consequences of Achilles’ association with the mortal rather than the immortal plane of existence, on his recognition of mortality and of his dependence on his fellow mortals.  


33 Schein 1984, who acknowledges his debt to Slatkin (91-92 and references), makes this meditation the main theme of his book, *The Mortal Hero*. 
supported by the allusions to the traditional accounts, yet in such a way that they do not detract from, but add to, its literary unity.

The difference between Cyclic texts that held out the promise of immortality for some of the heroes during their epoch, and the *Iliad’s* austerity in this respect, more than suggests that Homer innovated upon the Greek religious tradition.\(^3^4\) It is true that, as Redfield remarks, “the *Iliad* is [not] a definitive statement of Greek religious consciousness; it is not a testament, a gospel or torah,” and “there were many other aspects to the religion of the Greeks, who at various times and places created and believed in religions of fertility, of righteousness, of ecstasy, and of salvation.”\(^3^5\) However, even in respect of the various texts with which it shared the traditional understanding of cosmic and historical unfolding, the *Iliad* was not completely innovative. Rather, the poem seems to have kept to the main lines of that understanding. In part to heighten the drama of the poem, as James Morrison has shown, Homer will make reference to possibilities that, were they to be fulfilled, would have gone “beyond fate,” that is, beyond what for the poet’s original audience had been the main account of events.\(^3^6\) Yet, as Slatkin’s work

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34 On Homeric inventions vis-à-vis the epic tradition, see Willcock 2001. For a lesser example of suspected Homeric invention, see Fowler 2004: 228.

35 Redfield 1994: 245. He also underscores that the *Iliad* was the most important text for Greek culture and religion. See again Nagy 1999 on how traces of other religious experience are referred to or transformed in the *Iliad*.

36 Morrison 1992a and 1992b. Of the tradition before and after Homer, Glenn Most (2001: vii) offers this intriguing observation: “Every Greek poet, starting with Homer, had to face the delicate challenge posed by an often bizarre or enigmatic legend – because of a single women, an enormous army besieged a mighty city for ten years and then mercilessly destroyed it; a king saved his city, murdered his father, and married his mother – and
shows, comparisons with other texts show that Homer seems to have streamlined the traditional account or rendered it rationally consistent. Thus, again, if gods and men are divided by their immortality and mortality, respectively, then it makes sense not to have depicted the son of a mortal father as a hero who gains apotheosis or a god-like afterlife. The claim that the _Iliad_ is a work unified by its rationalism concerning such an important element of the human condition - our mortality - is central to my argument about the poem.

Scholarship that has shown that the _Iliad_ points to the larger historical context of the tradition that preceded Homer, while it also provides a rational argument about the Trojan War and its place in that history, is also instrumental to my own argument about the history of the Trojan War. In particular, I will try to show how references to the larger context of the war form a clear and consistent history in the poem. As to the history that precedes the present events of the war, I will discuss the cosmic context of the Olympians’ ascendency and its consequences for human beings. I will also discuss how the Trojan War originates on the human plane: where Helen left Sparta with Paris, taking many possessions, and the Trojans, by harboring her, brought on the war with the Achaeans.

More can be said, however, about how these and other aspects of the poem form a unified whole. I will add to other scholars’ discussions of the work in showing that Homer’s account of the Trojan War’s history - where the poem’s present takes place twenty years after Helen left and ten years after the Achaeans arrived to the shores outside Troy – is more complex and enlightening than has so far been appreciated. That is, I shall argue, Homer takes this timeline every time it was retold it had to be shaped in a new way for a new audience, neither reiterated so unimaginatively that it seemed stale and boring nor altered so radically that it contradicted the tradition and seemed implausible.”
seriously, and shows how it has resulted in different human dynamics within the two respective alliances. Here I have found most helpful research undertaken by Taplin, as it makes sense of a number of historical events referred to within the poem, finding consistency of characterization and argument among events that are not presented in a straightforward or linear way. In addition to providing vital information - particularly about the origins of the war, the formation of the Achaean alliance, and the respective roles of Achilles and Agamemnon - Taplin’s approach serves as a model for my own discussion of the historical material contained in the poem.\textsuperscript{37}

I shall also discuss how the Achaeans have by the present events of the poem established practices that are highly political, such that Achilles is able to articulate a vision of political community based on his experience among the Achaeans. Further, the events understood by the traditional account – such as the role of Helen, or the relations between immortals and mortals – are best understood alongside, together with, Homer’s account of the human dynamics inside Troy and amongst the Achaeans. As such, I shall try to show more clearly than has yet been shown that Homer provides a highly unified account of the Trojan War, characterized by a rational understanding of the experiences that its participants have undergone through time.

To end this section regarding how my thesis accords with the scholarship demonstrating the literary unity of the \textit{Iliad}, I should like to return to Lateiner’s observation that the poem’s many similes add yet another layer of material to consider in a poem that contains so much. The similes are undeniably one of the most striking elements of the poem. Much has been said about the abundance of life contained in Homer’s similes.\textsuperscript{38} Further, a highly illuminating article

\textsuperscript{37} Taplin 1986; 1990; 1995. See also Jones 1995.

\textsuperscript{38} See, e.g., Mitchell 2011: xx; Ahrensdorf 2014: 62-64.
written in 1943 by Kurt Riezler also discusses Homer’s contribution to the understanding of nature or “the meaning of truth” and, therewith, the poet’s vital contribution to the historical unfolding of classical rationalism. Among other things, Riezler shows how the similes are not put down in a simple formulaic fashion; rather, they bring out how the nature of thought itself is comparative, or how thought takes shape in the discovery of how images and ideas can be compared and contrasted with each other. The comparative element goes beyond the similes, and is one of the keys to the unity of the Iliad. My own line of argument relies on the vital insight that Riezler came to insofar as I attempt to understand important similarities and differences between the enemy alliances, and the various characters in the poem. Of course, Hotspur and Falstaff are to be compared, and we would learn much indeed from the comparison. The most important instance of this comparative element in the Iliad, I shall try to show, in where Achilles’ political experience provides the best prism through which to understand the various dynamics – between human beings, and in relation to the gods – that are contained within the poem.

1.2.2 Political approaches to the Iliad

The previous section ended with our suggestion that there is much to be learned from thinking about the significance of politics within Homer’s history of the Trojan War. The main scholars who figured in the foregoing discussion would provide important insights for scholars who have taken political approaches to the Iliad. Indeed, in recent years scholars have discovered that the

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Iliad contains significant reflections on politics. We know from the archeological record that at the time when the Homeric poems were composed the archaic Greek poleis had emerged in at least an embryonic form. Historians have found evidence of political community in the Iliad, the most important being the institution of a common assembly where significant decisions affecting its members took place. In turn, political theorists have discussed how the poem presents broader political matters. These matters are interrelated, and my discussion will focus especially on the following themes: human independence from the gods; the proper relationship between the individual, not least the ambitious individual, and the needs or desires of his community; how, therefore, human virtue is the cause of benefits and of problems for the individual and his, or her, community; the meaning of human mortality; and of family and friendship.

1.2.2.1 The Iliad in Relation to its Historical Context: The Emergence of the Polis

The historian must of course take into account the evidence we have discussed as to the poem’s having descended from a longstanding oral tradition. At the same time, the poem would likely have resonated with its audience’s own expectations and experiences. On one hand, the epic told its audience of special events from the past, and contained elements of fantasy and an archaizing tendency, the purpose of which is to create “epic distance,” or a heroic world separate from that

40 This approach may be contrasted with the anthropological approach taken by Redfield 1994. The difference in communal relations between the tribe and polis brings with it new and more comprehensive understandings of community, justice, and virtue (Cf. Aristotle Politics 1252b-1253a).
of the poet’s own time.\textsuperscript{41} Examples of these include the portrayal of human beings taller and stronger than in the present, their interactions with gods, and their use of outsized weaponry. On the other hand, “fantasy and archaisms were balanced by the listeners’ need to identify with the human drama and dilemmas described by the singer” of the poem. So the poem – which counts more than fifteen thousand lines - would also have contained “material reflecting social, economic and political conditions, values and relationships that were familiar to the audience.”\textsuperscript{42} It is thus a rich source for historians in understanding the society in which Homer’s poems were created.

Despite much evidence of an earlier oral tradition, scholars have dated the \textit{Iliad}'s final composition to the second half of the eighth century, perhaps as late as the first half of the seventh century BCE.\textsuperscript{43} Robin Osborne describes the salient logical inference:

> Bronze Age as well as early Iron Age archaeology can help us understand the resources out of which Homer’s society is created. But the Homeric poems show an awareness of particular material circumstances not found before the later eighth or early seventh centuries… Knowledge of the past requires the possibility of social memory, and that seems ensured by the demonstrable epic tradition; knowledge of the future would be far harder to account for, and for that reason it makes sense to ascribe the creation of the \textit{Iliad} and \textit{Odyssey}, in the form in which they have come down to us, to somewhere around, or shortly after 700.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{41} On “epic distance,” see Redfield 1994: 35-39, who also remarks on how the poem’s character and action would have been plausible to its listeners (58, 23). See Raaflaub 2008: 472 and n. 16; Hammer 2002: 11 and references.

\textsuperscript{42} Raaflaub 2000: 26; 2008: 473. On the arguments for an audience wider than only elites, see the references listed by Hammer 2002: 203 n. 36.

\textsuperscript{43} See Hammer 2002: 200 n. 5 and references.

\textsuperscript{44} Osborne 2004: 218.
This was a time when the polis was “emerging in Greece as the major form of independent social and political organization,” as it would remain for the next four centuries.\textsuperscript{45} Archeologists have discovered that the eighth century marked major changes in social organization. Populations grew in settlements that witnessed material advancement, increased social stratification, massive increases in dedications at sanctuaries (old and new), the construction of substantial temple buildings, the expansion of foreign trade and interaction, and the setting up of colonies in Italy and Sicily. With the introduction of the Phoenician alphabet, moreover, writing spread rapidly throughout the various settlements.\textsuperscript{46} With the rise in populations, moreover, there was competition for land, resulting in conflicts within and between poleis. As a consequence:

New forms of communal military and political organization thus became necessary, eventually resulting in a citizen army of heavily armed infantry…a differentiated apparatus of offices and government, and regulated procedures of decision making, lawgiving, resolution of conflicts and jurisdiction.\textsuperscript{47}

Given the historical evidence, “[t]he eighth century appears as a time of transition toward a more collective definition and arrangement of community space.”\textsuperscript{48} Hero and ancestor cults suggest the beginning of a shared sense of the past. The establishment of civic deities and sanctuaries provided a common religious identity, linked the centre of town and the surrounding

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\textsuperscript{45} Schein 1984: 169.
\textsuperscript{46} Snodgrass 1980; Morris 1989; Osborne 1996: 147-60.
\textsuperscript{47} Raaflaub 2000: 28.
\textsuperscript{48} Hammer 2002: 32.
\end{flushright}
country, and set territorial boundaries. So did city walls. Common burial sites replaced those close to homes. The erection of temples, public infrastructure, and the establishment of colonies all would have required communal negotiation and organization of collective resources. Moreover, cities began to create a Panhellenic identity through large gatherings, such as the Olympic games, and common sanctuaries, such as the Delphic oracle of the Pythian Apollo.

If we put aside the *Iliad*'s components of heroic exaggeration that serve to create epic distance, Kurt Raaflaub argues, “the world of Homer is a world of early poleis that are firmly embedded in the heroes’ thoughts and actions.” Put another way, “to fill in the ‘heroic frame,’ the poet seems to have adopted models with which his time was thoroughly familiar.” The great expedition to Troy described in the *Iliad* is thus an expanded version of “an expedition undertaken for the purpose of acquiring plunder or exacting revenge by a warrior band under the leadership of one or several elite members.” Troy itself has many attributes of a polis.

Further, when the Achaean army’s bridgehead at Troy eventually becomes a fortified camp “it is

49 See Hammer 2002: 32-33 and references.

50 See Nagy 1999: 7.

51 Raaflaub 2008: 474. Raaflaub thus continues, while providing correctives to, the work of Moses Finley (e.g., 1979), who transformed Homer into history through considering various references in the poems (see also Taplin 1990: 67).

52 Raaflaub 2008: 474.

53 Raaflaub 2008: 474.

54 Raaflaub 1993: 46-47.
assimilated to the central settlement of a polis.” Raaflaub notes that one must allow for certain limits: in terms of duration, by the length of the war; and the absence of families. However, he also cites the definitions of the polis put forward by later Greek writers (such as Herodotus and Thucydides) as a moveable community of men.\(^55\) That the Achaeans are a panhellenic expeditionary force reflects the contemporary ties between poleis.\(^56\) But otherwise the Achaean camp “has all the characteristics of [a contemporary polis]: streets and alleys, division into quarters, squares for sacrifices and rituals, a market place, an agora for assemblies and other communal events, walls, and gates.”\(^57\) Thus the Achaeans and the Trojans are two poleis situated on either end of the Trojan plain.\(^58\)

Admittedly, much of the language of politics that – together with more developed institutions, and constitutions - would come to be invented and developed in the proceeding centuries was missing at this early stage of the polis.\(^59\) Yet we can discern politics in its nascent or emergent form. The Homeric polis is dominated socially and economically by a group of noble families. Among the heads of these families is a paramount leader – who, like each of


\(^{57}\) Given the symbolic character of the work – where contemporary reality is inserted into traditional material, and where the entirety of the ten years of war is packed into the short time-span of the \textit{Iliad}’s present – the Achaeans’ erection of the wall, upon Nestor’s advice in book 7 (323-44) – seems highly significant.


\(^{59}\) Raaflaub 1988: 5.
them, is called a basileus (translated as “king”) – and he holds “a precarious position of pre-eminence.” Raaflaub describes their roles as follows.

These leaders meet in council, debate issues of communal importance in the assembly, lead their followers and fellow citizens in battle, serve as judges and, through guest friendships (xenia) and embassies, maintain contacts with other communities. Nurturing a highly competitive ideology of excellence…this elite projects an image of high status, great refinement, wealth and complete control in the community – an impression that is enhanced further by the epics’ focus on a small group of leaders elevated to superhuman (‘heroic’) status.\textsuperscript{60}

By contrast, the non-elite masses receive little attention. They are probably independent farmers, Raaflaub notes, whose status is out of place in epic or heroic poetry. Yet their role is important. Battles are decided by mass armies. They also attend assemblies where they “witness and legitimize” decisions of consequence to the community. The leader who ignores this sanction may even jeopardize his position. The same goes for the heads of households or lesser kings (basileis), who are acknowledged for deeds that serve the community, as, for example, Sarpedon’s famous statement about his status and motivations at \textit{Iliad} 12.310-16. Likewise, this is Hector’s position as protector of Troy. There can be rivalries between elites, but the kings should be tactful and respectful; and the poet makes clear that when Achilles and Agamemnon stand in opposition to each other the entire Achaean community is imperiled.\textsuperscript{61} Further, throughout the epic, often in the assembly, it becomes clear that the kings are not free from

\textsuperscript{60} Raaflaub 2000: 29.

\textsuperscript{61} Raaflaub 2000: 29-30. On the complex networks that comprise the Achaean and Trojan alliances, see also van Wees 1997.
errors and that they should aim for “insight, reparation, and reconciliation.”62 Finally, in his models of behaviors and their consequences for the community’s wellbeing, the poet himself educated his listeners.63

1.2.2.2 Political Thought in the *Iliad*: Questions of Authority and Community

Scholars who, like Raaflaub, are concerned with the historical background to the *Iliad* still have questions about the main political lessons that Homer meant to impart. Not least, there is some disagreement among scholars as to whether the main political contest of the *Iliad* – that between Achilles and Agamemnon – represents one kind of political framework or another. In his article, “Achilles’ Last Stand,” Elton Barker points out that Ian Morris, for example, has argued that Agamemnon’s authority as the paramount king among the Achaeans, although threatened by Achilles, is ultimately confirmed by their conflict.64 Peter Rose and Dean Hammer, by contrast, discuss how Agamemnon’s leadership is called into question by Achilles and, in the assembly scene of book 2, by the people at large.65 The alternative political frameworks, then, are of Agamemnon’s more robust kingship, and of a more open and unresolved framework in which competing views of the Achaean community and claims to authority in it are portrayed.


63 Raaflaub 2000: 34.

64 Morris 1986; Barker 2004: 5.

While Barker seems to agree with the perspective offered by Rose and Hammer, he puts forth a somewhat different perspective on the conflict between Agamemnon and Achilles. He emphasizes how it, together with several other episodes from the poem, brings out questions about authority - in particular, whether, to what extent, and how dissent can or should be institutionalized. He does so by focusing on the Achaean assemblies that take place at various points in the work (in books 1, 2, 9, and 19). Instead of presupposing or trying to discern a socio-political framework that these assemblies would have fit into or that they portray, Barker argues that the poem itself, through its representations of debate, “places a responsibility on the audience to work through the scenes of assembly and realize its potential as a forum for managing dissent.” His approach has much in common with reader response theories that understand a given reading of a text as “an event,” with the qualification that he has in mind the social or public performance of the *Iliad*.

Barker discusses the movement between the first and fourth of the assemblies, and how this is a “series of representations that progressively explores the possibility for, and value of, dissent in the community.” The poem depicts the assembly as it comes to be institutionalized as a place for more open dissent. He shows that some of the most decisive moments in the conflict between Agamemnon and Achilles take place in the context of assemblies, beginning with its irruption at the start of the poem, when Agamemnon takes Achilles’ war-prize, Briseis.

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Barker argues that the poem’s audience would have been invited to think about the place of dissent in their own given situations. For one thing, by “experiencing the assembly as a process,” he writes, the audience becomes “implicated in realizing it as an institution that makes use of disagreement.” Barker’s analysis is thus in keeping with the historians’ account of the emerging polis as providing historical context to the *Iliad*, as one can imagine how the poem’s depictions of debate would have helped (as it can help today’s readers) in creating an audience engaged in thinking about political deliberation.

Following Raaflaub and others, Dean Hammer carefully summarizes the scholarship on the historical record to provide a view of the background against which the poem is set. However, Hammer argues that many scholars who have written about the *Iliad* overlook the evidence of politics in the poem itself, on account of too narrowly defining that activity. Such writers have taken the view that, since the more robust institutions we associate with politics in the ancient Greek world were not created or were quite undeveloped in the archaic period, politics as such did not exist at that time. Hence, they have not discovered evidence of political activity in the *Iliad*. Yet Hammer notes that this approach “creates a perplexing situation in

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69 Barker 2004: 39. Barker also argues that even in parts of the *Iliad* where dissent is not effectively articulated or given institutional form in the assembly, the poem nonetheless invites the audience to “investigate debate” (2004: 31). For example, in book 2, when Thersites is silenced by force from speaking, the audience is encouraged to think about whether such a boundary to dissent is appropriate (2004: 25-26).

70 Barker 2004: 41.

71 Hammer 2002: 19-48, 116-29, 146-54. Hammer also looks beyond the time of the poem to discuss the development of the polis (160-69).
which institutions are political, but the preinstitutional activity of forming these institutions is not.”  

From a wider perspective, however, politics and reflection on politics, or political thought, would have appeared in the public performance of the poem, which brings a communal attention to it; and, again, in the performance – that is, the mimesis - of political actors within it.  

The political activity we are invited to reflect on in the Iliad, writes Hammer, “constitutes the political field, a realm in which questions of community organization are raised, determined, and implemented.” This field includes both Agamemnon and Achilles, and, like Barker, Hammer’s main focus is also on the conflict between them. Their conflict at the start of the poem is political in that it takes place in an assembly initially called to address the matter of the plague that imperils the community, and because in his anger at Agamemnon Achilles invokes public principles of community organization. Hammer characterizes their opposition as that between two different views of authority. Achilles understands the exercise of authority to

\[72\] Hammer 2002: 25.

\[73\] Hammer 2002: 11, 26-29. A second objection to the claim that the Iliad reflects on politics is that the Greeks had not discovered nature in Homer’s time, and that they understood human actions to be determined by the gods (15). In chapter 2 of his book Hammer argues for the presence of human agency.

\[74\] Hammer 2002: 14. The italics are Hammer’s, who derives the term “political field” from the work of the cultural anthropologist Victor Turner (26-28).

\[75\] Hammer 2002: 14, 82-86.
consist in “the ability to get others to willingly act together.” Agamemnon understands it to consist in “his ability to compel obedience, by force if need be.”

Their conflict irrupts after Agamemnon realizes that to end the plague sent by Apollo he must ransom back the captured slave-girl, Chryseis, to her father, after which he threatens, and then declares, that he will replace her with Briseis, whom Achilles has won after having fought in battle. Agamemnon as a king does not help his people, according to Achilles, on account of his greed and domineering character. He would rule for himself, and instead of fighting with the other warriors he merely takes from them. Agamemnon thinks that the assertion of his authority should not be challenged, as when he denies the assemblymen’s shouts of assent to return Chryseis to her father, or when he announces that he will take Briseis. Before the seer Calchas states that the only way out of the plague is for Agamemnon to return Chryseis, he is afraid to do so given Agamemnon’s retributive character.

Yet Achilles, because he does not fear Agamemnon, is not to be silenced by him. In being unafraid of Agamemnon, Achilles is not in awe of his power, thus proving that “fear is not an adequate substitute for authority.” Thus Achilles asks Agamemnon how anyone will “readily (prophrôn) obey” his orders. He understands Agamemnon to be acting for himself, out of greed, rather than for the public. Nevertheless, Agamemnon remains intransigent, and the people do obey him – they, too, are responsible for taking back the prize that was awarded to

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77 Hammer 2002: 82-84.

78 Hammer 2002: 83.

Achilles - because they are fearful, so he considers them to be “nonentities.” Since for Achilles the political community is constituted by the willing engagement in a common project, he understands it to have come apart: in speaking of nonentities Achilles suggests that “the resort to force will slowly deplete Agamemnon’s ranks, since the only people who remain… no longer speak or act.”

Hammer proceeds to describe an impasse in the Achaean community after the assembly breaks up. On the one hand, Agamemnon’s authority begins to crumble. Proof of Achilles’ assertions about its hollowness soon appears, in another assembly, in book 2. There his advice that they all return home from the Trojan plain – which is insincere; he is testing their readiness to fight - is taken up by the multitude, as the assembly gives way to tumult. The political field has been fractured. Further, it is another king – Odysseus - who restores Agamemnon’s authority as the king, and he does so through forcing the Achaeans not to flee. In that connection, however, Hammer cites Hannah Arendt in defining “the power of a leader” as “an empowering by a certain number of people...to act in their name,” and he argues that the scene shows that Agamemnnon has failed to attain it. Power is political in that it is based on a common enterprise; Agamemnon lacks true authority because he lacks power. On the other

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80 Hammer 2002: 100, 86.

81 Hammer 2002: 86.

82 Hammer 2002: 90-91. Hammer writes that the event is in keeping with Arendt’s account of what happens when power is corrupted (citing Arendt 1972: 143).
hand, Hammer discusses how Achilles’ own subsequent denial of the Achaean community places him outside of any proper political or human relationships.  

Together with historians such as Raaflaub, Hammer’s account of political thought in the *Iliad* establishes the presence of the people, as well as the rivalry between the elites, as seems to have been the case in actual poleis during the archaic period. At the same time, Hammer’s point about narrative also implies that to understand the *Iliad* in full one must fully account for it as such, comprised of individual characters who present us with complex motivations, circumstances, and interactions. (This is to say nothing of how such a work as the *Iliad* might help one to understand some of the human characteristics that were crucial to the motions of ancient history, as they are at any time.) In this respect, Hammer’s account of political thought may not go very far beyond the accounts of historians such as Raaflaub. The latter’s insight, that the poem contains “contemporary reality,” leads us to emphasize those parts where the roles of the elites and the people come into focus. From this perspective we see in the poem what the early Greeks would have recognized as inter-elite rivalry and the search for a common political order.

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84 In certain respects, however, Hammer’s analysis of the text is anachronistic. One should be cautious in using modern conceptual abstractions – such as the concept of “political fields” - to interpret the story of the *Iliad*, and by looking too eagerly or focusing too narrowly on what it can tell us about political dynamics in archaic society. Likewise, Hammer’s reliance on contemporary philosophy and political theory – together with his account at various junctures of an Arendtian Homer, he sees a Heideggerian Homer (e.g., 2002: 91, 189 and n. 60) – can distract us from a closer encounter with the *Iliad* itself. On inaccuracies that can follow from such an approach, see Redfield’s criticism of Whitman’s existentialist account of Achilles (1994: 9-11).
The *Iliad* is a kaleidoscopic text, however, and as we turn to a different perspective we see more things. Together with those parts on which historians of archaic Greece have concentrated, it is important not to neglect the “mythic” story on which, as we saw, literary scholars of the *Iliad* have focused, and which Homer’s contemporary readers would have thought of or experienced as their own cosmic and forebears’ history.\(^85\) It is important, as I shall argue, also to consider the story that includes the Olympian ascendency, of Paris and Helen, of the emergence of a common cause when the Achaeans entered into an alliance - which was not then the same as a political community - and how the conflict between Agamemnon and Achilles is shaped by their different experiences during the ten years after the alliance formed. In the present interpretation, I try to pay attention to each of these elements of the poem in turn, as I contend that we can better appreciate how scholars who discuss the literary treatment of the poem, along with historians of archaic Greece, can together contribute to our understanding of it as a unified whole. Some of the important findings of a more comprehensive approach are as follows.

In describing an historical unfolding within the poem, I shall argue, we can observe the emergence of three accounts of society. First, in Troy, the city is ruled by elites who follow private inclinations. Second, among the Achaeans, a sense of the common realm emerges, determined by the voluntary decision of the allies to form an expedition to defend the principle of xenia that the Trojans violated, and to observe reciprocal obligations and honors as members of the alliance. Third, a truer common realm emerges after the Achaeans have been encamped outside Troy for ten years. Achilles is the chief spokesman for the second type of community, and – in keeping with the historians’ insight into the contemporary reality that the poem contains

\(^{85}\) Cf. Taplin 1990: 67.
– his words are to be taken seriously for providing us with a true sense of what constitutes that political community. The differences between the two alliances show that Raaflaub’s discussion of politics in the *Iliad* must make room for significant distinctions between two types of polis. The disjunction between the first and second instances of community amongst the Achaeans also helps us to explain the different interpretations of the alliance that Barker mentions, where Agamemnon is understood to be the leader and yet he is challenged by Achilles.

I shall argue that as readers we should also keep in mind the underlying reason for the Achaean expedition in the first place, the Trojans’ violation of justice in harboring Helen and the possessions, and that the more newly established political community cannot ignore that first cause and its various consequences. Perhaps the most obvious consequence of the initial cause of the war is that the Achaean camp is almost completely comprised of males who have sailed from their homelands to Troy. That means, of course, that it is not a political community in the full sense.  

Raaflaub does note that women are not in the camp, but as his main approach is to discover evidence of contemporary political history in the poem (that is, in the main, politics understood as public institutions and contestation) he does not give this point much weight. Yet, as I shall argue, Achilles comes to learn that the contest for honor in the Achaean community is ultimately a vain contest, at which point he is moved deeply by the alternative of marriage and the enjoyment of a domestic life in peacetime. Stronger resonances are to be felt when one thinks about how at that point the meaning of the war comes full circle, as the original violation of the domestic bond, by Paris and Helen, is transfigured into Achilles’ meditation on

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86 Aristotle devotes much of the first book of the *Politics* to the theme of the family and its relationship to the polis.

87 Raaflaub 1993: 47.
the importance of that same bond as a fundamental alternative to the life of war at which he has excelled, and as pointing the way to a new understanding of political order or justice. This also brings out an important point of contrast between my interpretation and Hammer’s in regard to the Achaean elites represented by Odysseus and Nestor: the order that these men try to uphold—an Achaean alliance whose end is to keep the war going and destroy Troy—might well be deemed unjust. In order to appreciate such teachings contained in the poem, again, we would do well to take seriously its larger mythic structure together with, or as part of, what it tells us about political community.

1.2.2.3 Political Thought in the *Iliad*: Themes of Classical Political Philosophy

There are many clear and direct references to the Homeric epic in the great writings of subsequent generations. All such references would only indicate the extent of Homer’s influence on classical Greek thought. Indeed, beyond such references, a survey of the themes that pervade the epics and the great works that were written in subsequent generations would suggest even that the horizon of reflection in ancient Greek poetry, historiography, and philosophy would not have been illuminated without the first light that Homer provided. Rembrandt’s *Aristotle with a Bust of Homer* – as the phrase goes, it is “a picture that speaks a thousand words” - would beautifully illustrate the point.

A group of recent studies that have concentrated on themes and questions that appear first in the *Iliad*, and were later taken up by the classical political philosophers, is relatively small but significant. John Alvis describes one way of conceiving of those themes, as follows.

[B]oth political philosophy and epic poems are concerned with ascertaining human nature, the distinctive excellences that perfect
that nature, the rights pertaining to it, and the forms of association – the institutions, laws, and usages – most conducive to realizing the human capacity for virtue and for promoting the proper grounds of human respect...[T]he fundamental question that occupies classical political thought coincides with the fundamental concern that impels classical epic: how to define humanity’s intermediate position between beasts and gods and how to conceive terms of social life that may best serve to keep individuals mindful of their intermediate condition so as to acknowledge the moral obligations devolving from it.\textsuperscript{88}

In his chapter on the \textit{Iliad} Alvis discusses the “political plan of Zeus,” and how Achilles, most of all, responds to that plan.\textsuperscript{89} He first very helpfully discusses how Zeus arranges an order among the Olympians, most notably in his dealings with Hera. Unlike the philanderer recounted at points during the poem, Zeus takes a more conciliatory tone towards his wife, which betokens his new role as paterfamilias to the gods, “sublimating his erotic energies in a project of political consolidation.”\textsuperscript{90} Alvis writes that it is probably on account of the traditional teaching that Thetis would bear a son greater than his father (which Slatkin discussed) that Zeus invites all of the gods to her marriage with Peleus, thus displaying his restraint before them as well as avoiding his own and their ruin.\textsuperscript{91} Heroes are also the offspring of couplings between mortals and immortals, where Zeus has often been the most active among the latter. However, by taking

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{88} Alvis 1995: ix. The \textit{locus classicus} for this characterization of ancient political philosophy is of course Aristotle’s \textit{Politics} 1252a-1253b.
\item \textsuperscript{89} The reference to Zeus’s plan as “political” is made at the head of Alvis’s two chapters on Homer (1995: 1).
\item \textsuperscript{90} Alvis 1995: 5-6.
\item \textsuperscript{91} Alvis 1995: 6, 25-27.
\end{itemize}
sides with given heroes the gods have been led into battle with each other. Aphrodite’s mother, Dione, recounts such incidents in times past (see below, 2.1).  

I agree with Alvis that the gods, starting with Zeus, must remind themselves not to become overly involved with human beings. In his interpretation of the *Iliad*, however, Alvis seems to me to overstate their closeness to human beings, as well as their jealousy of human beings in those instances where human beings do not cause them to make war among themselves. For instance, Alvis notes that the worship of heroes took place in cult practice throughout Greece before, during and after Homer’s time, and argues that men in the *Iliad*, especially Achilles, would threaten the gods by vying to be so worshipped. By successfully seeking self-divinization in that way, Achilles would become a model for extraordinary men to emulate or imitate. This may indeed have been a motivation for Homer the poet, who, we saw, excises references to the fabulous such as one finds in the poems of the Epic Cycle. Thus Homer denies Sarpedon immortality while he also seems to make reference to the hero’s cult. Likewise, in the *Iliad*, even Achilles must admit that his model of heroic accomplishment, Heracles never gained the apotheosis that it seems, Achilles understood him to have gained (18.115-19). At the same time, these references are made in the *Iliad* very subtly, not

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93 Alvis 1995: 8-10.

94 See also Schein 1984: 46-49 and references.

95 See Nagy 1983.

96 In the *Odyssey* Heracles is said to have gained apotheosis (11.602-04). See Nagy 2005.
explicitly. Nor do the gods of the *Iliad* themselves seem to be concerned about heroic cult worship.\(^{97}\) The gods are concerned not to allow human beings to extend their lives, as when Hera reminds Zeus that if he should let Sarpedon live other immortals will do the same for their own favorites (16.431-57). As I shall argue in chapter 2, however, the main point is simply that the immortals must keep to a decisive separation between themselves and mortals, which their involvement in the Trojan War should only serve to establish. If they were to become too involved, the gods would in effect think that human beings are like them, or they would forget that human beings – being mortal - are not equals to themselves. Strife amongst the Olympians could also bring with it the recurrence of cosmic anarchy.

Alvis also goes too far in referring to Zeus’s role in human affairs as enacting a “providential” and “political” plan as regards human beings. It is true that Zeus from time to time foresees events that will occur in the human world, especially in regard to Achilles. What detracts from this claim is that Zeus and the other gods are motivated by their own ends rather than those of mortals. Alvis elides this latter point with an argument that the gods’ ends serve to create justice in the human realm.\(^{98}\) Yet there are problems with the examples that Alvis adduces to support this argument.

\(^{97}\) Similarly, while there are many references to sacrifices made to the gods (e.g., 4.44-49, 22.169-72), I see little evidence for Alvis’s claim that “Zeus presides over divinities who compete for prestige measured in humanly conferred honors” (1995: 16). By the end of the *Iliad*, suggests Redfield (1994: 246): “[T]he poet…takes a position close to that of ordinary cult – since much of Greek cult is devoted to keeping the gods at a distance...In general, I would say, practical Greek religion is less concerned with attracting and appropriating the positive powers of the gods than with fending off their negative powers.” Cf. also Kullmann 1985: 15-17 and references.

\(^{98}\) Alvis 1995: 10-23.
For instance, Alvis argues that Zeus takes a leading role in the punishment of Troy. At the start of book 4, after Aphrodite has saved Paris from the duel with Menelaus, Zeus goads Hera and Athene. By doing so, Zeus “makes himself ultimately responsible for prompting Pandarus to violate a truce that would have resolved the conflict” between the enemy alliances. However, that inference is tendentious. Zeus has turned from goading the two goddesses to being deeply troubled by the depth of Hera’s hatred toward the Trojans. Hera is more than willing to trade Troy’s destruction for that of Argos, Sparta, and Mykenos, or any other city Zeus should choose (4.1-67). Her sole aim is to destroy Troy: long ago she and Athene made oaths to do so (20.313-17). I contend that it is most important that the gods do not let their anger or their partisanship with any human make them forget that what unites the gods is much more important than what divides them. Even if the *Iliad* depicts the early stage of the Olympian order, this is the relatively simple lesson the gods must learn. Since Zeus’s aim is to keep the Olympians from fighting each other over human beings – his concern at Hera’s passionate intransigence, I suggest, is that she would place this passion over the need for comity among the gods - so he decides not to try and stop her (4.37-38).

In her article on political themes in the *Iliad*, Arlene Saxonhouse noted that the ambiguous relation between justice in the human realm and the Olympians has long been at issue in the scholarship. Nonetheless, she writes,

however much the gods, or Zeus in particular, may work to secure equitable distributions of goods and evils – for the Trojans, for Agamemnon, for Achilles, or for Priam – divine efforts in this

direction are not readily perceived by mortals nor relied upon by the participants in the Homeric epics.\textsuperscript{100} Missing from Alvis’s analysis of the gods of the \textit{Iliad} is what scholars have referred to as “double motivation,” which takes place frequently, where the same event is caused by a god and a human.\textsuperscript{101} Homer’s naturalistic account of human psychology and events explains these in a rationally comprehensible way. As Aristotle would later write in his discussion of what makes for tragedy, Homer’s characters think and act in a way that others of such dispositions would think and act in similar situations.\textsuperscript{102}

Alvis’s observation is accurate, that some of the same lessons that the gods learn, with regard to monogamy or to negotiating between others who have different desires or ends, human beings must also learn in their own way. At the same time, human beings have more complex, painful, and deeper lessons to learn; and, again, they must learn them for themselves, not from any instructions provided to them by the gods. The great pathos of the work is that human order is much harder to achieve than the relatively simple and easy negotiations that the Olympians must make in order to attain divine order. While the gods are concerned with ordering their own

\textsuperscript{100} Saxonhouse 1988: 44 n. 1 and references. See also Schein 1984: 59.

\textsuperscript{101} See Dodds 1951; Willcock 1970; Lesky 2001. Commenting on the proem, Alvis (1995: 14) does state that the \textit{Iliad} allows for human freedom. “If we think of the plan of Zeus as an unfolding providence adjusting at need to human choices, we perceive how divine purpose does not cancel human freedom...[T]he proem does not subordinate human causation to divine, but rather, sets forth two orders of causes, as it were, paratactically.” However, in his discussion of the gods, as we have noted, Alvis emphasizes their concern for and determination of justice (of a sort) in the human realm.

realm, one consequence of the absence of divine determination of human events is that human beings can discover where their hopes in the divine are misplaced. That of course is one of Achilles’ most important lessons, all the more poignant given his connection to his divine mother, as that connection makes it clearest to him that no mortal can gain a more than earthly status.

The second element of Alvis’s overall account, which focuses on human experience, is much more successful. The main hero, Achilles, learns from his own experiences in the human world that his desire for undying glory cannot be met, that there are limits to human striving. Hence, as Alvis very helpfully shows, together with a sense of vulnerability and human interdependence, Achilles learns the virtues of moderation or endurance, and magnanimity.103 Indeed, although I disagree with Alvis’s remark that these challenge divine hegemony, I agree that “friendship, courage, wit, and steadfastness have to be sought in Homer’s human models since these qualities are alien to the Homeric gods.”104 These qualities are of course in keeping with Alvis’s general statement about politics in the epic that we quoted above at the beginning of this subsection. Alongside these insights, I will wish to emphasize how – unlike the gods, who can afford simply to be unchanging throughout time in defending their fundamental separation from mortals, which allows the gods to enjoy lives of mere pleasure – human beings and their communities do and should change through time in order to adjust to and reflect on the vicissitudes of their condition, as individuals, and in relation to other human beings who are possessed of different character types and experiences.

103 Alvis 1995: e.g., 60-61.

Having said that, some people, and some cities, show very little ability to change. Mera Flaumenhaft’s article accounts for Homer’s naturalistic presentation of Troy and its main figures. From the poem Flaumenhaft traces back to the time when Priam’s father, Laomedon, hired the gods Poseidon and Apollo to build the city wall but treated them harshly and failed to pay them. Such disrespect for strangers, and such selfishness, are evident in Paris’s conduct toward Menelaus. In turn, the royal family fosters this behavior, as Priam treats his many sons lightly. His own many wives, the sons and their many wives, all reside in his luxurious palace. The result is a city that is focused on pleasure and the private realm, particularly that of the royal family. There is little that Hector, who is exceptional for wishing to defend his city, can do. The final result of their insularity, Flaumenhaft argues, will be the Trojans’ destruction.

Saxonhouse’s short article, “Thymos, Justice, and the Moderation of Anger in the Story of Achilles,” was nonetheless groundbreaking for bringing attention to those fundamental themes of political philosophy. As noted, Saxonhouse understands the Homeric hero to exist in a world ungoverned by gods who would provide order; accordingly, he tries to create order. Saxonhouse discusses Achilles’ understanding of justice in the context of war, where the warrior who risks his life, and accomplishes great feats, expects to be honored. The general principle is that “the best warrior should receive recognition in the form of booty for his deeds of courage on the battlefield.” Since material goods are tangible or visible, all can “acknowledge and admire”


them.\textsuperscript{108} When he is spurned by Agamemnon, however, his spiritedness grows to defend his honor and perception of justice. Yet his spiritedness is stifled when, after having gone to his tent, he has reflected on the inadequacy or weakness of justice as he has understood it. Further, after he has heard from the embassy, in book 9, Achilles comes to discover that his understanding has itself been inadequate, as there can be no compensation, in goods or honor, for a warrior who risks his life.\textsuperscript{109} At the same time, he understands what he had thought of material possessions in a new way – in particular, Briseis appears as a woman to be loved rather than a slave - which is in keeping with a new understanding of a life of peace as an alternative to war.\textsuperscript{110}

When Achilles does return to battle, after Patroclus dies, he does so from anger at his loss of a friend rather than the loss of his honor.\textsuperscript{111} Yet here, too, nothing can compensate for his loss. He can become moderate only by accepting that evils and goods are visited on human beings at random, that is, by accepting that his ability to control his fate in a random world is limited. Without the expectation that he can order human experience, or render the world just, he has accepted his own limits.\textsuperscript{112} The story of Achilles, then, is of “transformation through reflection and moderation, leading not to the abandonment of the notion of what is due, but to the

\textsuperscript{108} Saxonhouse 1988: 32.

\textsuperscript{109} Saxonhouse 1988: 32-34.

\textsuperscript{110} Saxonhouse 1988: 35-36.

\textsuperscript{111} Saxonhouse 1988: 36-37.

\textsuperscript{112} Saxonhouse 1988: 41-44.
understanding of the limits of this concept.”\textsuperscript{113} With this insight, however, Achilles displays a pity for others that is appropriate to an otherwise chaotic human condition.\textsuperscript{114}

Such tragic wisdom is accounted for by Peter J. Ahrensdorf as itself very close to that of the classical Greek philosophers, as he argues in \textit{Homer on the Gods and Human Virtue}.\textsuperscript{115} Like Reinhardt, Redfield, Saxonhouse, and other scholars before him, Ahrensdorf argues that Homer’s depiction of the gods as rather frivolous serves to highlight human endeavors and experience as more dignified and noble, if also more precarious.\textsuperscript{116} Ahrensdorf focuses on Achilles’ greatness as a reflective warrior who asks fundamental questions about the human condition, on account of which he outshines the loyal Hector and the wily Odysseus.

A crucial tension that Achilles’ situation brings out is that between the warrior’s concern for the common good of the Achaean alliance (which Ahrensdorf accounts for as a political community), and his desire for honor. In turn, virtue comes to sight as a problem for the warrior. His situation leads the reader to ask whether the warrior expects a reward for virtue that goes beyond mere material possessions, even though such virtue is, particularly in the context of war, self-sacrificial. According to Ahrensdorf, in his interaction with Athene, in book 1, it becomes clear that Achilles expects to be rewarded by the gods for his excellence as a warrior and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{113} Saxonhouse 1988: 44.
\item \textsuperscript{114} Saxonhouse 1988: 42-44.
\item \textsuperscript{115} Ahrensdorf 2014. For an analysis of passages from Plato’s \textit{Republic} that points in a similar direction, see Burns 2015.
\item \textsuperscript{116} Ahrensdorf 2014: 25-72.
\end{itemize}
political leader among the Achaeans. He persists in this expectation even while Agamemnon spurns him and the Achaeans do nothing to stop Agamemnon.  

So powerful is his devotion to virtue that he refuses to abandon it, even when both his companions and the gods fail to honor him for his virtue. But, on the other hand, so powerful is his desire to see virtue rewarded that he clings to the hope, notwithstanding the evidence of divine indifference to virtue, that it will be rewarded by just gods who ensure that the self-denying life of virtue is beneficial to those who lead it.  

That statement is a rather abstract account of how Achilles’ virtue and his concern for honor, as well his relationship to the gods, are presented in the poem. At the same time, here Ahrensdorf does highlight essential considerations.  

Finally, for Ahrensdorf the passages in book 9 where Achilles sings of the glory of warriors, but also questions the life of virtue he has led, mark feats of reflective brilliance that far outshine Hector’s understanding, for example.  

In addition to the endurance and moderation that depend upon such insights (which Alvis and Saxonhouse discuss), Ahrensdorf contends that Achilles’ thoughts point to a deeper, reflective way of life. These passages point to Achilles’ attachment to the warrior’s virtue as better than a long life of peace and, therewith, his desire to be rewarded with immortality on account of his virtue as a warrior. These reflections themselves are open to the most reflective man whom the *Iliad* tacitly acknowledges: namely, the philosophic poet himself. What Achilles comes close to grasping, but fails fully to grasp, is that

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119 Ahrensdorf 2014: 89-197.
the activity of singing about and reflecting on the virtue and honor of men could not constitute a compelling alternative to both the long but flat-souled life of material comfort and the noble but painful life of sacrifice...Would not this life, the life evidently led by Homer himself, offer Achilles the happiness, the fulfillment of mind and spirit, he craves? It is possible that, even though he does cherish the pleasures of singing and thinking about human beings, the active Achilles simply does not grasp that the life of the contemplative singer could constitute a distinct and complete way of life.\footnote{Ahrensdorf 2014: 157; see also 253-55. For different account of Achilles’ singing, however, see Benardete 2005: 95.}

As a way of life that does not look to gain immortality through virtue, Homer’s way of life also constitutes a fundamental alternative to conventional piety or obedience to the divine.\footnote{See Ahrensdorf 2014: 251-55.} In these respects Homer’s way of life inaugurates classical Greek political philosophy, with its reflections on the various elements of the human condition. Here, too, Ahrensdorf seems to extrapolate too much from the phenomena of the poem. In his focus on Homer’s pre-figuration of the philosophic life espoused by such subsequent writers as Plato and Aristotle, Ahrensdorf seems to have extricated Achilles from the web of relations in which he finds himself. While I do not see evidence of Achilles’ life as pointing towards that of Homer – where, after all, would Homer be without Achilles? - I agree that Achilles is by far the most self-conscious and clear-sighted of Homer’s characters, and that he raises fundamental questions and considerations.

My own discussion has benefitted much from those of Alvis, Saxonhouse, Flaumenhaft, and Ahrensdorf. In conversation with their accounts, my own aim is to incorporate some of the grand themes of classical political philosophy that they discuss into an account of the history of the Trojan War as it is put forth, particularly in books 1-9 of the \textit{Iliad}. At times, it will be useful...
to refer directly to the later writers, especially Aristotle, in order to bring clearer attention to those themes in the poem. A few words are in order concerning that decision. Raaflaub observes that in Homer’s context, the nascent polis, institutions and constitutions and corresponding terminology had to be newly created, and the political sphere itself had to be discovered and gradually penetrated by thought, understanding, and explanation.122

The poem, as we have noted, had also to conform to a general story about the Trojan War, its main protagonists, alliance-formations, and so on. The poetic form allows for greater verisimilitude in its portrayal of the human condition, much literary works of historiography, tragedy, and the Platonic dialogues would later. For example, the political significance of an individual’s point of view is often deepened, in the literary context in which he speaks, given the larger political context of the narrative. Its historical context and genre, then, did not allow for a rigorous account of politics such as Aristotle provides. Aristotle accounts for politics as distinct from sub-political entities such as the family or tribe. The polis is a common partnership, constituted by leadership roles, by a given understanding of justice, and by the human virtues required to support it. I will try to show that, in fundamental respects, that basic account accords with the poem.123

I understand Homer’s history to form an enquiry into what constitutes the human condition, with political questions arising at the center of that enquiry. As I noted with those scholars who have taken an historical approach to the poem, I believe that by looking at the

122 Raaflaub 1988: 5.

123 For a discussion (albeit somewhat polemical) of how the Aristotelian account of politics differs that from Hannah Arendt’s (1958) famous twentieth-century work, see Faulkner 2007: 210-18.
history of the war, beginning with Helen’s removal to Troy and ending with Achilles reflections in book 9, we can take note of other important details, and thus go more deeply into political issues than those who have written about the poem’s political philosophical themes have yet appreciated. Among other questions, we can ask about the precise meaning of political community and justice in the context of the Achaean alliance; or how questions about the relationship between the different spheres of human experience, such as the public and the private, intersect with questions about the justness of the war between the Achaeans and Trojans. My inquiry into these topics, I believe, will help us to see an even more unified *Iliad*. Like others who have written on the *Iliad*, with the following account of politics in the *Iliad* I will attempt to bring out the tensions inherent in political life that arise from different characters who have had different experiences of the human situation. Indeed, the history of the Trojan War, I will try to show, brings to sight how political community is itself defined by the various tensions that constitute it, and thus how reflection on those tensions is itself a highly worthwhile and humanizing endeavor.

1.3 Plan of the Dissertation

The plan of the dissertation is as follows. In chapter 2 I will discuss how, during the Trojan War, the *Iliad* accounts for the recent emergence and solidification of the Olympian order. In turn, Homer clarifies the decisive differences between the Olympian gods and mortals, and shows that these mark decisive limits on human existence. The Olympians have just ascended at the time the *Iliad* takes place. That means that they have not fully learned to give up a practice they acquired before their ascendance: that of intervening in human affairs, to the point where they become enemies to each other. The poem shows how they fully learn that they are immortal and that human beings are merely mortal.
With his depiction of this new epoch Homer also makes clear that the superhuman feats that previous heroes, such as Heracles, were understood by the tradition to have accomplished, are impossible. Thus where Heracles was understood to have gained immortality for his labors, the most Heraklean of the *Iliad*’s heroes, Achilles – who attempts to transcend the Achaean community - realizes that no one could ever attain that status. On the other hand, human experience can be dignified in a way that the Olympians can never realize. It is because human beings are limited or vulnerable that their experience can have meaning. The difference between the gods and mortals allows for such human involvements as love and friendship, and engagement in the virtues of politics.

Homer’s history of the war presents a number of alternative views of conduct - of individual characters, and the given communities to which they belong - where each influences the other. The two main alternatives depicted in the world of human beings, I will argue, are situated in the public sphere of existence – which includes the political – and the private sphere of existence. It must straightaway be added, however, that each of these spheres is complicated, and that there are also complex interconnections between them. Nonetheless, the perspective gained by the reflective political actor provides for the most comprehensive account of the human situation, in Homer’s presentation.

Turning from the “upper limits” that the Olympians put upon human existence and the attempt to surpass communal relations, in chapter 3 I discuss how Homer’s history of the Trojan War, in its origins and in the present action of the poem, reflects on the private or “sub-political” realm. The first cause of the hostilities between the Achaeans and Trojans was Paris’s taking Helen and a number of possessions from Sparta to Troy. The duel between Paris and Helen’s

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124 On Herakles’ labors and their connection to his apotheosis, see Nagy 2005.
husband, Menelaus, in book 3, brings out matters of justice and injustice that pertain to that transgression and, therewith, to the private realm of human experience. In keeping with the neo-analytic account of the *Iliad*, the duel appears as a “flashback” to the original event and Menelaus’s reaction to it, and is based on the conceit that the outcome of the war between the two alliances could be settled by the two parties to a private conflict. The duel quickly ends, however, when Paris is whisked away from the goddess of private pleasures, Aphrodite.

The chapter then looks into how in Troy Homer presents a city whose conduct is determined by the private wishes or desires of the ruling family, headed by Priam, who has spent much of his time siring children with his fifty wives. We see the focus on the private realm in Troy in the events prior to when the Achaeans mustered their expeditionary force, as well as during the hostilities, where the Trojans do not force Paris to return Helen and the possessions he took from Menelaus in Sparta, thus prolonging the war and leading Troy toward eventual destruction. Given what we learn about the gods from the *Iliad*, which we shall continue to discuss, we see that the Trojans are determined by private desires – or, put another way, that they are overly attached to Aphrodite, as they fail to separate themselves from her.

Troy’s reluctance in entering into the hostilities of the war led them to two practices: paying ransom in order to save those whom the Achaeans have captured; and dependence on allies in order to be somewhat effective at waging war. The historical build-up to the war meant that, to defend themselves from the Achaeans – not least because the Trojans, insulated in their private concerns, wanted to avoid returning Helen, but also to avoid war - they needed allies. Sarpedon the Lycian king is the greatest of these. Nonetheless, the community Sarpedon stands before comprises the other Lycian fighters rather than the Trojan alliance as a whole. Though his exertions as a warrior, and his willingness to risk his life, are noble, these are not made to serve of a larger alliance-community - to say nothing of a just cause.
The chapter will close with a discussion of Hector, the great exception among the leading Trojans in that he is not averse to war. Hector is impelled by the desire for honor, and by shame, to be the Trojans’ strategist and most courageous fighter. Even more than Sarpedon, however - in defending Troy rather than persuading the Trojans to return Helen - Hector cannot claim to act on behalf of a just cause. Further, the Trojans’ refusal to do what justice demands, by returning Helen - a refusal that is in keeping with the leading Trojans’ insular, private preoccupations - leaves the city with little to rally around. The Trojans’ regime does little to foster the sense of honor. Although Hector’s ambitions are thus unsupported by his city – and his ambitions would need civic support in order for him to pursue them - he nonetheless remains impelled by them. Thus Hector tries not only to try and defend Troy all by himself, as it were, but in so doing to commit the strategic and tactical errors that end in the city’s destruction as well as his own demise. Furthermore, the famous scene portraying Hector and his family shows the price that they and the city pay for his errors. Sarpedon and Hector, in their various relations with the Trojan alliance, thus elicit fundamental questions about the individual and community. What constitutes the common realm? How does one’s regime foster or limit virtuous action? How do the virtues of justice, courage, honor, and prudence correspond to each other?

Chapter 4 focuses on the *Iliad*’s presentation of the Achaean alliance. It begins with a discussion of the poem’s presentation of a “heroic code” or “warrior ethic” which, by contrast to the private desires that hold sway in Troy, is a public-minded ethic. On the Trojan side we again discuss Sarpedon, who during one of the battles of the *Iliad* describes how that ethic originates in the warrior’s defense of his community. His exertions are the more virtuous and noble given that he recognizes that he is not one of the immortals, that he exposes himself to death in battle. And for his exertions he gains its honors in the forms of prestige and material goods.
The chapter then turns to the Achaean alliance, which brings out larger manifestations of the warrior ethic. As with the Trojans, for the Achaeans the war would not be merely a private conflict between the Spartan king and Trojan prince. Among the Achaean leaders there is a similar understanding to that articulated by Sarpedon. By contrast, however, the history of the Achaeans’ involvement in the war begins with – to be more precise, it depends on - the impulse to correct the Trojans’ violation of justice by taking, and then not relinquishing, Helen and the possessions. Agamemnon, being more forceful than Menelaus, his brother, and as leader of the largest army among the Achaean allies, takes the leading role among the allies. Yet because they undertake the venture to secure justice, I will argue, a possibility for common action – and, with virtuous deeds, for gaining honor - amongst all of the Achaean allies exists for them as it does not either in Troy or amongst Sarpedon’s Lycians. As a result, the problems that obtain in the Trojan alliance – as to the relation between the individual and community, and what constitutes virtuous action – seem to have been much less evident among the Achaeans, particularly when they set out on the expedition to return Helen and the possessions, and to punish Troy.

The chapter next enquires into how, by the time of the present action of the poem - after the ten years’ history of the war that has elapsed since they arrived near Troy - two opposite alternatives emerge amongst the Achaeans, in the respective roles taken by Agamemnon and Achilles. That is, the Achaeans have witnessed a devolution of their common cause, on account of Agamemnon’s actions, and, through Achilles, a deepened and more unified vision of it. As to Agamemnon, with the forcefulness of his character, he has used the community in order to rule it for his own ends. Because by the time of the present action of the poem their original leader denies the existence of community among them, the Achaean alliance may be compared with Troy. Agamemnon is, moreover, a brutal leader, such as one cannot imagine among the Trojans or their allies. And this is clearest in his treatment of women: from comparing his wife
unfavorably with Chryseis, to - what are perhaps the most brutal lines in this poem about the brutality of war - where Agamemnon instructs his brother to kill even the Trojan infants nourished in their mothers’ wombs.

During their conflict that commences in book 1 and spans into book 19 of the poem, Achilles calls attention to the self-serving, greedy and brutal character of Agamemnon’s rule. In doing so he invokes the Achaean allies’ original undertaking, and charges Agamemnon with violating their common spirit. What is more – after Agamemnon takes Achilles’ own war prize, Briseis – Achilles charges him with violating a new understanding of the Achaean alliance that has emerged during the ten years near Troy. That is, over that time warriors have excelled in speech and deed, in keeping the Achaean community safe, and in fights against the cities surrounding Troy. Upon returning from battle their fellow warriors have honored them with their voluntary acclaim and the prizes of war. Achilles thus accounts for politics amongst the Achaeans: that is, he describes a common, public sphere of relations; one bound by an understanding of justice, which determines the institutional arrangement of the community and the decisions it takes; and a community that depends on the virtues of its members, whom in turn it honors. During the war’s ten years Achilles has been the “best of the Achaeans.” As he articulates matters, moreover, the political community that the Achaeans have achieved properly balances the virtues and honors needed to sustain and further its ends. Accordingly, on the Achaean side the history of the Trojan War would mark a rise from the private conflict between Menelaus and Paris, to the Achaeans’ public alliance, to the more fully political community that Achilles invokes and on whose behalf he exerts himself.

We are then led to a discussion of how, based on what we learn about Achilles’ history and his experience in the present action of the poem, that Achilles’ vision of the political
community serves as the basis for his own ends, which point beyond those of the community. At the same time, this becomes clear to Achilles only in the midst of his disappointment in his attempts to attain those ends. In short, in books 1 through 9 we see that Achilles wishes to earn glory from his fellow warriors in gratitude for his willingness to risk his life in battle and his accomplishments in speeches and in deeds. Further, Achilles wishes to earn an undying glory as compensation for those same accomplishments. Indeed, even the gods themselves – beginning with his mother, who plays a crucial role in the cosmic history of the Olympians’ ascendency - will honor him with undying glory. Nevertheless, as has been made clear to the reader in the books between 1 and 9, the Olympians now give proof of human mortality. Achilles’ hope proves unfulfilled. His recognition arrives in book 9: he reflects on how Agamemnon has violated the political community to which Achilles thought he had belonged. As he reflects on how Agamemnon has dishonored, Achilles comes to view that community, and his own wish for glory, as empty. He realizes that virtue - which is somehow higher, nobler, and purer – could depend for its honor not only on those who do not themselves practice virtue, but also on those who are base. As he recognizes this fundamental problem, moreover, Achilles sees that - because honors and glory are so unstable, and because virtues cannot adequately and appropriately be rewarded - they cannot compensate for death. Therewith Achilles suffers the loss of his hope that he would achieve undying glory, referring now instead to an anonymous death that would mark him as no different from those lacking in virtue, or mere cowards.

It is on account of Achilles’ experience as a member of a political community that he is able to gain these insights into the emptiness of honor. Yet Homer invites his readers to consider other elements of the human situation, and of other elements that constitute political community that Achilles has been unable to consider. Between the start of Achilles and Agamemnon’s conflict and book 9, and at other points throughout the poem, Homer calls attention to the regular
soldiers, on both sides of the war, whose wish is to return home. Likewise, Homer’s various images of women in those books and throughout the poem – of soldiers’ mothers, of wives, or the poignant scene between Hector and Andromache in book 6 - call attention to the domestic sphere of human existence. In his quest for glory Achilles has not been concerned with the lives of such men and women. Yet he himself comes to a recognition that the inability to overcome death through glory, and so the recognition of death, may open him to meaningful private attachment during the span of his existence. In light of his reflections Achilles states that he feels love toward the woman over whom the conflict began when Agamemnon took her from him; thus he intuits a transfiguration of Briseis, from a token of his honor to the “bride of [his] heart.” He also counsels the Achaeans to sail back to their homelands.

Thus these comparisons between the characters and events Homer treats between books 1 and 9 show how the Iliad marks a full circle of symbolic relations: the original cause of the war – that Helen and Paris absconded to Troy, their thoughtless violation of domestic union – is transfigured into an insight about the depth of domestic love, experienced by the man who has been the greatest warrior, and political figure, of the Achaean alliance, and in a way that would be foreign to lesser men such as Paris or Agamemnon. What is brought out by these reflections on the importance of the domestic bond, together with Achilles’ argument for an end to the war, is the alternative of peace to war. And so in these books of the Iliad Homer presents the basis for a new understanding of justice and the virtues, or of political community - where war is of lesser worth than peace, though where peacetime would depend for its meaning on lessons such as Achilles has learned.
2 The Immortals, Mortal Limits and Alternatives

2.1 Establishing the Olympian Order: The Immortals Realize that they are Immortal

An epochal change in the cosmos has taken place around the time depicted in the *Iliad*. In consequence, the gods are in their attributes closer to human beings than their Titanic predecessors. At the same time, the Olympian gods of the *Iliad* clarify the most important limit on human beings, their mortality. Each has a predominant trait that is an archetype of a corresponding trait of the human personality, or vice-versa. Nonetheless, each god’s or goddess’s character is one-sided, his or her characteristic trait is exaggerated beyond what one normally finds in the human personality. Yet the Olympians can afford to be one-sided, whereas human beings cannot. What explains this – the crucial difference between them – is that human beings are weighed down by mortal bodies; whereas mortals must die, the Olympian gods do not die. Later in the chapter we shall discuss how, although the Olympians enjoy certain decisive advantages over human beings, they are also less than human. We can begin to think about these matters by taking note of some of the events of book 5.

There we see that the goddess Aphrodite retains her one-sided character of beauty, sensuality, femininity and softness - very unwarlike - even in the midst of war. She and several other immortals enter into a battle between the Trojans and Achaeans as partisans of one side or another, and after Aphrodite enters in order to save her favorite, the Trojan Warrior, Aeneas, the Achaean, Diomedes, strikes her hand with his spear (5.336-38). Whereas the *Iliad* is replete with human death – where “perhaps the most important shared feature of the numerous scenes of

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killing and dying is that the combats are generally decided quickly, by one fatal blow” – the immortal Olympian gods of the *Iliad* can only ever be wounded, never killed. Thus, although she is pained by her wound, Aphrodite can be whisked on her chariot back to Mount Olympus (5.363-67).

Also on Olympus are Hera and Athene, who are partisans of the Achaeans, and, unlike Aphrodite, masculine, warlike, sometimes even ferocious. They mock Aphrodite, asking whether she cries from having laid her tender hand on some beautiful Achaean woman and pricking it on the golden pin that held her dress in place. As their mockery suggests, she does not belong in war, and this her father, Zeus, immediately affirms (5.428-30). She instead retains her character as the soft, sensual goddess, untainted by her foray onto the battlefield. Her mother, Dione, wipes away the *ichor* from her hand – just as she, like the other gods, does not eat food but “ambrosia,” Aphrodite bleeds not blood but this divine substance – and she is completely mended, no longer feeling even so much as she would a pinprick (5.334-42, 5.416-25). Aphrodite can remain Aphrodite despite her foray into the war, because she is immortal. She can step out of the war because she is not constrained to fight or suffer from it. The contrast with Helen is instructive (as we shall discuss in the next chapter), as Helen wishes she had not been born rather than having left with Paris to Troy, under the influence of Aphrodite. Helen must suffer the consequences of associating too closely with the goddess. And so, of course,

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126 Schein 1984: 76 and n. 21, 77.

127 Being essentially bodiless, the Olympians can do so much more than mortals can. For example, when Zeus is bored with being a spectator to the mortal combat of the war, he can move to places far off from the Trojan plain just as quickly as he thinks about doing so (13.1-9). All Zeus needs only to nod in order to complete an action he decides on (cf., e.g., 1.528-30).
must all of the other human beings who have been caught in the violence in this war that originated in her departure from Sparta, any of whom could at any moment be sent to Hades.

Homer does present an alternative mode of relations between the gods and human beings, where the boundaries between them are somewhat porous. This has been the mode of relations between the gods and at least some human beings in the generations prior to the Trojan War. The *Iliad* contains a number of genealogical accounts, mostly boasted by the warriors themselves, that within several or even one generation lead back to divine origins. In the Trojan alliance, for instance, Aeneas is son to the mortal Anchises – whose lineage goes back to Zeus – but he is also son to Aphrodite, who chose Anchises as her husband (20.213-40, 5.247-48). Sarpedon is son to a mortal woman but also to Zeus himself (5.682). Among the Achaeans, for instance, Achilles is son to a mortal father, Peleus, whose ancestry goes back to Zeus, and to the Nereid or sea-goddess, Thetis (21.188-89). In an exchange with Hera in book 14, Zeus lists a number of other human beings (as well as goddesses) with whom he has enjoyed sexual congress (14.313-28).

Another kind of closeness between human beings and gods is in the gods’ various interventions to help certain individuals or one side over the other in the war. At the start of the poem, Apollo supports his priest, Chryses, after the Achaeans refuse to return his daughter, Chryseis, whom they had captured from one of the cities that they conquered near Troy (1.35-53). Aphrodite whisks Paris away from a duel he is about to lose to Menelaus (see chapter three), and we have noted her intervention to save Aeneas. Similarly, Athene supports Diomedes – even to the point of instructing him that he is free to attack immortals on the battlefield – which is what causes Aphrodite’s injury in book 5 (5.1-8, 5.131-32).

There is a closeness between human beings and gods, but of another sort, in the enmity of the latter toward the former. Apollo’s enmity toward the Achaeans seems to have begun with the
denial of his priest Chryses’ plea to them at the start of the poem. Poseidon’s toward the Trojans began long ago. He built a wall for their former king, Laomedon, who did not pay him and treated him most harshly (21.441-57). That of Hera and Athene toward the Trojans began long before the contemporary action of the poem, even before the twenty years that have elapsed since Paris and Helen left Sparta for Troy (24.27-30; 24.765-66). It began at a contest to which Homer alludes at the end of the *Iliad*: it took place in Paris’s courtyard, between Hera, Athene, and Aphrodite, and Paris chose the goddess of beauty. Hera and Athene’s enmity is particularly inflexible (24.28-29). Of Hera’s wish for all of Troy’s destruction, Zeus states to her that if she “could eat [all of the Trojans] raw,…then, and only then, might [she] glut [her] anger” (4.34-36). So implacable is Hera’s hatred of Troy that she would readily be willing to see one of her own three favorite cities – Argos, Sparta, and Mykenos, all of which are major Achaean cities fighting against Troy – destroyed, should Zeus agree to allow for Troy’s destruction (4.50-64; cf. 18.362-67).

The *Iliad* shows, however, that when the gods are involved in the affairs of mortals, they themselves might well be harmed. In book 5, when the wounded Aphrodite returns to Olympus, she is attended to by her mother, Dione, who asks her who of the “gods” has done such things to her (5.373-74). Although Aphrodite replies that Diomedes struck her, Dione’s question still stands, given Athene’s direction and support of Diomedes (5.121-32). She continues to encourage Diomedes – as mentioned, even to fight any immortal – whereupon Athene escorts him in a chariot and makes way for him to cast his spear at Ares, the god of war, which she then drives further into Ares’ belly (5.825-62). Dione, in her exchange with Aphrodite, suggests the way things have been during the epoch before the Olympians established their rule. Her

references are vague, but she alludes to cases where mortals have injured gods, in particular, at times when the gods also inflicted injuries on each other. Dione refers twice to the great hero, Heracles, who caused injury once to Hera, and another time to Hades. She refers as well as to the binding of Ares by the two giants, Ephialtes and Otus (5.381-404).

The danger that these events pose for the gods cannot be overstated. As Slatkin writes of the act of binding,

> [it] is the ultimate penalty in the divine realm, where by definition there is no death. It serves not to deprive an opponent of existence, but to render him impotent. Once bound, a god cannot escape his bondage by himself, no matter how great his strength.”

Dione’s references are also on point in the situation that Ares faces in book 5. After being hit by Diomedes’ and Athene’s spear-cast, Ares says that if his swift feet had not taken him away, he “should long be lying there in pain among the stark dead men, or go living without strength” on account of his wound (5.5885-87). Ares thus complains to his father, Zeus: “We who are gods forever have to endure the most horrible hurts, by each other’s hatred, as we try to give favor to mortals” (5.873-74). To which Zeus replies by chastising the war god for his continuous quarrelsomeness, and by stating that he recognizes that the anger of Ares’ mother, Hera, has caused this incident and other such harm and disorder among the Olympians (5.588-94; cf. 8.406-08). Indeed, as Dione’s references to the Giants’ binding of Ares would suggest – as that event may have been part of, or at least it reminds of, the Titanomachia, through which the Olympians became ascendant – the events of book 5 threaten to break out and destroy the Olympian order.

At various points we see that Zeus, the chief god, is very concerned to avoid enmity, to preserve or foster comity, among the Olympians (for examples: 1.517-23, 4.37-38). However, we note again the goddesses’ intransigence, where Zeus seems to marvel at Hera’s willingness to be so involved in human affairs as to wish to eat the Trojans raw. Zeus will therefore have to resort to force if need be. Not long after the events of book 5, Zeus decides to bring an end to the danger of a full-scale return to the previous epoch. In particular, he threatens to do to the Olympians - as we know from Hesiod’s *Theogony*, together with vague references in the *Iliad* - what he had done to the pre-Olympian gods during the Titanomachy, through which he and the Olympians came to rule over the cosmos. If any of the Olympians enter into the battle between the Achaeans and Trojans without permission, then he will either whip all the way back to Olympus or dash down to the uttermost depth of Tartaros, “as far beneath the house of Hades as from the earth the sky lies” (8.1-27). That, as he states later (in one of the vague allusions to the Titanomachy; and as we learn in detail from Hesiod) is where the previous cosmic rulers, the Titans Iapetos and Kronos [are] seated, where they enjoy no “shining of the sun…but Tartaros stands deeply about them” (8.478-81). Zeus can issue this ban and make these threats because he is, as he says, by far “the strongest of the immortals” (8.17).130

In defiance of Hera, Zeus also announces that he will let the Trojans, led by their strongest warrior, Hector, prevail over the Achaeans until Achilles fights him, after the latter will be roused by the death of his comrade, Patroclus (8.470-76). As events proceed there are some challenges to Zeus’s ban – such that Zeus “seems less like an absolute tyrant than an embattled

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130 See 8.19-29, which Willcock (1995: 121) discusses; and see 2.781-83.
“administrator” - but he holds the Olympians to it.\textsuperscript{131} To glance ahead at books 20 and 21, there Zeus does release the Olympians from his ban, but there, crucially, the Olympians also retain their solidarity. As Schein discusses, the language Homer uses to introduce this battle strongly resembles that used by Hesiod to describe the Titanomachic battle between Zeus and Typhoeus, the outcome of which enables Zeus to establish the Olympian order or to be the prime ruler of the universe.\textsuperscript{132} However, a comparison between the two passages clarifies how in the divine battle in the \textit{Iliad} there is decisively less at stake than was the case in the Titanomachy. (In this sense, the battle of book 20 does not contravene the spirit of Zeus’s order in book 8.) Of course, the contrast is stronger when this divine battle and those between the mortal combatants are considered.\textsuperscript{133}

By the time that battle between the gods commences in book 20, Achilles has killed many Trojan Warriors – spurred on by his anger toward Hector for his having killed Patroclus - and is on the verge of entering the gates of Troy and vanquishing the city. Yet this is not fated to be. Zeus allows the gods to help their respective favorites on the battlefield, but only to the end of stalling Achilles’ advance. While they engage in the battle on the different sides, moreover, the gods and goddesses keep themselves from allowing their partisanship to turn them violently against themselves. Apollo will admit to Athene that Troy’s destruction will take place (7.30-32). Poseidon, although he, like Hera and Athens, is a partisan of the Achaeans, has to rein in

\textsuperscript{131} The quotation is from Redfield 1994: 227. On the prevailing power of Zeus in book 8, see especially, 8.428-30; and, more generally, Willcock 1995.

\textsuperscript{132} \textit{Theogony} 847-52; Schein 1984: 50-51; Griffin 1980: 185; Lang 1983.

\textsuperscript{133} Schein 1984: 50-51; Griffin 1980: 185.
the goddesses’ ferocity (20.115-143; cf. 8.198-207). When Apollo and Poseidon meet – although Apollo is aligned with Troy - he avoids battling with Poseidon, with these words:

Shaker of the earth, you would have me be as one without prudence if I am to fight even you for the sake of insignificant mortals, who are as leaves, and now flourish and grown warm with life, and feed on what the ground gives, but then again fade away and are dead. Therefore let us with all speed give up this quarrel and let the mortals fight their own battles. (21.461-67)

The Olympian order is preserved according to this logic of separation between the immortal Olympians and the mortal warriors.

Our understanding of the logic of separation between gods and mortals, as far as mortals are concerned, can go still farther if we reflect that the main or primary “situation” of the poem is the story of the Judgment of Paris and its aftermath.\(^\text{134}\) It led to Aphrodite’s “[supplying] the lust that led to the disaster” (24.30) of Helen’s flight from Sparta, as well as the enmity of Hera and Athene, the ensuing the Trojan War, and the eventual destruction of Troy. As we noted in the previous chapter, the poem does not contradict the main events of the traditional myth, and makes many allusions to their having come to pass. Homer announces in the proem, however, that the \textit{Iliad}’s main topics are the rage of Achilles and the will of Zeus (1.1-7). Thus, as we have seen, Zeus thwarts the goddesses spurned by Paris from initiating serious contentions between the Olympians on behalf of their mortal favorites. Although he does not counteract the events that are fated to happen during the Trojan War, Zeus preserves the Olympian order, in particular, by upholding the decisive separation between the immortals and mortals. Having noted how Zeus’s decisions in book 8 – to bar the Olympians from entering the battlefield, and to aid the Trojans until Hector kills Patroclus – mark a turning point in his efforts to thwart Hera’s

\(^\text{134}\) Reinhardt 1997.
intransigent engagement in the war, we can discuss how that decision fits into Zeus’s overall plan.

Near the beginning of the *Iliad*, Zeus deliberates and decides on a matter that will determine all of his other decisions in the poem (1.511-30). He says that his decision will put him into conflict with Hera, which would make it “a disastrous matter” (1.518). Upon hearing of his decision, Hephaestus says to Hera that “[t]his will be a disastrous matter and not endurable if you two are to quarrel thus for the sake of mortals and bring brawling among the gods” (1.573-75). Ultimately, however, Zeus’s decision will have just the opposite effect. Zeus renders the decision after he has been supplicated by the sea-goddess, Thetis, to do favor or to honor her son, Achilles. The Achaeans have dishonored Achilles and he in turn pleaded with Thetis to supplicate Zeus to punish the Achaeans by favoring the Trojans in the war. He should continue to favor the Trojans until such time as the Achaeans would repent of their having dishonored Achilles, and redress their unjust act, whilst pleading with him to save them (1.495-510).

The relationship between Thetis and Zeus is highly significant for understanding the political thought of the *Iliad*. When Achilles pleads with his mother, he refers to her role in saving Zeus himself from other Olympians – Hera, Poseidon, and Athene – at that time when they sought to bind him. Thetis set Zeus free and then called on Briareos, “the creature of the hundred hands,” to scare off the other Olympians, who consequently gave up on trying to keep Zeus bound (1.396-406). The allusion is vague, much as Dione refers to how the gods have fought each other on behalf of their human favorites, or to the actions of the Giants, Ephialtes


136 For the discussion in this and the next several paragraphs, see Slatkin 2011a.
and Otus. At the same time, the allusion is an important clue that helps us to discover Thetis’s role in the poem and in understanding her significance. Achilles’ reference makes clear that Zeus had not yet sufficiently demonstrated to the other Olympians that he far exceeded them in strength. Given also the involvement of the Giant Briareos, who plays a prominent role in Hesiod’s account of the Titanomachy, the events that Achilles describes would seem to have taken place during the Titanomachy – or, what could amount to the same - to the highly unstable epoch during which Kronos was overthrown, prior to the establishment of the Olympian order over which Zeus now presides. Although not an Olympian herself, Thetis kept the Olympians from entering into a continuation of the state of affairs that occurred during the Titanomachy. She acted as the “rescuer of the divine regime,” a cosmic power who was able to order the very universe and render it stable. Elsewhere in the Iliad she is likewise described as having rescued Dionysos (6.135-37) and Hephaistos (18.394-405).

The poetic phrase that Achilles uses to describe Thetis’s rescue of Zeus is that she was able to “ward off destruction” (loigos amunai, 1.398). Thetis shares with three other characters in the Iliad – the Olympians Zeus and Apollo, and her son, Achilles – this power to ward off destruction. But there is an important difference between her and them in this connection. Zeus, Apollo, and Achilles also experience mēnis – numinous wrath – and demonstrate the ability to cause vast destruction, whereas Thetis does not. Thetis also shares with Achilles the

137 Theogony 644-60; Slatkin 2011a: 59-61.

138 Slatkin 2011a: 73. Slatkin has demonstrated that traditional mythology about Thetis accounted for her ability to order the very universe and render it stable (52-71).

139 See Slatkin 2011a: 73.
experience of *achos* – pain, grief, or distress. Yet whereas Achilles’ grief initiates his god-like destructive anger (*mēnis*), and this eventually results in the deaths of many Achaeans and Trojans, Thetis remains afflicted by grief alone.

That is more noteworthy given that an element of the mythology about Thetis outside the epics of Homer is her potential to cause disorder on a cosmic scale. As Slatkin has shown by gathering and analyzing evidence from a number of sources, the traditional mythological account of Thetis was that she was for a time desired by both Zeus and Poseidon, each of whom, together with Hades, ruled (and rules) over one of three main parts of the cosmos. She, however, would have given birth to a son who would become “stronger than his father.”

Such unparalleled strength as her son would wield would correspond to Thetis’s role as cosmic protectress. Further, given that Zeus or Poseidon would have been his father, the birth of Thetis’ son would have meant a return to the same divine warfare that took place during the Titanomachy, where the entire cosmos would have been overturned. In book 18 of the *Iliad*, moreover, after Achilles learns of Patroclus’ death and his own mortality becomes clear to him, Homer describes Thetis in terms that refer to an implicit threat of anger – she dons a black cloak, the image which is elsewhere associated with Demeter’s anger (*mēnis*) at Hades’ abduction of Persephone, and her threat to cause widespread devastation - such that the pattern of grief (*achos*) and anger (*mēnis*) would also have been evident in her case.

Yet no cosmic destruction, such as the myth of Thetis’ son who would grow “stronger than his father” foretold, is allowed to occur. In Pindar’s later telling of that myth, Themis, the

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141 *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*; Slatkin 2011a: 74-78.
guardian of order, warns Zeus and all of his brothers against marrying Thetis, instructing the
gods to marry her to a mortal instead, and, eventually, to see her son die in war.\textsuperscript{142} In book 18
Thetis speaks of that decisive event where the Olympians forced her to marry the mortal, Peleus,
and of her inability to help save her son from death in war (18.429-43). Now, instead of giving
birth to a son stronger than Zeus or Poseidon, it is Briareos whom Homer’s Achilles has
described as “stronger than his father,” that is, the Giant who sits beside Zeus to mark the end of
the cosmic struggle and his ultimate power as the chief Olympian (1.403-04).

Thus, in order for the Olympians to ascend to the summit of power, Thetis had to be
subordinated. The forced marriage to Peleus marked her subordination to the gods on Olympos.
In this she was unlike the Olympian, Aphrodite, who voluntarily chose to wed Anchises (2.819-
21). Thus, in book 1, Thetis must supplicate Zeus to assent to Achilles’ plea, and can only feel
grief when the imminence of this death becomes clear (18.429-43). Likewise, the depth of her
grief – which is depicted in 18, especially, but also in most of her other appearances - may be
contrasted with the pain that the Olympians Aphrodite and Apollo suffer after the skirmishes
with Diomedes and Athene, in book 5, which, as we saw, is temporary and reversible.

The subordination of Thetis serves the plan of Zeus as it unfolds throughout the \textit{Iliad}.
Zeus does grant to Thetis her plea to honor Achilles, and he may do so to repay her for saving
him from being bound by Hera, Athene, and Poseidon. By granting her supplication and
Achilles’ honor, however, Zeus only serves to clarify that he stands as the leader of the
Olympians, at the summit of cosmic power. For at the end of book 1, in deliberating on Thetis’
plea, wherein he surveys the actions and events to follow throughout the poem, the mind of Zeus
grasps what Thetis – and, even much more deeply, Achilles – must suffer. Zeus thus clarifies

\textsuperscript{142} Pindar \textit{Isthmian} 8: 35-38.
that Thetis has not given birth to a son stronger than a god. On the contrary, the plan of Zeus, or the plot of the *Iliad*, follows the course of Achilles’ rage, the hopes that lie behind it – which, as we shall discuss, include his hope to gain immortality for himself – and the dashing of those hopes. Zeus sees that Achilles’ anger will be transfigured after Patroclus is killed, but also that Patroclus’s death will signify Achilles’ own death (1.1-7, 1.511-30, 8.470-77, 18.15-116).

Zeus’s lesson - that the essential boundary between the gods and mortals is, or will have to become, completely impervious – becomes clear in the fate of Achilles.

Nonetheless, the main challenge to the Olympian order that is presented in the *Iliad*, we have seen, is posed by the Olympian gods and goddesses themselves. As partisans of the Achaean or Trojan alliances, the Olympians, in book 5, intervene to encourage attacks on other Olympians – to the point that Athene, rather than the mortal, Diomedes, is responsible for Aphrodite’s wound, as Dione states – or to attack other gods themselves, as Athene does to Ares. As noted, before Thetis rescued him it was Hera, Athene, and Poseidon who bound Zeus and attempted to keep him bound. We have suggested that the additional reference to Briareos, given his prominence in Hesiod’s account of the Titanomachy, also suggests that a return to the anarchic strife of that time could occur if the Olympians turn against each other. Further, it is noteworthy that the three Olympians who bound Zeus are also the main partisans of the Achaean in the Trojan War, and that that discord between Zeus and Hera persists into the time of the war (24.25-30) The repetition of their appearances in those two events serves to emphasize a similar problem in that both times it is they who seriously threaten the Olympian
order; and in the second instance, again, Zeus as much as states this outright when he threatens to banish them to Tartaros, where the Titans have been forced to wallow.\textsuperscript{143}

Before Zeus puts a stop to it, after all, the Olympians’ behavior is contradictory. It begins in the goddesses’ punishment of human beings for failing to honor them (i.e., the Judgment of Paris and its consequences). That punishment then leads to a war in which the goddesses intervene in support of the Achaeans, and other Olympians intervene in support of the Trojans, where the Olympians are led to harm each other. What begins as a punishment of the human presumption to judge the gods ends up as enmity between gods who are, in effect, acting on behalf of mortals. It is clear, for example, from Hera’s promise never to try and stop Zeus, should he choose to, from destroying the three most prominent Achaean cities, that it is not the gods’ ultimate intention to support human beings. It is in following their prerogatives as gods - vis-à-vis human beings, in their anger or in support of them, who stand on one or the other of the opposing sides in their own mortal conflict - that the Olympians are led to become, in effect, enemies to each other.

By honoring Achilles after Thetis supplicates him, Zeus orchestrates it so that Achilles’ mortality becomes the focus of the Trojan War. To do this, he must subordinate Hera and Athene’s wrath to his own will. Precisely by subordinating the goddesses’ wrath, then, Zeus puts into focus the true division between mortals and gods – again, the division that the goddesses’

\textsuperscript{143} As we have seen, Slatkin’s important research shows that the reference to binding and Thetis’ intervention suggests the parallel to the Titanomachy. It is important to emphasize, however, that the Olympians, not the Titans, presented the threat to the cosmic order in that event. Hence I disagree with Schein (1984: 50) that the disorder among the Olympians alluded to at certain points in the poem is simply a “thing of the past,” or that the events we have been looking at in book 5 might not be real threats to cosmic order.
initial anger presupposes, but that has gotten obscured as the war has ensued – as he also stops
the Olympians’ contradictory behavior in the war. With this in mind, we should modify a
common argument about the *Iliad* in relation to the mythological tradition, that Homer’s poem
must wend its way around the pattern set by the events that ensued from the Judgment of Paris
until Odysseus’s return to Ithaca. For we have seen that Homer shows how the goddesses’
reaction to Paris’s choice could well have led to cosmic anarchy, whereas the will of Zeus is to
uphold decisively the principle of Olympian supremacy, which after all is what has allowed the
goddesses to react in the way that they have. By suggesting through various allusions that the
Olympians’ actions in the Trojan War would portend the same cosmic anarchy as had occurred
during the Titanomachy, Homer emphasizes how crucial it is for the Olympians to follow that
principle above all else.

So, the plan and will of Zeus will not be subject to the vulnerabilities or existential
dangers that follow from Hera and Athene’s intransigent will to destroy the Trojans. Moreover,
whereas previous quarrels between Zeus and Hera may have been disastrous, as Zeus at first
fears and as Hephaestus’ initial reaction to his decision suggests (1.511-21, 1.571-75), this time
Zeus’s disagreement effectively preserves Hera as well as himself and the other Olympians. In
keeping with this new order, the *Iliad* shows how real closeness between mortals and the gods
are no longer to take place. Couplings between gods and human beings no longer occur by the
time of the Trojan War. As Alvis observes, “Zeus contrives no new erotic adventures in the
course of the action of the *Iliad*…nor does Homer foretell any future escapades with goddesses

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144 See Dowden 1996; Graziosi and Haubold 2005.
or mortal women."\textsuperscript{145} In this context the exchange between Hera and Zeus in book 14, where the latter lists those he has slept with, should be seen as a humorous exchange for its tactlessness, especially since he ends up telling Hera that he desires her more than any of his previous paramours (14.313-28).\textsuperscript{146}

At the end of the first book Hera is angered that Zeus will grant Thetis’s supplication that he honor Achilles by aiding the Trojans, to punish the Achaeans. Nevertheless, in the end Zeus’s decision will only make life easier for the Olympians because it will lead to Achilles’ death and prove that the marriage they had arranged for Thetis and Peleus had been good for the gods. The first book, which marks the beginning of Achilles’ story, and his suffering, concludes with the gods feasting on Olympus. Hephaestus pours drinks for the gods, dipping up from the mixing bowl the sweet nectar. But among the blessed immortals uncontrollable laughter went up as they saw Hephaestus bustling about the palace. Thus thereafter the whole day long until the sun went under they feasted, nor was anyone's hunger denied a fair portion, nor denied the beautifully wrought lyre in the hands of Apollo nor the antiphonal sweet sound of the Muses singing (1.598-604).

The contrast with Achilles’ situation is further brought out in the image of Zeus and Hera going to bed. Whereas Achilles’ war-prize, Briseis, has been taken from him by Agamemnon, Homer tells how

\begin{quote}
Zeus the Olympian and lord of the lightning went to his own bed, where always he lay when sweet sleep came on him.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{145} Alvis 1995: 6.

\textsuperscript{146} Alvis 1995: 5-7 notes in this context that now the chief god will reign himself in. Ahrensdorf 2014: 26-27 comments on the humor of the exchange.
Going up to the bed he slept and Hera of the gold throne beside him (1.609-11).

Such is the kind of easy life that is now fitting for the gods.

2.2 Changes to the Human Situation Under the Olympian Order – and the Desire for Immortal, Thwarted

While the Olympians have been establishing their order, it has become a different world for the mortals. Homer subtly shows that when the Olympians are no longer so involved with mortals, our plane of existence is less fantastical, more recognizably human. During this new epoch of the cosmos, strange and fabulous events experienced by previous generations of human beings are no longer in order, or possible. Nestor – like Peleus, Laomedon, Phoenix, and others – belongs to that previous generation. Nestor sometimes gives good counsel in the tactics of warfare and diplomacy. Too old to fight now, he tends to upbraid the present generation of Achaean fighters. In so doing he tells what in the poem’s present situation sound like tall tales, or bizarre tales, such as the one about how the previous generation of men “fought against the strongest, the beast men living within the mountains” (1.267-68). Schein, who notes that this is probably a reference to the traditional story about the battle between the Lapiths and Centaurs, although Homer as usual will only indicate that such a story is entirely peripheral to his own. Nestor conjures “a picture of a half-savage world of warriors far more powerful and far cruder” than that of the Iliad’s present generation of fighters. Similarly fantastic is the story Phoenix

147 Schein 1984: 135.

tells to Achilles in book 9, of how after one Oineus of Calydon had failed to sacrifice to Artemis and was punished by her with a menacing boar. His son, Meleagros, saved his fellow Calydonians but only by leading a great hunting party comprised of men from many tribes, since the boar was big enough even to have ripped out tall trees (9.532-46). Such things happened on earth when gods and human beings were closer to each other.

Other heroes of the present generation, even highly impressive ones, do not face such bizarre challenges or accomplish such fabled deeds. We have discussed Diomedes’ role in book 5. Slatkin has shown that the book also contains various allusions to his father, Tydeus – whose accomplishments in conquering Thebes were the subject of another epic in the tradition that preceded the *Iliad* – and whose mythic status helps explain Diomedes’ closeness to Athene in book 5. 149 This adds to our understanding that Diomedes’ role is appropriate, if at all, to the epoch that the *Iliad* shows has been replaced. Similar to Tydeus’s accomplishment, the heroic quests of Zeus’s son, Heracles’ are referred to at various points in the poem. “In the *Iliad,*” writes Schein, “Heracles represents the highest possible human heroic achievement.” 150 Nevertheless, his achievements are also out of place in its contemporary context. In another image of what battle was like, Heracles is said to have defeated Troy itself “with six vessels only and the few men needed to man them” (5.641; see 14.242-61). 151

149 Slatkin 2011b.


151 A fuller, although un-Homeric, version of Heracles’ place in the unfolding of the cosmic order is provided by Hesiod in the *Theogony*. Benardete (2000a: 6) makes the following observation. “Typhos was born after the triumph of the Olympians over the Titans…Zeus did not defeat Typhos before his offspring were born, all of whom are killed except Cerberus. Heracles kills Geryon’s dog Orthus, the Hydra, the Nemean lion, the last two of whom
Now, Achilles is associated with Heracles a number of times in the poem.\footnote{Schein 1984: 135.} We see the logical extent to which Heraklean self-sufficiency might be taken where he tells Patroclus that he wishes to hold power over all those around them – indeed, to be the only two not annihilated.

Father Zeus, Athene and Apollo, if only not one of the Trojans could escape destruction, not one of the Achaeans, but you and I could emerge from the slaughter, so that we two alone could break Troy’s hallowed coronal (16.97-100).

Achilles’ wish here is even more radical than it might seem. Achilles tells this to Patroclus while he remains behind in his tent, sending his friend to battle with the instruction not to extend his warring too far in the false hope of visiting destruction on Troy. For Achilles is telling him that they cannot \textit{both} break that city – without a care for Trojans \textit{or} Achaeans - with the obvious implication that Achilles wishes or expects to do that alone.

What Achilles utters in those words to Patroclus is a wish to escape all community – and, perhaps, to be more than human. We may have a clue that that is his wish in the parallel between his wish for the destruction of both alliances, and that Hera wishes for Troy’s destruction but is also willing to watch Argos, Sparta, and Mykenos destroyed. In any event, there is reason to think that by following Heracles’ own pattern Achilles will gain apotheosis, which he thinks Heracles achieved. David Bolotin has made the persuasive argument that there is a crucial

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Hera brought up, and Bellerophon kills the Chimera. Zeus allows these monsters to be born so that the earth can become civilized through heroes. The earth had to be made savage by the will of Zeus before it could be made tame through Zeus.”
inference to be made from Achilles’ reasoning in book 9.\textsuperscript{153} There (as we shall discuss in more detail in chapter 4) Achilles at first gives up on a hope to gain undying glory. For, by that time in the epic he has learned that - since Agamemnon has dishonored him, in taking Briseis; or that he can not retain the honors he has earned in the war – it is impossible to gain the undying glory that depends on the esteem of other men. This means that cowards as well as brave fighters, as he puts it bitterly, “are all held in a single honor,” and all die the same death (9.314-20). Accordingly, he announces he will set sail for his homeland of Phthia, and recommends that the other Achaeans do the same (9.414-18). As it turns out, however, he does not go home. It must therefore be, as Bolotin argues, that if he does stay he has it in mind to gain a redemption that will save him from death.\textsuperscript{154} Just before announcing that he will indeed stay near Troy Achilles also states that he does not need men’s honor but that he thinks he is already honored by Zeus (9.608-10).

Bolotin’s reasoning is sustained and strengthened, I think, by the following considerations. When Patroclus is killed, Achilles will acknowledge his own mortality and, in that very context – after the death of Patroclus, who he now realizes matters more to him than anything else – he states his knowledge that Heracles also had died (18.90-121). Heracles was known by the tradition (including the \textit{Odyssey}) to be that exceptional hero who gained apotheosis through undergoing his labors.\textsuperscript{155} We can ask, did Achilles not stay near Troy in order to follow Heracles’ heroic pattern by conquering that “hallowed coronal,” and to also have

\textsuperscript{153} Bolotin 1995, especially 86.

\textsuperscript{154} Bolotin 1995, especially 86.

\textsuperscript{155} \textit{Odyssey} 11.602-04; see Nagy 2005.
gained apotheosis thereby? Homer brings up this wish subtly – it is not to the poet’s taste to allow for it as a real possibility - and only to show that it has been dashed. As we have discussed, however, the *Iliad* differs vastly from the fantastical poetry of the epic cycle, according to which Achilles would be transported to the White Isle, having escaped the fate of Hades. Further, in the *Iliad*, gone is the time when Thetis could boast in the halls of Achilles’ father, Peleus, that she had saved Zeus from the other gods. Her powers are severely limited. Only Briareos, through whom Thetis helped Zeus, was a son born to be stronger than his father. Peleus and Achilles share the same fate (see 18.78-99).

After his conversation with Thetis, Achilles prowls the battlefield with outsized anger (*mēnis*) and strength that is reminiscent of Heracles’ ability to accomplish so much by himself. He is inhabited by Athene, even to the point where she “about his head circle[s] golden cloud, and kindle[s] from it a flame far-shining” (18.205-06). Nevertheless, he thus does Athene’s bidding, not his own. (As we saw earlier, Zeus has allowed for Troy’s destruction, and Apollo will agree that mortals are not worth fighting over.) The subsequent scenes are also full of brutal bloodshed, and not such as the heroes of old could have been proud. For Achilles performs his killing out a sense of wretchedness, which arises out of a sense that he is impotent to return

156 Compare Diomedes’ claim, in book 9, that he and Sthenelus can conquer Troy together, as they have come to Troy “with the god” (9.43-49). Slatkin 2011b discusses Diomedes’ story in relation to that of his mythically accomplished father, Tydeus, in the traditional stories about the sack of Thebes. Whitman (1958: 154-80, 264-66) compares (and contrasts) Achilles and Diomedes.

157 “When Achilles’ last rites are described by Agamemnon, as the *Odyssey* draws to a close (*Odyssey* 24.43ff.), it is fitting that there is no hint of the version in which Thetis carried him away to immortality” (Edwards 1987: 140).

his friend (see, especially, 21.17-135).\(^{159}\) Having forgotten about his quarrel with Agamemnon, first his sole wish is to kill Hector for killing Patroclus. Even after he does so, Achilles continues to thrash at Hector’s dead body. He continues to do so, as Ahrensdorf observes, even after the funeral of Patroclus. He continues to speak to the dead Patroclus, so “he evidently falls short of reconciling himself to the finality of death” (21.1-22, 24.591-95).\(^{160}\) Thus, if his power in the last books looks fantastical, his experience makes palpable that he fails to proceed in the human way or the way appropriate to himself. Achilles’ wretchedness gives the lie to his wish to be completely self-sufficient or invulnerable.

2.3 The Gods and Human Alternatives

While Achilles’ example shows that to follow their pattern is to act so inhumanly, the *Iliad* gives us images of more human alternatives, even if we must often discern those alternatives from what goes wrong when various characters fail to do so. Scholars have discussed how the shield fashioned by Hephaestus for Achilles before he enters the battle, together with other scenes throughout the *Iliad*, depict a peaceful world in contrast to the world of warfare that is so much more pronounced in the poem.\(^{161}\) Further, the *Iliad* as a whole shows that the world of warfare

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\(^{159}\) People of differing qualities are thwarted by various sorts of obstacles. Nonetheless, Arendt’s (1972) discussion of violence as stemming from frustrated agency provides a helpful insight into Achilles’ various experiences. Also insightful in the present context – particularly given the brutality of Achilles’ violence after Patroclus dies – is Aristotle’s discussion of the problem posed for the polis by an honor-lover such as Achilles (*Politics* 1266b24-1267a15).

\(^{160}\) Ahrensdorf 2014: 189.

is a tragic one to be avoided, and suggests that human beings could begin to avoid it if they were to reflect on their differences from the gods, or to accept their human condition. Achilles famously remarks that at Zeus’s doorstep stand two urns - one containing evil, the other, good fortune - and the god bestows them on human beings at random (24.527-30). He says this not in a moment of fear but of resignation. The lesson is not to wallow in grief when misfortune strikes, as Achilles tells Hector’s father, Priam. It is to bear up through the inevitable shifts of this existence (24.523-550, 602-20).\textsuperscript{162} Achilles learns this lesson too late, and so do many others who have read the \textit{Iliad}, but the lesson remains. Rather than in tragically discovering that the gods represent limits upon the human condition, moreover, there is hope to be found in reflecting on those limits; in knowing that whereas they are not bound by time, we are; that whereas they need not be flexible, we must. These differences reflect human vulnerability, but to know them also allows for human dignity.\textsuperscript{163}

As for the gods themselves, together with such instances as Athene’s awful alliance with Achilles, we have seen others where, as in their easy-going meals and pleasures on Olympus, they can be quite humorous characters. We have seen how the negotiations they engage in between themselves are relatively straightforward and simple, especially when compared with the complexities mortals face.\textsuperscript{164} To close the chapter we can note how, in a highly Homeric speech before some of his fellow Athenian citizens, Plato’s character, Aristophanes, would

\textsuperscript{162} See Saxonhouse 1988.

\textsuperscript{163} See, e.g., Edwards 1987: 317-23.

capture this understanding of the gods.\textsuperscript{165} He tells the story of human beings from an earlier epoch who tried to overtake the gods. Those human beings were reminiscent of the outlandishly large Ephialtes and Otus to whom we saw Homer refer. They were physically different from ourselves also in that each of them looked like two people attached to each other. Zeus split them apart with his lightning bolt and nearly killed all of the human beings. At the same time, the gods wanted the human beings to keep on living, because they depended on their sacrificial offerings. So Zeus and Apollo thought hard about what to do, and the latter undertook an operation to stitch the human beings back together, but this he also bungled.\textsuperscript{166} Such simple-minded gods, looking out for their own ends, are humorous, not fearful. It is true, and the comic poet also underscores this, that unlike the gods human beings are to suffer and die. Human beings also experience eros and philia, love and friendship, such as the gods – because they lack our vulnerability, and because they lack souls – cannot imagine. Aristophanes also discusses how human beings must negotiate much more with each other than what he has shown the gods to do, that we must learn the arts of politics. He says this in the context of another war, the Peloponnesian War, from which Athenian citizens, not the gods, must save themselves.

We shall discuss in chapter 4 how the history of the Trojan War brings out political and other possibilities and lessons. Before that, however, we turn in the next two chapters to discuss the origins of the war, and the Trojans’ regime. Having explained that the gods, who mark a
limit on human endeavor, do not provide a model for human existence, we will discuss how the
Trojans mark a limit of a different sort. Their way of life does not rise to the level of a politics or
a concern for the common good or virtue. Rather, the Trojans’ approach to life can be compared
with the gods on Olympus - an approach that is ill suited to their status as human beings, which it
will be their tragedy to learn too late.
3 The Trojan War as a Private Conflict

3.1 The Duel Between Menelaus and Paris

In book 3 of the *Iliad* Homer depicts a series of events from the ninth year of the Trojan War, which also serve as a flashback to its initial cause, when Paris took Helen from Sparta to Troy. A duel is arranged between Menelaus and Paris. From the perspective of the duelers, their quarrel is central to the war at present, so the outcome of their duel should determine that of the war itself. As the audience recognizes, however, the duel takes place in the context of a war that has been waged for almost ten years, and by the end of the section the reader is led to ask whether the duel could displace the much larger conflict between the Achaean and Trojan alliances. In other words, this section of book 3 raises the question of whether the Trojan War as a whole can be understood as a private conflict. At the same time, the section raises questions about justice that are important in themselves and that will continue to resonate throughout our larger account of the politics in the *Iliad*.

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168 Scholarship on the *Iliad* has discussed Homer’s relationship with the epic tradition, his ability to include and incorporate material to create a grand poem that encompasses the cosmic and human history as these were understood in the Greek religion (see Graziosi and Haubold 2005). The purpose of neo-analytic scholarship has been to show how book 3’s duel points to the part of that history when the war began (see Kullman 2001). I add to these perspectives another effect of Homer’s inclusion of this material, as well as its relation to the rest of the poem. I will discuss how the history of the war lays bare an account of politics, from its sub-political or private underpinnings, in the origin of the war, to a more public or political ethic that we shall discuss later in this chapter (see 3.4-3.6, below) and in chapter 4. Additionally, Helen’s symbolic presence in the poem – and the importance of
A bare definition of politics is that it rises above private concerns to more common, public ones. The earliest cause of what would become the Trojan War was “sub-political” or private: it would not have occurred had Paris not dishonored Menelaus, in spite of his generosity as host, by taking his wife and various possessions (1.159-60; 3.349-54, 3.15-29, 3.87, 3.97-100, 6.56-57, 13.621-27). Homer looks back to that first violation when he first depicts the Achaean and Trojan armies set in opposition to each other. For when Paris rashly leaps out from the Trojan ranks to challenge “the best of the Achaeans” to fight in a duel, Menelaus – like a hungry lion who happens on the large carcass of a stag or a goat – is happy to find Paris right in front of him, and, “thinking to punish the robber, straightaway in all his armor he [springs] to the ground from his chariot” (3.15-29).

True to his own character, the fearful Paris runs away.

Paris the godlike when he saw Menelaus showing among the champions, the heart was shaken within him; to avoid death he shrank into the host of his own companions. As a man who has come on a snake in the mountain valley suddenly steps back, and shivers come over his body, and he draws back and away, cheeks seized with a green pallor; so in terror of Atreus’ son godlike Paris lost himself again in the host of the haughty Trojans (3.30-37).

His brother, Hector, then berates him,

Evil Paris, beautiful, woman-crazy, cajoling, better you had never been born, or killed unwedded. Truly I could have wished it so; it

private, familial relations - resonates in the conflict between Agamemnon and Achilles, and the partial resolution of that conflict, in book 9, as I shall also discuss in chapter 4.
would be far better than to have you with us to our shame, for others to sneer at…[There] is no strength in your heart, no courage. Were you like this that time when in sea-wandering vessels assembling oarsmen to help you you sailed over the water and mixed with the outlanders, and carried away a fair woman from a remote land, whose lord’s kin were spearmen and fighters, to your father a big sorrow, and your city, and all your people, to yourself a thing shameful but bringing joy to the enemy? (3.39-51)

Improbably enough, Paris then proposes to fight a duel with Menelaus, where whoever wins and is proved stronger will take the possessions and Helen, and lead her homeward (3.67-72). He says this would also allow the Achaeans and Trojans to end the war with “oaths of faith and friendship (philotēs)” (3.38-78). So, on behalf of Paris, “for whose sake [or, on account of whom] this strife has arisen,” Hector calls out to ask the Achaeans to make oaths of agreement to the duel and its terms, as Paris had stated them (3.84-94). In the catalogue of ships Homer had stated that Menelaus confidently drove his Spartan warriors battleward, “since above all his heart was eager to avenge Helen’s longing to escape and her lamentation” (2.588-90). Now it is Menelaus who responds for the Achaeans to the challenge Hector has announced.

Listen to me…since beyond all others this sorrow comes closest to my heart, and I think the Argives and Trojans can go free of each other at last. You have suffered much evil for the sake of [or, on account of] this my quarrel since [Paris] began it. As for that one of us for whom death and fate are given, let him die: the rest of you be parted with all speed (3.97-102).

So Paris, Hector, and Menelaus would agree that, much as Paris initiated the present conflict by dishonoring Menelaus, it can be reduced in the event to a duel between just the two of them. The one who committed, and the other who was offended by, the original act of injustice can bring it to a resolution – their quarrel remains in essence a private affair - while there will be a ceasefire
and the two warring armies are to fall into the background; and, no matter who prevails in the
duel, through it, the Trojan War can be brought to a peaceful close. We shall discuss later in this
chapter and in the next how Homer will point to the limitations of this implicit account of what
the war is about.

Although Paris and Menelaus think that the Trojan War is rooted in their own mutual
history, it is worthwhile to note where their respective understandings of that history, and of the
present conflict, diverge. Paris, obviously enough, is self-serving. He is unable simply to admit
that he acted unjustly when he robbed Menelaus. Indeed, his narrow self-concern is, by this
point, long-standing: he did rob Menelaus a long time ago, and since then Paris has refused to
return Helen and the possessions, in spite of a diplomatic embassy to Troy that Menelaus and
Odysseus undertook in order to secure their return, and in spite of ten years of war (3.205-24).
Indeed, a full twenty years have passed since his initial transgression (24.754-56). And how
much of a transgression was it, as far as Paris sees it? Unlike his brother - who refers to the
danger of Paris’s act, particularly given that Menelaus’s kin are “spearmen and fighters” (3.46-
49) - Paris says that they hail from Argos and “Achaea the land of fair women” (3.75).

His attitude is in keeping with the resolution Paris proposes - to determine the matter by a
duel – not simply to return what he took from Menelaus. We can say that Paris’s conduct has
continually illustrated how the speedy admission of guilt and restoration of justice is a rare event.
There would be no need for such a restoration were the proper order of things not disturbed in
the first place; but unjust deeds do occur. In that sense, they have their place in the world, and
are all too common. In the event - far from returning what he took - Paris believes that through
the duel he can establish his own acquisition of Helen and the possessions once and for all.
In the event, Aphrodite, the goddess whose characteristics are so embodied by Paris, intervenes to save him from the danger of the duel. So Paris is able to get away, much as he stole away from Sparta with Helen. Now Aphrodite brings him behind Troy’s walls and close to Helen, to his fragrant bedchamber, where he has always felt most comfortable (3.374-448). There Paris says to Helen:

[A]nother time I shall beat him. For we have gods on our side also. Come, then, rather let us go to bed and turn to love-making (\textit{all' age dē philotēti trapeiomen eunēthente}). Never before as now has passion enmeshed my senses, not when I took you the first time from Lakedaimon the lovely and caught you up and carried you away in seafaring vessels, and lay with you in the bed of love (\textit{emigēn philotēi kai eunē}) on the island Kranae, not even then, as now, did I love you and sweet desire seize me (3.440-46; cf. 3.64-66).

Here is a return to the origins that long preceded the Trojan War. Aphrodite’s fabulous intervention reminds the reader of the story of the Judgment of Paris, which Homer’s depiction of Paris presupposes.\footnote{See Rheinhardt 1997.} At the end of the poem Homer will state that after Paris chose Aphrodite over Hera and Athene, she “supplied the lust that led to disaster” (cf. 24.28-30). Here Paris follows his usual pattern and, given his character, he can do no other. Twenty years later, Paris is characterized by self-serving pleasure even more than he was when he committed the war’s originary act of injustice. That moment shows again how Paris’s decision so long ago proved his complete and irremediable identification with the goddess of desire and pleasure.

Indeed, although Paris boasts that he and Helen have “gods” on their side, only Aphrodite is in evidence. Likewise, where Paris’s epithet in this section of the poem is “godlike” \textit{(theoeidēs)}, this must be in the specific sense that his physical beauty and voluptuary ways mark
him so (cf., e.g., 3.30-66). And yet, Paris takes false comfort in his identification with Aphrodite, who cannot completely secure him. For one thing, Paris is oblivious of Hera and Athene’s enmity. Also, although Aphrodite has helped Paris to escape the fight, she has not helped him to wage it. Only in bed with Helen can he claim to be confident that he will beat Menelaus on some other occasion.

After Aphrodite’s intervention, Menelaus ranges along the host in search of Paris, much as he did when Paris first hopped out from the Trojan ranks (3.448-50; 3.15-29). Here and throughout the section, Menelaus’s epithet is “dear to Ares” (arēphilōi), a god much more fitting to a violent conflict (3.452). In the earlier image - of the lion, close to the prey – Homer illustrated Menelaus’s desire to have Paris dead. Indeed, whereas Paris had said that the duel would determine who would keep what he had taken, Menelaus made it clear that the duel would determine whether he or Paris would suffer “death and fate” (3.69-75; 3.101-02). On the one hand, Menelaus did not talk of having enjoyed the honor of his position and its trappings before Paris had so dishonored him; nor did he even expressly mention Helen or the possessions. Menelaus’s experience illustrates how suffering an injustice may lead one away from a more flourishing existence.

Menelaus and Paris’s different understandings of the duel tell us something else about where the concept of justice figures in the conflict. Menelaus is more than ready for the duel. Paris, in his focus on all things pleasant, was extraordinarily naïve to think that losing the duel would mean only that he should return what he had taken from Menelaus, whereupon all of the combatants would be made friends, or to think that he himself would survive the duel. (It is as though Paris has thought that his thievery in Sparta, and the twenty years since, could all be erased!) Indeed, it is Paris who has failed to understand this fundamental aspect of the human
experience of justice: whether as a way to assuage one’s injury, as something strangely pleasant in itself, or some mixture of these, the desire for revenge against one’s offender often overtakes any concern to restore oneself to the condition that obtained prior to the offense. This is what Menelaus’s statement on the meaning of the duel would signify; it would explain Menelaus’s association with Ares; and it is what the analogy of the ravenous lion, feeding on the carcass, also suggests.

In addition to Hector, moreover, the common Trojans are exasperated with Paris, and they are even hostile toward him (3.38-57). Homer indicates the reason for this in the passage quoted above, where Paris repeats a word he had used earlier. In proposing the duel, Paris had used the word “philotēs” to denote the friendship between the Achaeans and Trojans that Paris thought would be its outcome; whereas after the duel is aborted, the word “philotēs” comes to signify only his own private desire to “make love” with Helen (3.73; 3.441, 445). By this repetition Homer would indicate that Paris makes no distinction between his two uses of the word. As such, the repetition would point out Paris’s tendency to project his own experience onto others around him – his childish view that others identify with his own desires - even when his acting on those desires comes at the expense of the others around him. Homer also suggests how mistaken Paris is when he uses the term philotēs one more time in the section. That is, after Aphrodite has taken Paris from the scene, and Menelaus searches for him,

none of the Trojans nor any of their famed allies could show Paris then to Menelaus, dear to Ares. These would not have hidden him for love (philotēs), if any had seen him, since he was hated among them all as dark death is hated (3.448-54).

Since the cowardly Paris has absconded to safety, which would mean that he has been defeated by Menelaus, there is no love lost for him.
If Paris has been extraordinarily naïve in projecting his easy-going outlook onto everyone who surrounds him, he is a laughable figure. By himself, he poses little threat as an effective practitioner of injustice. All indications are that he did not fight with Menelaus when he took Helen with him from Sparta (3.38-57, 6.343-48 with 3.399-405; cf. 3.430-36). Since then he has depended on the Trojans and their allies in order to keep Helen and to enjoy his fun-loving ways (see, e.g., 11.123-41). As we have seen, it soon also became clear that if he really had his way there would have been no duel. For a short spell Paris is forced to see that other men’s interests – the pressures of an enemy army on the attack; Hector’s anger - would affect his own actions. Even then he is saved by Aphrodite from any harsh consequences. His place really is in the private sphere, especially the bedroom, and he looks silly out of his element.

It may also be true that, together with his self-indulgence and cowardice, there is a certain charm to Paris that cannot completely be denied. We see it when Aphrodite, having rescued him, appears in the guise of an old woman, and instructs Helen to visit Paris in his chamber, in the bed with its circled pattern, shining in his raiment and his own beauty; you would not think that he came from fighting against a man; you would think he was going rather to a dance, or rested and had been dancing lately (3.390-94).


171 In terms of gender, Paris is a feminine character. He is a particular kind of feminine character in that he is identified with Aphrodite rather than with, say, Hera. The Trojan soldiers – out in the field – underscore this characterization in that their denial of philotēs toward Paris also implies a judgment as to the inappropriateness of Paris’s bedchamber philotēs.

172 See Taplin 1995: 118.
When Helen arrives, we saw, Paris re-imagines the bedchamber as one of Aphrodite’s magical islands of love. Despite its transgressive character, Paris’s desire for Helen’s beauty is not to be dismissed altogether. Similarly, when Hector berates him for his devotion to Aphrodite, Paris responds with a witty rejoinder, pointing out his brother’s inflexibility and his denial of “the sweet favors of golden Aphrodite” (3.38-66).  

And yet, Paris’s charms are fleeting because in his one-dimensionality he cannot adjust to circumstances that would take him beyond the pleasure principle. There is little place for the goddess of private love, or her one-sided devotee, in the midst of a duel or a war, so there is little place for such a laughable figure. For Paris, all experiences are aesthetic. Later in the poem

173 See Schein 1984: 21-22; Rabel ----- provides the most persuasive explanation of Paris’s complex simile at 3.58-63.

As an archetypal figure, someone like Paris shows up from time to time in world literature (to say nothing of empirical history). There are uncanny fundamental resemblances to Paris in George Eliot’s Tito Melema. Tito “had an unconquerable aversion to anything unpleasant.” So he “would have been equal to any sacrifice that was not unpleasant.” That said, “his fibre was too fine, his intellect too bright, for him to be tempted into the habits of a gross pleasure-seeker.” Hence “[t]he elements of kindness and self-indulgence are hard to distinguish in a soft nature like Tito’s.” (Romola 113, 284, 308.) Similar to Paris, Tito Melema is a small-time opportunist whose actions ruin the woman who associates with him. On the other hand, Paris’s actions have led to a war whose effects are of a greater magnitude. But there again the foppish prince is caught up by forces beyond his imagining.

174 Instructive here are certain resonances, but also differences, between Paris and the comic hero of Old Comedy, or Aristophanes himself. Two of the most important themes in Aristophanes’ plays will be the importance of private pleasures, and the wish to end the Peloponnesian War. As the Platonic Socrates will say of Aristophanes, his “whole activity is devoted to Dionysus and Aphrodite” (Symposium 177e2-3). Aristophanes is not only a devotee of the goddess of sensuality. In coupling the goddess with the god of the theater, Socrates’ characterization implies a
Paris will make some appearances on the battlefield, but they are fleeting, and what he will most resemble there is a prancing horse (6.504-19). As Edwards notes, “Paris runs swiftly as a stallion that glories in its strength and beauty, and it is the beauty of Paris in his glittering armor that matters, not his speed.” This is what a devotee of Aphrodite would look like on the battlefield, and the image is in keeping with Aphrodite’s words to Helen about how combat has not affected Paris, who is always ready to enjoy voluptuary pleasures.

For Paris, it as if Troy has not been at war, as if there were no change between when he left for Sparta and took Helen away twenty years before. As in his statement to Helen about the duel – that, while Menelaus has defeated him in the duel this time, he could at another time

degree of reflection on the place of Aphrodite in human affairs (cf. Clouds 519). The comic poet emphasizes the importance of marriage. His active opposition to the war also goes together with a teaching on moderation in both private and political relations. Aristophanes would seem to bring together pleasure or charm and concern for the public good in a way that could never have occurred to Paris.


176 See Benardete 2005: 48-9; Redfield 1994: 113-15; Griffin 1980: 3-5; Schein 1984: 21-22; Flaumenhaft 2004: 13-15. Paris does go on to fight at some points, but he is mostly associated with the bow rather than direct combat (e.g., 11.369-70, 11.378-83). Whereas Hector often berates Paris and encourages him to fight, the one time when Paris encourages Hector to fight, he does so against the prudent advice of their brother, Poulydamas, and he “turn[s Hector’s] wits” (13.723-88, noted by Flaumenhaft 2004: 20; consider 13.775-780 within the context of 727-34 and 765-67; surely, the reference to Paris as a “hero” at 13.788 drips with irony).
defeat Menelaus – Paris seems to think that every possibility is open to him. In these ways, Paris, whom Aphrodite has protected, is much like the goddess as she is presented in book 5. As we saw in the previous chapter, during the battle between the gods portrayed in book 5 of the poem Aphrodite is injured by the Achaean hero Diomedes, which will serve to illustrate that war is not her domain. Nonetheless, as have also discussed, Aphrodite can bounce back from an injury that would cause a mortal, such as Diomedes – or Paris - to die (see above, 2.1). Within the structure of the Iliad, the fabulous Paris belongs to the early books, which are thick with references to the origins of the war, and where the immortal gods partake of the war. Yet the Iliad is really a poem about the reality of war for mortals. What would happen to the mortal Paris if he were to truly engage in war is perhaps best indicated by what happens to Pandarus, given their mutual association with the bow as well as their respective violations of established customs or agreements. In book 5, Pandarus is killed by Diomedes, whose spear cuts through his jawbone and the very tongue of the oath-breaker (5.276-96).

As such, nothing could look sillier than when Paris first hops out from the ranks to boast that he will fight “the best of the Achaeans,” and nothing could look paltrier. Hector – unlike Paris, where the brothers are contrasted in book 6 - is aware that he has little time to cherish his wife and child, let alone for indolent activities (6.325-502). In this context Paris’s rejoinder to

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177 The point is stated by Flaumenhaft 2004: 16, who notes, in this context, that Paris is often given the epithet “godlike.” “[Paris] seems to expect an infinite future in which every choice can be remade, every deed redone... Unlike mortal men who must plan ahead and make choices that are mutually exclusive, Paris lives as though all things are possible.”

178 Taplin 1995: 108 notes the poetic justice of this passage.
Hector’s chastisement at the start of book 3 – to be more flexible, and to respect the goddess Aphrodite - is hollow (3.38-66; compare 6.369-481). Just as Aphrodite must leave warfare to mortals, as we discussed in the last chapter, so Paris must step aside in the Trojan War. Though the conflict would not have begun without his initial crime, the war, and the poem, are inhabited by greater characters and themes than those he could ever experience or imagine.

Now, we have discussed how in book 3 Menelaus - hungry for the duel - teaches us more about motivation and the phenomena of justice in the private sphere or relations between individuals. Yet, in his own way, Menelaus also has a limited view of events and interests involved in the war. He, too, views the Trojan War as fundamentally a private affair. Nonetheless, unlike Paris, in his anger Menelaus was under no illusion that the Achaeans and Trojans would become friends once the duel was over. But, again, he too thought that the duel’s outcome would bring the war to a close. Yet the war has been a larger undertaking than the duel. No duel occurred when Menelaus and Odysseus came to Troy as emissaries before the war. Given the Trojans’ protection of Paris, it is hard to imagine how the duel would have taken place had the two armies not amassed.

Here Homer’s first image of Menelaus and Paris is worth considering again. After Paris’s challenge, that is, where Menelaus is said to act like a lion who happens on a large carcass, the image continues, “in his hunger chancing upon the body of a horned stag or wild goat; [he eats] it eagerly, although against him are hastening the hounds in their speed the

179 Perhaps Menelaus holds to the view that the war has been waged solely on account of the injustice done to him, as his remark to Antilochos in book 23 would suggest (23.607-08). Cf. also his naïve statement, in the context, at 13.633-39.
stalwart young men” (3.15-26). The killing of the stag or goat is accomplished not by the lion but by the more effective and organized hunting party, whose members, presumably, are about to scare off the lion in order to claim their prey for themselves. The image raises the question whether Menelaus has been right to think that the Achaeans have suffered much evil on account of his quarrel with Paris - that is, that they have fought and suffered only for his sake. One would not have to deny Menelaus’s claim that the pain of this conflict has been closest to his own heart, in suspecting that the many other men who have been involved in the war have had their own interests in waging it, interests distinct and separable from those of Menelaus and Paris (see below, 4.2). In this connection it might be noted that at the end of the Paris-Menelaus section of the poem (as book 3 closes), where Menelaus ranges about the army looking for Paris, Homer does not compare him to a lion eating his prey but, more simply, to a wild beast (3.449-50).

On the other hand, Homer immediately points to Agamemnon. For the war has been undertaken by both sons of Atreus (the Atridae), Agamemnon as well as Menelaus. Indeed, Agamemnon is leader of the Achaean alliance (see below, section 4.2); and the alliance is capable of a high degree of organization and effectiveness (3.455-61). Before the duel took place Agamemnon presided over the oath ceremony that would determine its terms and conditions, saying that if Menelaus were to kill Paris, the Trojans should give back Helen and the possessions,

180 Menelaus will still think this even after Patroclus dies (17.92). See Ahrensrod’s discussion (2014: 164-78) of Patroclus’s involvement in the war.

181 See Benardete 2000b: 22-27; Griffin 1980: 4-5 and references.
and pay also a price to the Argives which will be fitting, which among people yet to come shall be as a standard. Then if Priam and the sons of Priam are yet unwilling after Paris has fallen to pay me the penalty, I myself shall fight hereafter for the sake of the ransom, here remaining, until I have won to the end of my quarrel (3.284-91).

Needless to say, Agamemnon could be confident in his brother’s ability to defeat Paris; but, in doing so, the statement shows, Menelaus would have contributed to Agamemnon’s own war aims (cf. also, e.g., 2.110-15, 3.455-61). So there Agamemnon has claimed that the Trojan War has been about his own quarrel, and that his enemy has been – not just Paris - Troy as a whole. What is more, given the difference between Agamemnon’s and Paris’s, or Hector’s, understanding of the terms of the duel, it seems that - even had Menelaus won it by killing Paris – the Trojans’ payment would not have sufficed for Agamemnon, and the war would have continued.

As mentioned, after Aphrodite whisks Paris away, Homer comments on the Trojans’ willingness to hand him over to Menelaus, their overturning of Paris’s philotēs, and their hatred of him. They have taken on Menelaus’s feeling toward Paris. Like the “stalwart young men” of the image, they too are on the hunt - but for a different reason, and this signals a transition in the poem. After Agamemnon had declared the terms of the duel and performed the oath-ceremonies, thus would murmur any man, Trojan or Achaean, “Zeus, exalted and mightiest, and you other immortals, let those, whichever side they may be, who do wrong to the oaths sworn first, let their brains be spilled on the ground as this wine is spilled now, theirs and their sons’, and let their wives be the spoil of others” (3.297-301).

Does Paris’s flight from the duel constitute a violation of the oaths? If so, perhaps the Trojan warriors now hate Paris “as dark death is hated” because, unlike Paris, they are aware of the vengeance they are about to face as a result of that violation (3.448-54). In any event, Homer’s statement on the Trojans’ attitude toward Paris directly precedes Agamemnon’s declaration that the duel is a victory for Menelaus - even though the latter, ranging like a wild beast, seems
anything but pleased with the outcome – where Agamemnon also repeats his earlier demand that, upon Menelaus’s victory, the Trojans must pay that price “which among people yet to come shall be as a standard” (3.455-61). Once again, it is Agamemnon, whose character differs from his brother’s, who would lead the attack against the Trojans and their allies, in order to claim his own ransom. Thus this section of the poem ends where Menelaus’s quarrel gives way to Agamemnon’s renewal of the war.

3.2 Helen of Sparta and Troy - Her Error, Her Awareness of its Public Consequences, and Her Struggle with Aphrodite

By contrast with Paris, the other party to the original transgression, his wife, Helen, has been changed through time by her experience. Helen is the “daughter of Zeus” (e.g. 3.418) but that affords her no great honors or protection from the vagaries of existence. Still, she is much more aware than Paris that they indeed acted in error, that their act has had public consequences that reach far beyond Paris and herself. In contrast to Paris, who is so close to Aphrodite, Helen is aware of how the harm she has caused and experienced results from her association with the goddess. In leaving Sparta she was not exactly the woman Menelaus has described as longing to escape and full of lamentations (2.590). Indeed, she will refer to herself as “a nasty bitch evil-intriguing” who wishes “that on the day my mother first bore me the foul whirlwind of the storm had caught me away and swept me to the mountain, or into the wash of the sea deep-thundering where the waves would have swept me away,” rather than to have caused so many troubles (6.344-48).

In the teichoskopíē scene in book 3, just before the duel between Menelaus and Paris, Helen speaks with King Priam and other leading elders as they survey the Achaean host from atop the city walls. When Helen is escorted to the wall where Priam and the elders sit, and is told by Iris, messenger of the gods, that there is to be a duel, she experiences “in her heart sweet
longing after her husband of time before, and her city and parents” (3.139-40). And when she meets Priam she calls herself a “slut,” and says:

Always to me, beloved father, you are feared and respected; and I wish bitter death had been what I wanted, when I came hither following your son, forsaking my chamber, my kinsmen, my grown child, and the loveliness of girls my own age...[A]nd now I am worn with weeping (3.172-180; see also 24.763-66).

She points out for Priam and the others the various Achaean leaders, among whom she observes Agamemnon, who was once her kinsman (3.178-80). She also mentions her two brothers, whom she cannot see and, she thinks, must not have come to Troy on account of their family shame; though she does not know it, they have already died and been buried in her homeland (3.233-44).

Helen is also aware of how her action has led to other effects than the loss of her own private relations in Sparta. She will later speak to Hector about the “vile things” that she together with Paris has caused, and that have caused Hector much travail (6.344, 6.354-57).

Although Helen will say to Hector that “the gods have brought it about” that the vile things she has been involved in have come to pass (6.344-49; see 6.356-58), she is to be contrasted with Paris, not only for recognizing her predicament, but also for trying to reject the goddess whom Paris so depends on and embraces. After Aphrodite has whisked Paris away from the duel and “set him down again in his own perfumed bedchamber,” she goes to summon Helen (3.380-86). Aphrodite transfigures herself into an aged woman, like a wool-dresser who lived in Sparta when Helen was there, who “made beautiful things out of wool, and loved her beyond all others” (3.386-88). It is at this point that she invites Helen to see the beautiful Paris, with the words quoted earlier about how one “would not think that he came from fighting against a man; you would think he was going rather to a dance, or rested and had been dancing lately” (3.389-94). These words, however, “[trouble] the spirit in Helen’s bosom”; she recognizes the goddess who would entice her, “her desirable breasts, and her eyes…full of shining” (3.395-98). Her
reaction is worth quoting as an exemplary struggle of a mortal with the goddess who has so controlled her.

Strange divinity! Why are you still so stubborn to beguile me?...Is it because Menelaus has beaten great Paris and wishes, hateful even as I am, to carry me homeward, is it for this that you stand in your treachery now beside me? Go yourself and sit beside him, abandon the gods’ way, turn your feet back never again to the path of Olympus but stay with him forever, and suffer for him, and look after him until he makes you his wedded wife, or makes you his slave girl. Not I. I am not going to him. It would be too shameful. I will not serve his bed (3.399-411).

Helen’s words indicate the importance of rejecting the influence of an immortal who would lead one astray. That Aphrodite appears in such beguiling ways also indicates the importance of first recognizing that one is indeed under the influence of an immortal, in order to take a more prudent course.\(^{182}\)

Paris, we have seen, is easy to recognize for who he is and, clearly, Helen come to question his charms.\(^{183}\) As the passage just quoted shows, her attempts to reject Aphrodite coincide with her rejection of Paris. Despite her struggle with Aphrodite, the goddess does force her to sit in Paris’s bedchamber. Upon arriving there, however, Helen turns to him with words of derision and mockery.

So you came back from fighting. Oh, how I wish you had died there beaten down by the stronger man, who was once my husband. There was a time before now you boasted that you were better than warlike Menelaus, in spear and hand and your own strength. Go forth now and challenge warlike Menelaus once


\(^{183}\) That she did not at first may have had to do with Paris’s own association with Aphrodite or immortal beauty (see 24.763).
again to fight you in combat. But no: I advise you rather to let it be, and fight no longer with fair-haired Menelaus...recklessly. You might very well go down before his spear (3.428-36).

Whether or not Menelaus is to kill him, Helen foresees Paris’s demise in the war. She will say to Hector that, since the gods have brought vile things to pass,

I wish I had been the wife of a better man than [Paris], one who knew modesty and all things of shame that men say. But this man’s heart is no steadfast thing, nor yet will it be so ever hereafter; for that I think he shall take the consequence (6.349-53).

Despite his blindness, Paris will eventually be punished for not relinquishing Helen, or not struggling with the goddess who supplied his lust (24.28-30). ¹⁸⁴

Helen, then, knows and is concerned that her decision to follow Paris has caused much grief, both to herself and for those engaged in the war. Helen is not a goddess, despite her beauty or its effects. Unlike Paris, who should have, and unlike Aphrodite, who as a goddess never could, Helen has undergone and reflected on the changes she has experienced. And yet, she does not comprehend the entire meaning of the war. Perhaps it should not surprise us that the same woman who went off with Paris would fail to see the larger motives that have led to the war and its continuation. ¹⁸⁵ With her angry words to Aphrodite (quoted above) she tells the goddess that

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¹⁸⁴ “The most morally frivolous of the heroes is Paris, and he is among the heroes closest to the gods” (Redfield 1994: 242-43). Contrast Aphrodite’s threat to forsake Helen and let her be killed by Achaeans or Trojans, which (together with Helen’s obedience to her) implies that she will survive the Trojan War, is in keeping with the tradition’s account of her survival and return to Sparta after the war (3.413-17).

¹⁸⁵ Should we also detect a lingering opportunism in Helen, despite her current rejection of Aphrodite? When she speaks to Aphrodite, Helen asks the goddess:
Menelaus is motivated by his desire to have her back – not his anger at the Trojans. Like Menelaus, moreover, she is wrong to think that the entire Achaean alliance was set up in order to restore her marriage. As we noted, when she sees Hector, in book 6, and laments her decision to have followed Paris, she regrets the toll it has taken on him. She says that the hard work that has fallen on Hector’s heart is for the sake of her and Paris – “us two, on whom Zeus set a vile destiny, so that hereafter we shall be made into things of song for men of the future” (6.354-58; see 3.125-28). Here Helen displays the vanity that would have made her amenable to the seductions of Paris. When she says this to Hector she has briefly detained him on his way to see his wife, Andromache, mother to his son, whose depth and steadfastness are to be contrasted with Helen’s character (6.369-493). And what really impels Hector to fight - his own sense of honor and shame - is something greater than the wish to keep Helen in Troy for his brother, and forms a larger part of the song of the Trojan War or of Homer’s *Iliad.*

After all, Helen is in her own way a confused character. As she spends her time weaving a massive robe, directing her handmaidens to do “magnificent work,” or walking about in

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Will you carry me further yet somewhere among cities fairly settled? In Phrygia or in lovely Maionia? Is there some mortal man there also who is dear to you? Is it because Menelaus has beaten great Paris and wishes, hateful even as I am, to carry me homeward, is it for this that you stand in your treachery now beside me? (3.400-05)

She will wait for Menelaus. But it seems she also knows that Phrygia and Maionia are the two cities that have benefited from Troy’s need to mortgage the war (18.287-92).

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shimmering garments, she inhabits, as it were, a dream (3.125-28, 6.321-24, 3.139-45). When she stands atop the wall and confesses to what she has forsaken back in Sparta, she seems to enter into a stream of consciousness, wondering how she arrived at her fate (3.172-79). She even asks aloud, “Did it happen this way?” (3.179). Yet the poem investigates just how the war takes on themes of greater magnitude than that of the turmoil she experiences and imagines. At the same time, Helen’s presence in Troy was the original *casus belli*. Nonetheless, even as she will become less significant in our understanding of the true cause of the war as well as of its meaning, we will observe that she retains a vital symbolic importance (see below, especially 4.7).

### 3.3 The Trojan War and the Emergence of a Public Conflict - From a Conflict between Individuals to a Conflict Between Alliances

The shield that Hephaestus will fashion for Achilles, described in book 18, contains a portrayal of the city during peacetime. It includes a scene where officials deliberate before the community on a matter of justice, the proper restitution that a murderer should pay (18.497-508). As they require public remedies, private transgressions do not remain private. Such public remedies prevent private citizens from seeking their own private revenge, and are necessary to thwart the chaos of violent vendettas and counter-retaliations, to keep the public realm stable. The duel is a different matter. While there is a sort of poetic justice to it - in that Menelaus, who was wronged, is stronger than Paris, the transgressor – their duel is of course different from the kind of public adjudication depicted on the shield. It was not set up to punish the offender, as would be the case, for instance, were Paris to have been a Spartan citizen. While it lasted, the duel was violent, and took place in the context of warfare between enemies, in contrast to what the shield
depicts as a peaceful way of responding to a transgression and preserving public order within a polis.

At the same time, we saw, the duel was an organized event subject to rules agreed upon between the enemies. Yet, despite its violence and wretchedness, war itself is usually not a matter of simple chaos or disorder. For one thing, each of the enemy groupings must itself be organized.187 This war is the result of much organization on the part of the Achaean and Trojans, making it a “public” enterprise for those who belong to each of the given alliances. After all, all of the Achaean fighters and those allied to Troy have left their private situations, their homes and their families, to fight near Troy, and even the Trojans themselves must fight to defend their homes that the city walls contain.

Of course, although the duel brings out the origins of the war, it is only part of a larger war, a smaller conflict taking place in the context of a larger one. This rather obvious point suggests another perspective on Agamemnon’s claim that the duel is significant in relation to his own quarrel against the Trojans. That is, just as the duel points to the earliest origins of the war, as when Menelaus assumes that the general conflict centers on his grievance, so Agamemnon’s reference to his own quarrel against the Trojans would point to his own role in the origins of the conflict ten years prior to the present situation. It also raises the matter of how the other Achaean agreed to join him on the expedition to Troy. And, indeed, there are a number of other references to the Achaean’s involvement in the origins of the war that are to be examined. In so doing, we shall try to show, the Achaean’s involvement in the war is to be seen as a larger, more public undertaking, which eventuates in a more developed polis community. The meaning of

187 Cf. Plato Protagoras 322b; Aristotle Politics 1253a1-8, in the context of its reference Nestor’s words about the need for peace amongst allies in order to wage war on the enemy, at Iliad 9.63-64.
politics will also emerge from the motives that impelled the combatants as they formed the alliance. This would lead us to discuss how the Achaeans built their alliance more than ten years before the present action of the poem (see chapter six).

At the same time, however, the Achaeans began to form their alliance in reaction to Troy’s own involvement in Paris’s crimes. We should therefore discuss the Trojans’ involvement first. Having discussed Paris and Helen, we should discuss some of the other major characters, and events, that create and shape Troy’s alliance throughout the course of the Trojan War.

3.4 Trojan Culpability; Troy as a Private or Sub-Political Regime: From Paris’s Crimes to Troy’s Destruction

The *Iliad* contains details that, when taken together, allow us to view Troy’s conduct and characteristics from the time of her involvement in Paris’s affair to the formation of the Trojan alliance, to the poem’s present situation in the tenth year in the war. The Trojans’ participation in the war comes about in reaction to the Achaeans’ fight against them. That is only the proximate cause of their involvement, however, as Troy plays its own role in bringing the city into war. That will become clear once we examine some of the dynamics between the various events that lead the Trojans further into the war, on the one hand, and, on the other, the respective characters who play leading roles in the city.

As part of that examination, we can observe pivotal events and decisions where the city comes to be involved in Paris’s crimes, which thence transforms them into Trojan crimes. In other words, Paris’s crimes enter into the Troy’s public realm. Nonetheless, we shall see that Troy itself comes into view as a city defined by private interests; her public affairs are determined by private ends. Indeed, Paris’s greed and softness, coupled with his obliviousness to danger, is characteristic of the city at large. This is clearest in the conduct of the ruling family,
with Priam at its head. In turn, as we shall discuss, the Trojans’ strategy, or their lack thereof, led them to seek allies.

3.4.1 Troy’s Culpability and a Protracted War
Troy as a city could have reversed or remedied Paris’s crimes early on. Before the Achaean kings formed their alliance against Troy, Menelaus himself went to Troy to regain Helen and the possessions. We learn this in the teichoskopiê scene in book 3. As Helen describes the leading Achaeans, one of the elders, Antenor, recalls Menelaus’s earlier visit. Menelaus, he recalls, was accompanied by Odysseus. Antenor hosted and entertained them in his halls, was advised of their mission, and observed them speak before the assembled Trojans. Each in his own way was an impressive speaker, according to Antenor (3.162-224).

Later in the poem, however, we are told something of what happened at that assembly; and since this is all that is said about that assembly in the poem, it seems to be its main event. Another member of the Trojan elite, Antimachus, was there, and he had profited more than any other Trojan from the possessions that Paris had taken from Sparta. He certainly made his interest known in the assembly. Were the Trojans to have agreed with Menelaus and Odysseus, Antimachus would have had to return those riches. He therefore argued that instead of reversing Paris’s offence the Trojans should simply kill Menelaus (11.123-41). That obviously did not happen, but nor did the Trojans grant the emissaries’ demands.

That Antenor’s position at that assembly would have been to return Helen and the possessions might be gathered from what he recounts to Helen about Menelaus and Odysseus’s visit years earlier, and from what he will say in an upcoming assembly. That assembly takes place toward the end of book 7, and its context is worth noting. There, much like the one that took place during Menelaus’s and Odysseus’s visit, the Trojans seem to have the opportunity to put an end to the war by returning Helen and the possessions. We have noted how many
references point to the origins of the war: Hera and Athene’s enmity toward Troy; the duel between Menelaus and Paris; the teichoskopiê scene where Antenor recalls the earlier embassy, and Helen and the Trojan elders espy leading Achaean kings; the catalogue of ships in book 2. By the last third of book 7, on the other hand, the action of the poem will have brought the reader’s attention to the prolongation of the war, and its destructiveness.

In order to set up the duel between Menelaus and Paris, as we noted, the two alliances agreed, under a solemn oath to Zeus, to a ceasefire. However, after Paris fled to his bedchamber and Helen, in an even more grievous violation of that agreement, the Trojan Pandarus lets fly from his bow an arrow that struck and critically injured Menelaus (4.112-40). At that point, Agamemnon declares that he knows that Zeus will destroy the entire city of Troy (4.157-68). So, then, the war is renewed – and our first descriptions of battle, deferred until this point - in intense fighting between the armies (described from the end of book 4 to the end of book 6). The audience has also been given to witness through Homer’s poetry the violent deaths of many men on both sides, and has been made to feel the losses those deaths mark for their respective families. Not least, there is the expanded, poignant scene where Hector’s wife, Andromache, has described the ravages of war upon her family (6.381-502).

Then, having fought through their human proxies, in book 5, the gods Apollo and Athene agreed to stop the fighting for the day by causing the enemies to arrange another duel. The duel was waged by Hector and Ajax - who, with the exception of Achilles, are the two strongest men in the two camps - where neither was able to overpower the other, so it ended in a draw. This marks the end of the day of intense fighting, at which point Nestor advises the Achaeans to ask the enemy for a day’s respite in order to bury those who have died in the war. On the Trojan

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side, King Priam proposes the same. A break is needed, but the war will go on. In a clear reference to the lengthiness of the war, Nestor has also urged the Achaeans to build a wall to better fortify themselves against the Trojans.

So it is in this general context of the war as a protracted conflict that “the thoughtful Antenor” speaks again, to the assembled Trojan alliance.

Trojans and Dardanians and companions in arms: hear me while I speak forth what the heart within my breast urges. Come then: let us give back Helen of Argos to [Menelaus and Agamemnon] to take away, seeing now we fight with our true pledges made into lies; and I see no good thing’s accomplishment for us in the end, unless we do this (7.345-53).

In war, the alternative to a good end is to be grievously harmed or even destroyed. Unlike the combatants, Homer’s audience knows for certain that this is what will happen to Troy. As noted, even Apollo, despite his sympathy for the Trojans, has conceded this to their ferocious enemy, Athene, just before the most recent duel (7.30-32). At this point the mortal combatants also seem to see more clearly that Troy is fated to be destroyed. In his scene with Andromache, Hector has been altogether unsure that Troy can be defended, and even seems to be convinced that it cannot (6.447-49).189 For Antenor, the matter is clear, as he tells the Trojans, because “now we fight with our true pledges made into lies,” by which he refers to Pandarus’s breaking of the oath to maintain a ceasefire during the first duel.190 That is, for reasons of prudence as much as (or more than) justice, they must return Helen and the possessions. Much as with the embassy from Menelaus and Odysseus early on, however, here too the Trojans decide that there will be no returning Helen. Paris’s reaction to Antenor’s appeal – where he clarifies again his

identification with sensuality - is to state that while he is willing to have the possessions returned, he will not return Helen to the Achaeans. Next to speak is Priam, who does not overrule Paris, but simply affirms him, and who thus denies Antenor’s plea (7.365-78).

3.4.2 King Priam’s Culpability and Troy as a Regime Based on Private Ties
That assembly shows one instance among others where Troy does not provide for deliberation or real argument about what might constitute the common good. As Flaumenhaft observes,

Trojan assembly, the *agorē*, is located just outside the doors (2.787–88; 7.346) of the king’s royal *oikos*, or household…Trojan assemblies and councils are not occasions for extended public deliberation or oratory. Instead, there is usually a brief exchange or a weak suggestion that does not result in action.191

On this last point, we note again the inaction with regard to returning Helen and the possessions that results from Antimachus’s and Paris’s respective statements in assembly.

It is clear from Agamemnon’s statements concerning the duel between Menelaus and Paris that he has his own understanding of the war, and we shall discuss below Agamemnon’s leadership of the Achaean alliance, and his motives to wage war against Troy. For now we can assert that it was too late by the time of the first duel, and before Pandarus broke the oath, for the Trojans to avoid the Achaeans’ onslaught. Perhaps the Trojans could have avoided their fate only had they returned Helen and the possessions to Menelaus when he and Odysseus came to Troy so long ago. Thus it is clear from early on that, for failing to rectify the matter and – by profiting from Paris’s crimes - for active involvement in them, the Trojans themselves are to be blamed for their fate.

191 Flaumenhaft 2005: 5. As we shall discuss further in the next chapter, the Achaeans achieve a far more public, or political, community. On this matter Raaflaub (e.g., 1993: 46-48) does not distinguish clearly enough between the Trojan and Achaean alliances.
We should recall that Antenor is not the only Trojan to disapprove of Paris. In fact, most Trojans detest Paris. With the announcement of the duel between Menelaus and Paris - which would end the war - these Trojans “were joyful, hoping now to be rid of all the sorrow of warfare” (3.111-12). We saw that after Aphrodite swept Paris away, and Menelaus paced back and forth searching for him, Paris was hated “among them all,” – that is, the bulk of the Trojans - “as dark death is hated” (3.451-54). Yet these Trojans can do nothing decisive to return what Paris stole. Unlike Antenor, they do not speak in a Trojan assembly; nor have they been able to affirm Antenor’s advice, which, again, has not been effective.

That Paris’s behavior is somehow elemental to Troy itself is suggested by the moment where the Trojan leading elders sit atop the wall with Priam and watch Helen approach, just before the teichoskopiê. They “murmur softly” to each other:

Surely, there is no blame on Trojans and strong-greaved Achaeans if for long time they suffer hardship for a woman like this. Terrible is the likeness of her face to immortal goddesses. Still, though she be such, led her to away in the ships, lest she be left behind, a grief to us and our children (3.156-60).

Antenor is among these elders and, it would seem, the most prudent among them. Their collective remarks show, however, that while Paris is the most extreme case of an individual who is under the influence of Aphrodite, he is not the only Trojan susceptible to the seduction of physical beauty. In taking their own private pleasure from her appearance, they remind one of Paris in his self-concern. Further, these elites have made her in some degree a possession of them all – in the quoted text they refer to the “Trojans,” in the plural – so that the original, private marriage in Sparta has been replaced not only by her relation with Paris but also by their common admiration of her looks.

Although the elders refer to the harm suffered in order to keep Helen, they do not appear to have suffered much. They are unable to fight on account of age, so have not seen combat in
the war. The teichoskopiê scene of which this is a part, we noted, hearkens back to the beginning of the war, when the leading Achaeans would have first appeared within eyesight of Helen and Priam, and when the fighting had not yet begun. At the same time, not only does Homer frame the scene as part of the present time of the poem (the tenth year of the war), here the Trojan elders expressly speak of suffering hardship on account of Helen “for such a long time.” Homer also portrays these Trojans’ naïveté even as they sit inside the walls during the war’s tenth year. Comically enough - like Paris, in their own way - they have been overcome by the aesthetic experience afforded them by Helen, and, prior to now, at least, to the point that they are unaware of the injustice, and the danger, of keeping her at Troy. Certainly, nothing issues from their concern here. Although Homer characterizes them as “excellent speakers,” he adds ironic distance to this characterization by comparing them to cicadas, who settle the forest trees “to issue their delicate voice of singing” (3.150-52). As they murmur softly to each other about Helen’s looks, the elders seem immune to the danger which the poet’s audience knows is fast approaching on the other side of Troy’s walls. They inhabit a dreamy sort of awareness, as if time stops, as they talk about Helen’s presence among them. Indeed we are struck more by Helen’s hypnotic influence on them than by their vague discomfort and their view that she should, after all, be returned to the Achaeans.

Further, what underlies their obliviousness is the view that, since immortal goddesses are so affected by the mortal Helen’s beauty as to become jealous of her, they themselves can hardly resist her charms. For them, beauty is what would move men to action. Their view of the war as a hardship suffered on account of Helen’s beauty, by Achaeans and Trojans alike, is in keeping with the one expressed by a later poet’s phrase, Marlowe’s “face that launched a thousand ships.” Just like Paris, they can only imagine a fight as connected with beauty - and, to the point at which they speak in the poem, it has not been much of a fight.
Yet Troy as a whole will also suffer. To understand further how the Trojans become involved in the war – as well as how Paris’s behavior is not out of character in Troy – we turn to the character and role of his father, Troy’s leader, King Priam. Whereas Helen regrets having come to Troy - and even the elders who, perhaps swayed by Antenor, think that the Trojans should send her back to the Achaeans – Priam expresses no such concern. He does not speak of returning Helen to those who have come for her. The elders are talking, “but Priam aloud call[s] out to Helen,” calling her “dear child,” telling her to sit beside him and “look at [her] husband of time past, [her] friends and [her] people” (3.161-63). He then says, “I am not blaming you: to me the gods are blameworthy who drove upon me this sorrowful war against the Achaeans” (3.164-65). Priam thus implicitly disagrees with the elders, Antenor in particular, as he will do when he decides not to overrule Paris after the assembly where his son and Antenor speak in book 7.

While Priam does not with those words deny the hardships of the war, he blames the gods as solely responsible for it. Priam does not blame Paris for the war, as Hector and Antenor do. Priam is also unlike Paris, who denies the war’s harshness and who thinks he can depend on Aphrodite. He is also unlike Helen who, we saw, blames herself for her role in the war. Further, he is unlike the elders, who are aware that Helen’s beauty has the power even to move the immortals, but who admit that Troy continues the war by keeping her. His blame of the gods in effect displaces the obvious blame that Paris has incurred, and the need to return Helen in order to try to end the war. Again, he sees more of the war’s harshness than Paris does; but this would render his blindness as to its cause even more apparent.

192 For references to Priam’s status in Troy, see Flaumenhaft 2004: 4.
Indeed, like Helen and most of the other Trojans, Priam also has not fully recognized the
harshness of the war. We are given this sense from his remarks to Helen as he asks her to
describe the leading Achaeans she sees on the battlefield. Of the first, who turns out to be
Agamemnon, he asks:

So you could tell me the name of this man who is so tremendous;
who is this Achaean man of power and stature? Though in truth
there are others taller by a head than he is, yet these eyes have
never yet looked on a man so splendid nor so lordly as this: such a
man might well be royal (3.166-70).

To some extent, he admires the leader of the enemy alliance for his aesthetic appearance. He
will similarly admire Ajax, another “Achaean of power and stature,” who “[towers] above the
Argives by head and broad shoulders” (3.225-27). The more impressive these men, the more
Priam should fear – not admire – them. It is in this context where Antenor makes his remarks
about the earlier embassy from Odysseus and Menelaus: he acknowledges how they appeared at
the assembly then, but emphasizes their strengths as speakers (3.203-24). This would call
attention to the Achaeans’ claim to a just cause in the war, and to their anger at the Trojans.
Priam is a naive figure for not focusing on this aspect of the war. After Helen has told him that
Agamemnon is the man he has asked about, Priam speaks admiringly of the strength of his
enemy’s command: “O son of Atreus, blessed, child of fortune and favor, many are these
beneath your sway, these sons of the Achaeans” (3.182-83, see 3.184-90). However, given the
sorrows of the war, in the absence of concern about what motivates the enemy, his awareness of
Agamemnon’s power is rather disturbing.

Together with Priam’s merely vague awareness of the war’s sorrows, is his marked
aversion to harm. He compares the army under Agamemnon’s command favorably with the
army that he beheld at another time, when he was under another leader’s command, during his
one experience of warfare.
Once before this time I visited Phrygia of the vineyards. There I looked upon Phrygian men with their swarming horses, so many of them…and I myself, a helper in war, was marshaled among them on that day when the Amazon women came, men’s equals (3.184-89).

In the pre-technological and much more gendered society of the *Iliad*, it is Priam who refers to the military equality of the Amazonians.¹⁹³ When he is called to swear the oaths before the duel between Menelaus and Paris, he shudders (3.259). Having done so - joined, and probably prodded, by Antenor (3.312-13) - Priam rushes from the scene, back to Troy, after this brief statement:

> Listen to me, you Trojans and you strong-greaved Achaeans. Now I am going away to windy Ilion, homeward, since I cannot look with these eyes on the sight of my dear son fighting against warlike Menelaus in single combat. Zeus knows – maybe he knows – and the rest of the gods immortal for which of the two death is appointed to end this matter (3.304-09).

Unlike Agamemnon, who will refuse to let Menelaus fight against Hector in book 7 (7.101-21), Priam again denies all earthly agency, turning instead to the unknowable determinations of the gods.¹⁹⁴ And he remains fearful. Afterwards Hector fights Ajax rather than Menelaus, after which there is a pause to collect the corpses from the battlefield. Yet Priam forbids the Trojans who collect the corpses from crying aloud, perhaps because he wishes to deny the violent effects of the war (7.427-28). He stays out of the war, and appears again in book 21, where, in fear of


Achilles, he tells the Trojan guards to hold open the gates so that the troops can come in from the battlefield to the protection of the city (21.526-36).\(^{195}\)

As the leader of Troy, Priam’s character decisively shapes the city. There is, moreover, a dynamic relationship between Troy’s leadership and other elements, such as its geographic situation, its architecture, the way that rule is practiced, its customs and habits; and these elements make Troy a city where Priam can be secure as the type of king that he is. It starts with geography: Troy is blessed for being situated on a fertile plain supported by deep-flowing rivers (e.g., 3.74, 5.773-74). Troy’s walls are large and protective. Perhaps her most frequent epithet is “strong-walled Ilion.” The city itself is full of comforts. Troy has housed much wealth in addition to the treasures that Paris took from Sparta along with Helen (e.g., 1.127-29, 6.286-96, 9.401-03, 11.123-35, 18.288-89, 22.46-51, 24.229-37, 24.543-46).\(^{196}\)

Most of that wealth is contained in the royal apartments, which are voluminous. For Priam has several wives, many concubines, fifty sons and twelve daughters (6.242-50, 21.84-96, 8.305, 24.496-97, 6.87). Priam’s erotic energy is in keeping with his aesthetic approach to others, and it is more in evidence than his courage.\(^{197}\) It should be remarked here that, in taking Helen from Sparta, Paris was to some extent a product of his environment. The members of the royal family also all live together. Each couple has its own apartment, but they are all connected

\(^{195}\) See Flaumenhaft 2004: 7.

\(^{196}\) Troy’s epithets – “the stronghold of well-founded Troy,” “strong walled citadel,” “Troy of the wide ways,” etc. - also illustrate her riches.

within the royal compound, a dynastic “breeding ground” (6.242-50). Homer does refer at times to other dynastic families among the Trojan allies. The one inside Troy he refers to is Antenor’s (e.g., 2.822, 3.122-24 4.87, 6.299-300, 11.58-59). Priam’s family, however, is overwhelmingly dominant. As we learn in the catalogue of the Trojan fighters in book 2, for instance, Antenor’s sons cannot even lead their own battalions, which are led by the king’s cousin, Aeneas (2.819-23). Priam’s rule is also relatively unquestioned. Moderate or prudent policy – such as Antenor’s; or the regular soldiers’ hatred for Paris; and, what this implied, their wish to reverse Paris’s injustice – is ignored by Priam. As in most other aspects of his life presented in the Iliad, Priam’s rule seems to go along of itself, unquestioned.

The all-encompassing importance of the palace is also clear from Homer’s descriptions of Trojans’ movements from the palace to the wall, where most often there seems to be no city space in between them. That, as Flaumenhaft observes, “has the effect of attaching all the important ‘inside’ action in Troy to the palace.” The point also pertains to public deliberation, such as there is, where the assemblies in Troy are held outside the doors of Priam’s palace (2.787-88; 7.346). Decisions belong to the king – once again, not to the mass of soldiers, or

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198 The phrase is Taplin’s 1995: 117.

199 On Homer’s references to a few other families in the alliance, see Taplin 1995: 117 n. 14.

200 22.46-51 suggests that other families buy into Priam’s through marrying their daughters to his sons.

201 This is noted by Flaumenhaft 2004: 8.


203 As noted by Flaumenhaft 2004: 5.
other elites. In the assembly where there would be some contention – where Antenor argues that the Trojans should return Helen and the possessions, in book 7 – again, the decision is made without pause to affirm Paris’s desire to keep Helen.

Aristotle will give the general definition of the political “regime” (politeia) as an arrangement of a polis with respect to its offices, particularly the one that has the authority over all matters. For what has authority in the polis is everywhere the governing body, and the governing body is the regime.\(^{204}\)

According to this account, Priam’s Trojan regime is concerned most of all with the private affairs of the royal family. Put another way, Troy is ruled by her royal family, rather than by a larger public, and that family rules in its own interest rather than with a view to a common good. That is in keeping with the air of oblivion that we saw characterizes the Trojan elites, which is clearest in the poem in their attitude toward Helen. It is true of Priam and Paris most of all. In turn, as we noted, neither Priam nor Paris experiences significant challenges (least of all from each other), which leaves them free to seek voluptuary lives of sensual pleasure or the avoidance of pain. It is to defend this regime that other brave Trojan fighters, those who do not belong to the royal family, exert themselves. Under such leadership, however, they are ill-disciplined and less effective. Benardete calls attention to the shame and steadfastness of Achaean warriors in contrast to the fickle spiritedness of most Trojan warriors.\(^{205}\) The Achaeans experience a kind of shame before each other, which leads them to find safety in “concerted virtue.”\(^{206}\)

\(^{204}\) *Politics* 1278b9-11, translated by Lord 2013.

\(^{205}\) Benardete 2000b: 25.

\(^{206}\) Benardete 2000b: 25.
shame would seem to stem from a sense of equality among the troops that is lacking in the more hierarchical Trojan alliance. (We shall discuss this difference further in chapter 4.) It is significant, then, that most of the deaths described in the *Iliad* are of minor Trojans and their allies.\(^{207}\)

Further, we note that the royal family enjoys proximity to the city’s sacred temples as these and the palace are both situated on the acropolis, above the rest of the city (6.86-88, 6.269-79, 7.81-83).\(^{208}\) We observe this in a scene in book 6, when Hector goes through the royal apartments to meet Andromache. Before that he is detained by Helen he is detained by his mother, and Priam’s main wife, Hecube. She tries to keep him longer, but he instructs her to go with her ladies-in-waiting to place before Athene in her temple “the largest and loveliest” robe in the palace, “that which is far your dearest possession” (6.264-73). Then, when Hecube goes to the fragrant storeroom, she selects one of the elaborately wrought robes, the work of Sidonian women, whom Paris himself, the godlike, had brought home from the land of Sidon, crossing the wide sea, on that journey when he brought back also gloriously descended Helen (6.288-92).

She then places the best of these before Athene in her temple on the citadel (6.293-311). The image reminds us of Paris’s ill-gotten gains, but also points to a Trojan attempt to make use of them to gain Athene’s favor. As Taplin remarks, Troy itself is implicitly compared to the cloth, “magnificent but tainted,” and it is of course refused by Athene (6.311).\(^{209}\)

\(^{207}\) See Schein 1984: 73-75.

\(^{208}\) See Flaumenhaft 2004: 6 and references.

\(^{209}\) Taplin 1995: 118.
Just before Hector instructs Hecube to make offerings to Athene, his mother asks him why he has come to the city from the battlefield. She thinks of Hector not as a tireless warrior but as worn out by the Achaeans, who has come to lift his hands “from the peak of the citadel” to pour a libation of honey-sweet wine to Zeus and the other immortals – as well as to have a drink for himself (6.242-68)! Such proximity – or a lack of separation between the royal family and the gods – may explain in part why Priam neglects his own duties as a ruler. Perhaps he does not see himself as an agent separate from the gods, capable of making decisions. By the same logic, as we saw, he could also assert that the gods are completely responsible for the war. Conversely, such proximity - and the sense of relative familiarity that would accompany it - may in part explain why Paris so identifies with the goddess while he is blind to his own culpability. It might also suggest why the Trojan royals, in their hedonism, are reminiscent of the immortals who enjoy the easy life of pleasures.

There is, moreover, a deep-rooted history of such presumptuousness toward the gods in Troy. There is a story from Troy’s past to which Homer alludes, where the walls are linked to the enmity of the gods. It is that Poseidon, joined by Apollo, built the walls for Laomedon, Priam’s father, who then failed to pay them for their labors (7.452-53, 21.441-54, with 24.26-27).210 In addition to impiety, this history tells of Trojan ingratitude and the improper treatment of foreigners, and opportunism, which continue to be evident in Paris’s violation of xenia when he took Helen, in Troy’s refusal to relinquish her, and in Pandarus’s violation of the truce.211

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210 Flaumenhaft 2004: 3-4.

211 On further connections to the latter act, see Taplin 1995: 109. Another instance of the violation of xenia by Laomedon was his treatment of Heracles (see 5.638-51). On the Trojans’ ingratitude towards their own allies in the war, see, e.g., 5.471-84, 17.146-51.
The story of Laomedon and the construction of Troy’s walls tells of how the Trojans’ incurred the gods’ enmity, but it also points to the false comfort the Trojans take from their present security behind the walls. Eventually, even Priam will come to see this. By book 22, when he laments Hector’s imminent death at the hands of Achilles, he says:

[Soon I will have] seen my sons destroyed and my daughters dragged away captive and the chambers of marriage wrecked and the innocent children taken and dashed to the ground in the hatefulness of war, and the wives of my sons dragged off by the accursed hands of the Achaeans. And myself last of all, my dogs in front of my doorway will rip me raw, after some man…has torn the life out of my body (22.62-68).

[W]hen an old man is dead and down, and the dogs mutilate the grey head and the grey beard and the parts that are secret (aidō), this for all sad mortality, is the sight most pitiful (22.74-76).

This image is just one of the many references to Troy’s destruction throughout the poem, some of which we have noted, and many of which appear in the later books. Here it is fitting that Troy’s king, so defined by his own household, should focus on his own death therein; and it is perversely and disturbingly fitting that Priam, whose genitals have so defined him, imagines his guard dogs gnawing on them.²¹² It is worth noting, however, that here again he does not mention concern for the city or his people.

Priam comes to realize that, all along, he could have chosen to stop the war, had he only disciplined his unruly offspring. After Hector has died, and Paris remains alive, we are given a display of how he might have disciplined and refused the latter. As he prepares to meet Achilles, with whom he will plead for the ransom of Hector’s body, he refers to those of his sons who have not died and are still alive, all of them ne’er do wells. (Unsurprisingly, Paris is not the only

one of his kind born to Priam.\textsuperscript{213} “[A]ll that are left me are the disgraces, the liars and the
dancers, champions of the chorus, the plundersers of their own people in their land of lambs and
kids” (24.260-62). He tells them to prepare his cart and, “in terror at the old man’s scolding,”
they do as they are told (24.265-66). Yet it will have taken the hatefulness of war for Priam to
learn to think and speak in such terms, and his knowledge will have come too late to help save
Troy.

Indeed, there was perhaps little that could have been done by the time that Agamemnon
gathered the Achaean alliance, to say nothing of his reaction to Paris’s flight from the duel and to
Pandarus’s breaking of the oaths to establish the ceasefire. In book 7, after Paris states that,
come what may, he will keep Helen (and Priam, over Antenor’s objection, does not deny his
son), the Trojans send a herald to announce this to the Achaeans. On the Achaean side,
Diomedes replies by urging his fellow Achaeans not to accept Paris’s possessions and, moreover,
not accept Helen’s return should the Trojans re-think the matter and offer her back. For,
Diomedes says, “one who is very simple can see it, that by this time the terms of death hang over
the Trojans” (7.399-402).

3.4.3 The Trojans Use their Wealth for Provisions, Ransom Payments, and
Allies
Given Priam’s staggering naiveté as their king, how have the Trojans been able to keep
themselves from being destroyed? Obviously, their walls are of benefit to them. So is their
legendary wealth. Hector makes reference, in book 18, to the decline of Troy’s wealth because it
has been sold off during the war to the cities of Phrygia and Maionia – presumably, for

Their wealth has also allowed them to pay ransom for soldiers who have been apprehended by the enemy, and thus to escape death. Homer mentions instances of ransom – that is, instances where given suppliants were allowed to go on living, in exchange for paying ransom – particularly to Achilles. When Achilles confronts Priam’s son, Lycaon, we learn that earlier in the war Achilles had already captured and sold him, for a hundred oxen, to inhabitants of the island of Lemnos (21.35-46). He caught another two of Priam’s sons while they tended their sheep, and they were released after paying a ransom (11.101-06; cf. also 6.421-28, 22.46-51).

While the wealth and treasures that Trojans have amassed have helped them save some of their sons, they are unable to avail themselves of them during the contemporary action of the poem (cf. also 18.288-92). Now, in the poem’s present, the Trojans who are apprehended and expect to be spared for a ransom are all killed.\(^{214}\) Diomedes and Odysseus go on a reconnaissance mission and capture Dolon venturing beyond the city walls. Dolon begs to be spared for a ransom, and Odysseus promises to free him if tells them about his own present mission and gives them intelligence about the Trojans’ tactical positions. Dolon does so, but is immediately killed by Diomedes (10.334-461). When Achilles captures Lycaon for the second time, he kills him because he is enraged at the death of Patroclus (21.47-119).

Prior to that scene, and Achilles’ new stance of contempt for the supplicant, are several scenes where Agamemnon refuses to accept ransom for those who supplicate him to spare their lives. The sons of Antimachus promise to pay Agamemnon plenty from their father’s treasures. As we noted earlier, many of those treasures had been stolen from Menelaus in the first place. For that, and to avenge Antimachus for arguing that the Menelaus and Odysseus should be

killed, when they first came to Troy, Agamemnon kills the brothers (11.122-47). In another context, prior to the duel between Menelaus and Paris, as we saw, Agamemnon refers to the ransom that he will demand if Paris falls to Menelaus – and the demand he makes is, if anything, much stronger after Paris flees from the duel (3.288-91; 3.455-61). Agamemnon is not to be tempted by small treasures from those who supplicate him – certainly not those which had belonged to his brother - when he intends to take much more, and wishes not to waste time whilst attempting to destroy (and thus to punish) Troy as a whole (cf. 6.66-71 with 3.281-91, 3.455-61, and above, 3.1).

Indeed, in book 6, Menelaus captures the Trojan Adrestos, and the latter promises him the ransom of treasures from his rich father’s house. Menelaus is about to agree to the transaction, but Agamemnon intervenes to admonish him to kill Adrestos. Agamemnon restates here his view that justice requires Troy’s utter destruction (6.37-62). Why settle for small ransoms when the entire city can be destroyed? Agamemnon seeks revenge, and to satisfy his anger (see below, 4.6). This scene thus makes clear that the Trojans cannot count on their wealth to pay off the enemy. To defend themselves, the Trojans need warriors.

In spite of such leadership and such a policy, and so many brothers from the ruling family who are unwilling to fight, there are capable warriors on the Trojan side. The common people will fight, albeit under unsteady leadership (see 3.4.2). We will also discuss the most exceptional Trojan fighter, Hector, in the next section of the chapter. Yet even Troy’s best warrior, like the rest of his city, depends on the aid of other fighters – kings, and the men under their rule - who have come from foreign poleis. Early in the work the point is well made by Agamemnon, when he decides to test the Achaeans’ willingness to fight the Trojans.

At their assembly in book 2, that is - precisely by telling them that they should leave the Trojan plain for their respective cities - Agamemnon hopes that the troops will prove themselves
ready and willing to do the opposite and fight on against Troy. In his speech, he remarks that it will be a great shame that future men will hear that so strong and numerous a host as the Achaeans ended up fighting the present war in vain, and even though they outnumber the Trojans by a vast amount (2.119-30). Yet, by way of diminishing their shame, Agamemnon immediately points out that his comparison applies only to the city of Troy proper. The problem, he says, is that the Trojans have

allies (epikouroi) from other cities in their numbers, wielders of the spear, to help them, who drive me hard back again and will not allow me, despite my will, to sack the stronghold of well-founded Troy (2.130-33).

Using the metaphor of an archeological dig site, Taplin has very helpfully undertaken what he calls “poetic fieldwork” on the historical origins of the Achaean and Trojan alliances.\textsuperscript{215} He notes continuities between the alliances, where clues can be taken from Homer’s description of one and, as appropriate, transposed to the other, to help compose a sketch of the “anthropology” that informs the epic.\textsuperscript{216} In order for the Trojans’ to defend themselves, Taplin

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\textsuperscript{215} Taplin 1995: especially 46-109; 1990: 67-70. What Taplin writes of the Achaean alliance pertains, \textit{mutatis mutandis}, to the Trojan one: “It is possible to make a coherent quasi–reconstruction of [the Achaean offensive alliance] by piecing together scattered circumstantial details. The method is similar to that used by Moses Finley for transforming Homer into history, but, unlike him, I do not wish to claim that the presuppositions of the poem necessarily reflect the historical reality of any particular time or place. It may well be that the gathering of the host was an established episode in other epics” (67).

\textsuperscript{216} Taplin 1995: 57-60; 1990: 67-70. Taplin also refers in this context to Iliadic “politics” (1995: 57; cf. 7, where he calls the poem “highly political”), but he does not develop this line of enquiry. I shall discuss in the next chapter how the Achaeans provide for a more political community than do the Trojans.
writes, the city’s “summoner” – Priam, although with Hector as military leader – would have
gathered a host.217 “The verbs used are ageirein, keleuein, and otrunein (‘gather,’ ‘urge,’ ‘stir
up’).” Most often the object of those verbs is lāon [i.e., ‘the people’]; although “once the leader
has agreed to go at the call of another, his subjects have less choice.”218

The Trojan allies would not be defending their own cities and peoples. Thus, in book 5,
when Sarpedon rebukes Hector for not rallying his Trojan brothers and brothers-in-law, he
indicates why he would not have come to Troy. He states his own and the other Lycians’
position in the war.

[W]e, who are here as your companions, carry the fighting. I have
come, a companion to help you, from a very far place; Lycia lies
far away, by the whirling waters of Xanthos; there I left behind my
own wife and my baby son, there I left many possessions which
the needy man eyes longingly. Yet even so I drive on my Lycians,
and myself have courage to fight my man in battle, though there is
nothing of mine here that the Achaeans can carry away as spoil or
drive off (5.475-84).

What, then, motivated the allies to join the Trojan alliance? While the allies would have
had nothing of their own to defend in Troy, the summoner would have appealed to “past duties
and obligations, and [have made] assurances for the future.”219 For their efforts and sacrifices,
the summoner would also offer the allies “proper honor, due esteem, timē.” A related concept is

217 Taplin 1995: 57. Taplin seems to have in mind Priam’s role as ruler in stating that he would have been the
summoner. I see no evidence of Priam’s role as summoner, whereas 17.220-26, discussed below, points to Hector’s
having taken that role.


that of gratitude (*charis*).\(^{220}\) In addition to appeals to past and future obligations met and promised, Hector doles out payments to the allies during the course of the war, as incentives to fight.\(^ {221}\) Hector’s words in the midst of battle, in book 17, betray his own perspective on the purpose of the allies. He approaches them with this complaint and exhortation:

> Hear me, you numberless hordes of companions who live at our borders. It was not for any desire nor need of a multitude that man by man I gathered you to come here from your cities, but so that you might have good will to defend the innocent children of the Trojans, and their wives, from the fighting Achaeans. With such a purpose I wear out my own people for gifts (*dōrēma*) and food, wherewith I make strong the spirit within each of you (17.220-26).

Hector thus makes clear that the Trojans have used their wealth to keep themselves and allies segregated from each other, and that their relationship is an instrumental one. Yet despite Hector’s exhortation in book 17, fighters the allies often stand out from their Trojan counterparts. Sarpedon complains that he is a more vigorous fighter than the Trojans themselves, who have possessions and relatives to protect (5.483-84).\(^ {222}\) Just after Sarpedon is killed, in book 16, Glaucus is afraid that the Achaeans will strip his army and denigrate his body, berates Hector and the Trojans with these words: “Now you have utterly forgotten your armed companions who for your sake, far from their friends and the land of their fathers, are wearing their lives away, and you will do nothing to help them” (16.537-40). Later, in trying to shame Hector into a course that will lead the Achaeans to give up Sarpedon’s armor, Glaucus will state that, while the

\(^ {220}\) Taplin 1995: 57-60.

\(^ {221}\) Noted by Redfield (1994: 153) who takes a more sympathetic view of Hector’s conduct vis-à-vis the allies.

\(^ {222}\) As noted by Taplin 1995: 58.
Lycians are owed gratitude (*charis*), the Trojans neglect the fallen King who has been their guest friend (*xenos*) and comrade (*étairos*) (17.146-51). Moreover, he tells Hector:

> Take thought now how to hold fast your town, your citadel by yourself, with those your people who were born in Troy, since no Lycian will go forth now to fight with the Achaeans for the sake of your city, since after all we got no gratitude for our everlasting hard struggle against your enemies...[I]f any of the Lycian men will obey me, we are going home, and the headlong destruction of Troy shall be manifest (17.144-55).

As we shall also discuss in the next chapter, the Achaean alliance constitutes a much more common enterprise, or a community, than do Troy and her allies. In the Trojan view of the world, we have seen, Troy’s royal family understands the city to somehow emanate from the palace. Likewise, in book 2’s catalogue the list begins with Hector and “then radiates out in four directions to the allies who are geographically the farthest from Priam’s central city.”

The alliance formed by Troy and the other cities suffers from the same lack of public-spiritedness that we have described in this chapter as characterizing the involvement of Troy proper in the early and present stages of the war. The allies speak different languages, and are ill-coordinated. Despite their bravery (and in keeping with what we observed about Hector’s statement in book 17) the allies are not included in debates in public assembly – where, again, the ultimate decisions are in effect made by Priam. This is the case even though the allies have

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lived within Troy’s walls for some time, probably since the arrival of the Achaens.\textsuperscript{225} The policy can only detract from their esprit de corps.

Having discussed the use of payments - or the instrumental relationship between Troy and the allies - we should state the two other main reasons or factors that explain why Troy and her allies are less involved in a common action, and how these reinforce or augment one another. First, in Troy there has not been fertile ground for the alliance to form a community characterized by public-spiritedness, given that, as we have established, Troy itself has not formed such a community. (Again, in his words in book 17, Hector makes it clear that he is not interested in creating a community out of the alliance.) Second, as a corollary to the first point, we find it hard to imagine why their allies would have come to the aid of the Trojans out of a sense of justice or the public good, particularly given that Troy had the opportunity to avert the war by following the just course long ago - returning Helen and the possessions. As such, there is no evidence that the Trojan allies appeal to Troy’s defense as a matter of justice. Rather, as Flaumenhaft observes, they have come for their own, and very un-Trojan, reasons: “for foreign allies like Glaucus and Sarpedon…the war is not patriotic self-defense, but an opportunity to prove themselves the best of the Lycians (6.205–11; see 4.1, below).”\textsuperscript{226} In section 4.1 we shall discuss this most important motive for those allies to have come to Troy.

\textsuperscript{225} This seems very reasonable to assume given that the catalogue of book 2 so clearly hearkens back to the origins of the war when the Achaean and the Trojan alliances were formed.

\textsuperscript{226} Flaumenhaft 2004: 9.
3.5 Hector: The Great Exception Among the Trojans, who also Fails to Understand the Trojan Regime and the Trojan War

It sometimes happens that one is very unlike the rest of his family, and Homer’s art of characterization encompasses this phenomenon. Hector is an unlikely son of Priam. He is unlike his father and, most clearly, Hector is Paris’s opposite. Whereas the feminine Paris belongs inside his gorgeous bedchamber or at a dance, the masculine Hector belongs outside the city walls, his body grimed with mud and blood. To Paris’s softness and shamelessness, Hector is characterized by a martial spirit, a sense of honor, coupled with shame (cf. 3.391-94, 6.313-17, 6.506-10, 6.440-46, 18.249-87, 6.263-68). Among the other Trojan elites, as well, Hector is the great exception.227

Hector has doubtless been hardened by the ten years of warfare that have transpired since the Achaeans arrived. We saw that the other decision makers in Troy have not been so affected. Yet in spite of Hector’s exceptional character, like the other Trojan elites, in his own way Hector also fails to understand the Trojan War. Hector not only fights hard, and devises strategy and tactics, in a war brought on by Trojan softness. At the same time, he does not understand the significance of how exceptional his qualities are amongst the Trojans, so that under his leadership as their main fighter he further involves them in a war that it is not in their character to fight. It is true that the situation would have been – or will be - disastrous for the Trojans without Hector, as they will be crushed in short order once he dies, whereas his leadership in waging the war keeps the Trojans safe until then. Yet so important is he to Troy that one is left

227 Although Hector’s brother, the augur Helenus, calls Hector and the Dardanian Aeneas the leading men of the Trojans and Lycians, “whether it be in thought or fighting” (6.75-79), Hector is clearly more important than his cousin. (We shall discuss the Lycian Sarpedon further at the start of the next chapter, in sub-section 4.1.)
wondering whether Hector could not have made use of his exceptional qualities to lead the Trojans to disavow Paris’s action, to criticize the softness of the royal family, and to end the war.228

The Trojans depend on Hector, whose very name means “Protector.” Hector’s family depends on him. Andromache reminds Hector that her birth family in Thebe has been destroyed by the war – her father and brothers were killed by Achilles, her mother died soon after – so Hector is everything to her (6.400-30). Prior to meeting Andromache, in book 6, he leaves the battlefield to instruct his mother to gather the women of the royal family to pray and make offerings to Athene. Homer describes his arrival inside the gates, where “all the wives of the Trojans and their daughters came running about him to ask after their sons, after their brothers and neighbors, their husbands” (6.237-40; cf. 6.77-79; 6.251-312).229 When he goes then to meet Andromache and their child (“beautiful as a star shining”) Homer comments that Hector called the toddler Skamandrios, “but all others [called him] Astyanax – ‘lord of the city’ - since Hector alone saved Troy” (6.400-03; cf. 24.729-30).

Indeed, Hector is the only Trojan (other than the allies) mentioned in book 2’s catalogue (2.816–18).230 When Achilles leaves the battlefield to the rest of the Achaeans, in book 1, he warns them that they will lament how they have treated him “when in their numbers before man-

228 My account of Hector in this section - and in the comparison between Hector and Achilles, in the following chapters - is more in keeping with Flaumenhaft’s (2004) and Ahrensdorf’s (2014) than that of Redfield (1994), who is much more sympathetic to Hector and understands him to be the most central character of the Iliad. (Schein 1984 provides another sympathetic view of Hector and the Trojans generally.)


slaughtering Hector they drop and die” (1.242-43). In book 5, when the Achaeans led by Diomedes are prevailing, it is to Hector that the Lycians Sarpedon and Glaucus turn to complain that the Trojan fighters need to be rallied (5.471-92). Hector effects a pause in the battle, in book 7, to challenge the best of the Achaeans to a duel (7.55-91). In book 8, as the Trojans prevail over the Achaeans under Hector’s leadership, and might have destroyed them had the sun not gone down, he holds an assembly and instructs his troops to camp outside the wall in anticipation of destroying the enemy (8.489-541). His aristeia runs from books 11 to 18. Indeed, under Hector the Trojans might well have destroyed the Achaeans were Achilles not finally to enter the battle (e.g., 15.688-730).

As he proposes book 7’s duel, Hector says that if he kills his opponent he will return the corpse to the Achaeans, to be interred under a burial mound, so at some future time men will say:

‘This is the mound of a man who died long ago in battle, who was one of the bravest, and glorious Hector killed him. So will he speak some day, and my glory (kleos) will not be forgotten’ (7.87-90).

We saw that the first duel referred back to the original cause of the war as brought out in the transgression against Menelaus’s house. Earlier in the chapter we discussed the myopia of that unhappy couple, Paris and Helen, whose character and renown are certainly much lesser than Hector’s (6.354-62). Similarly, when Menelaus responds to this challenge from Paris’s brother, Agamemnon tells him that he is no match for Hector. Hector’s proposal of the second duel is one of many markers that tell us the poem has moved on. Helen’s implicit claim that the epic tradition will center on her sorrows is overtaken by Hector’s desire for glory.231

Yet, for all of his qualities as a citizen and a warrior, Hector is not far-sighted. He does not stop to think that the offerings he tells the women of the royal household to make to Athene, in book 6 – we noted earlier that prominent among them were garments stolen by Paris on his misadventure – would offend the goddess and be rejected (6.286-96, 6.311). So far from blaming the gods for the war, as his father does, Hector sees in it a great opportunity. In his speech to the Trojan troops at the end of book 8, in all of his confidence Hector says: “Oh, if I only could be as this in all my days immortal and ageless and be held in honor as Athene and Apollo are honored as surely as this oncoming day brings evil to the Achaeans” (8.538-41). There Hector seems to suggest what his ultimate wish would be. In book 13 he repeats the statement but varies it with a wish to be son to Zeus and Hera, and honored as Apollo and Athene are honored (13.825-28)! Unbeknownst to Hector, however, his confidence is unfounded. His statement in book 8 is immediately preceded by Zeus’s harsh statement to Hera and Athene – where he also reminds them of his own cosmic ascendency over the Titans in Tartarus - that he will allow Hector and the Trojans to prevail, but only until Achilles returns to the war over the fallen Patroclus (8.350-484). Of course, at that time Achilles will return in order to kill Hector. Thus after the Trojans shout approval of Hector’s instructions and make sacrifices to the gods, “the blessed gods [take] no part of it. They would not; so hateful to them was sacred Troy, and Priam, and the city of Priam” (8.550-52; cf. 6.269-311).

232 Similarly, just before the quoted statement, Hector says that to bring about victory he intends to strike Diomedes (8.532-41), but he is ignorant of how the latter’s chief roles in the poem has been to remind the gods of their separation from mortals. Another of Diomedes’ roles is to be a placeholder of Achaean greatness in battle whilst Achilles sits out (cf. Slatkin 2011b). But in his speech in book 8 - as well as in his challenge to the “best of the Achaeans” in book 7 – Hector seems unaware of Achilles or his danger to him. Cf. Redfield 1994: 139.
We can better take the measure of Hector’s limitations by noting his misconceptions about the Trojan character and the general meaning of the war. Despite all evidence, Hector thinks that the leading Trojans are valiant. This would partly explain his decision to keep the allies and Trojans apart from each other (see 3.4.3). He also seems to see in the men of his family mirrors of himself. Sarpedon prefaces his complaint in book 5, where he states that the allies have been doing the hard work of war, by telling Hector: “You once said that without allies (epikouroi) and without people (laoi) you could hold this city alone, with only your brothers and the lords of your sisters” (5.472-74). Sarpedon’s point here is that even those brothers and brothers-in-law have not been fighting with vigor. The clearest instance of Hector’s bias in favor of his brothers is his treatment of Paris. Hector continually tries to reform his brother so that he becomes a fighter even though, as we have seen, nothing could be further from Paris’s character (3.52-57, 3.67-94, 6.280-81, 6.325-31, 6.363-64, 6.520-29). Thus, while he brings his extraordinary alacrity in fighting to bear on his and Priam’s family, Hector is not exceptional among the Trojans in the way he also focuses on that family. Nor is he prudent in this matter, as Sarpedon’s exhortation also points out, or given Agamemnon’s statement that the Achaeans would easily have crushed the Trojans if they had no allies.

Hector’s concern for his family and his alacrity in battle are combined in his understanding of the cause of the war or what is at issue in fighting the Achaeans. To look back to the beginning of book 3 where he chastises his brother for his voluptuary ways and for being the cause of the Trojan War, it is remarkable that Hector focuses not on Paris’s injustice but on

233 Taplin (1995: 116) states that this is the one clear instance where Homer takes the opportunity to pun on the meaning of Hector’s name. He also notes the other possible instance in Andromache’s statement at 24.729-30, where she also refers to Hector’s erstwhile ability to protect the whole city all by himself.
how he has brought shame upon the Trojans.\textsuperscript{234} As Antenor would have told them long ago, the Trojans also were expected to respect the conventions of guest friendship (see above, 3.4.1; cf. also 17.146-51). Instead, he asks Paris how he could do such a thing as to have taken a woman from a husband whose kin are spearmen and fighters. Better Paris had died than “to have you with us to our shame, for others to sneer at.” He says to Paris, “[There] is no strength in your heart, no courage” (3.39-51).\textsuperscript{235} Instead of considering the injustice of the affair, again, he tries to turn Paris into a fighter. Just as he does not understand his brother’s character, as he proceeds in his futile attempt to turn Paris into a fighter, so too does he fail to understand how important it is to the Achaean war effort that in fighting to retrieve Helen they have justice on their side. Although Hector frames his role as defender of Troy, there might well have been no need to defend the city had he earlier considered the question of justice in the war.\textsuperscript{236}

Hector’s understanding of the just course of action seems to underlie his role as Troy’s defender (e.g., 6.261-62, 6.526-29, 12.243). This understanding governs his own relations with the Trojans. He tells Andromache:

[I] would feel deep shame before the Trojans, and the Trojan women with trailing garments, if like a coward I were to shrink aside from the fighting; and the spirit will not let me, since I have learned to be valiant and to fight always among the foremost ranks of the Trojans, winning for my own self great glory, and for my father (6.441-46).


\textsuperscript{235} Ahrensdorf (2014: 86, 89) misses this distinction.

\textsuperscript{236} Cf. Taplin’s (1995: 120) remark on the exchange between Hector and Helen at 6.343-68: “[I]n a sense, Hector’s kindness to Helen…destroys him. The others might well complain that it is his complaisance, his foolish indulgence to the slut, that spells destruction for the whole city.”
Yet although his understanding also leads him to mischaracterize his brother – and his father, as he does here – Hector still experiences some doubt. In the same encounter with Andromache, Hector vacillates between an understanding that all of Troy is doomed to destruction, on the one hand, and on the other, that his son will live to best himself as a fighter and delight his mother’s heart (6.447-81). Even aside from considerations of justice, Hector is unsure even about the prudence of waging the war. Yet Hector cannot escape his character or see beyond it – in the statement just cited, despite the context, he even mischaracterizes Andromache’s deepest wishes for their son as aligning with his own.237

On grounds of justice and prudence, then, the question for Hector should have become whether it was appropriate for him to feel shame before the Trojans or to vie for honor amongst them. If it has not been appropriate, by engaging in the war Hector has in effect attempted to make use of the Trojans (and has attempted to make use of the Trojan allies, and the Achaeans, for that matter [see again 8.538-41 and 13.825-28]) as a platform on which to display his own virtue and greatness.238 Yet would the Trojans thus depend on him, ultimately - or he on them?

Hector is led away from raising such questions, as he seeks instead to be Troy’s sole defender - in hope of gaining glory and, as we suggested above, the self-sufficiency that he associates with


238 Cf. Benardete’s subtle but intriguing discussion of Hector as feeling more shame before his troops than they do before him (2000b: 26). See also Benardete 2000c: 43-45.
the immortal gods.\textsuperscript{239} In book 18, when Hector feels confident of destroying the Achaeans by himself, he also seems to come to his own, late recognition of the decisive differences between himself and his family, that is, between their materialism and his love of glory. He states that their softness has so far kept them cooped up behind the city walls, selling off possessions to stay safe. Whereas, now, any Trojan who is “strongly concerned about his possessions, let him gather them and give them to the people, to use them in common” (18.284-301).\textsuperscript{240} Possessions matter little to Hector as compared with honor (cf. 22.111-30). He states that he will fight Achilles and hopes to win glory for doing so (18.305-09). Thus he will soon decide to try and protect Troy all by himself, when he meets Achilles, alone, outside city’s gates (22.91-130). So he separates himself not only from Troy’s allies (as we discussed in the previous section [3.4.3]) but from Troy itself.

Ahrensdorf discusses Hector’s great abilities and his command of the army, while arguing that Hector could instead have made the decisions necessary to end Troy’s involvement

\textsuperscript{239} Hector’s lines at 8.538-41 and 13.825-28 are not to be equated with Achilles’ stronger and more conscious desire to become a god, which we discussed in the previous chapter. On Hector’s lines at 8.538-41, see Taplin 1995: 111.

\textsuperscript{240} One could extrapolate this statement to show the potential for Hector’s leadership to conduce to the common good amongst the Trojans (cf. Hammer’s discussion [2002, 2005] of “plebiscitary politics”). Such could be an implication of Hector’s words, but in this context he speaks of putting everything into the battle so that no Achaean could enjoy the city’s possessions (18.302); at the same time, he focuses on prevailing over Achilles and earning glory thereby (18.305-09).
in the war, particularly by returning Helen and the possessions. That may not be entirely so. For one thing, as we have noted, Agamemnon has his own reasons for engaging in the war (see above, 3.1). At the same time, it is certainly the case that Hector has not tried to stop the war and the suffering to which it has led. If the Trojans were to defeat the Achaeans, to do so, they would be in dire need of Hector. At the same time, ironically enough, precisely by focusing his energies on martial valor, Hector digs the Trojans deeper into a war that it is not in their character to wage, and, on account of their character, it would have to be a war in defense of their voluptuary ways. He is the exception who, paradoxically, reinforces the regime’s own most self-destructive tendencies. Yet the Trojans cannot change to become warriors, so by defending them he only leads them more surely to destruction. So does his greatness as a warrior – in that respect, his selflessness, which makes him so much more impressive than Paris – not also make Hector much more dangerous to Troy than Paris?

Hector’s meeting with Andromache and Astyanax is crucial to the entire poem’s structure: it resonates until the end, foreshadowing Hector’s death, and showing how valuable

\[\text{footnote1}\]

2014: 88-99. Cf. Taplin 1995: 119-20. We have followed the Lycian leaders in noting that Hector is not always in command of his army (see also two notes above). That may have to do with his concern for his own individual conduct on the battlefield, which we have also noted.

\[\text{footnote2}\]

In certain respects Thucydides’ Brasidas will be reminiscent of Hector. In his love of glory, Hector is like an Achaean amongst Trojans. Brasidas is, in fundamental respects, like an Athenian amongst the Spartans. For one thing, he is a bold conqueror whereas they stay close to home. Brasidas dies having brought the Spartans victories that they cannot or will not wish to hold on to. Different in character from the Spartan regime, he thus serves to clarify its character.
the domestic sphere of relations can be, although the war destroys these relations.\textsuperscript{243} Indeed, as Felson and Slatkin write: “Inside Troy, Hector, Andromache, and Astyanax epitomize the household that the war will soon utterly destroy, in a sense representing all the families to be fractured by the Trojan War.”\textsuperscript{244} Throughout the poem we are told of many parents, wives, and children who will not see their sons, husbands, and fathers return from the war.

In the scene with Andromache, Hector appears, having just visited Paris and Helen, as a devoted and loving father and husband.\textsuperscript{245} But, again, he also appears confused. It also seems that he and the Trojans would have fared better had he listened to his wife’s poignant words. Andromache’s name is a composite of “man” and “war.” Yet these influences do not completely define her, as she has learned from her sufferings. She urges Hector to be cautious, and gives him specific strategic advice to that end.\textsuperscript{246} That is when, as we described, Hector emphasizes his honor and shame in relation to all of the Trojans, but despite his apparent clarity in this moment, he also continues to be confused about the future course of the war and his place in it.

\textsuperscript{243} Cf. Owen 1946; Schadewaldt 1997a: especially 141.

\textsuperscript{244} 2004: 92.

\textsuperscript{245} Cf. Griffin 1980: 6. Hector and Andromache, as parents to Astyanax, are also to be contrasted to the infertile Paris and Helen.

\textsuperscript{246} Schein (1984: 173-74; cf. also Schadewaldt 1997a; Felson and Slatkin 2004: 98-101) states that Hector and Andromache, respectively, are concerned with the public and private realms. That Andromache gives tactical advice shows that her thoughts extend beyond the private realm. That her advice is reprimed by Poulydamas later in the poem suggests its prudence (18.249-83). She also raises the spectre of Achilles, of whose power Hector remains ignorant when he challenges “the best of the Achaeans” to the duel in book 8, despite Andromache’s warning here (cf. Schadewaldt 1997a: 134, 141).
(6.431-46). Hector’s confusion as to his and Troy’s fate should give him pause to consider Andromache’s counsel, the significance of which will become clear later on in the work when he decides to ignore the similar counsel from Poulydamas, to stay outside the walls and fight Achilles, and thus to seal his and all of Troy’s fate (22.100-04).²⁴⁷

### 3.6 Questions Raised by the Trojans and their Allies

Sarpedon looks to his fellow Lycians as the community before whom he performs noble deeds and earns honor. He does not truly belong to the Trojan alliance, in the way he would have had that alliance constituted a community ordered by common institutions, a sense of justice, and of the virtues that would serve to uphold these. In turn, Hector understands himself to be serving a common purpose in defending his city, which is obviously the case, in one sense. In another, the community on whose behalf he is engaged in great deeds simply does not exist. He sees a Troy whose members applaud his virtue; and the Trojans do depend on Hector. Yet because the Trojan regime is characterized by the royals’ luxury and pleasure rather than fighting in battle, while the Trojans are also involved in a war in which their enemies may rightfully claim that justice is their rallying cry, they are unable to concern themselves with Hector’s virtues. Sarpedon and Hector, in their various relations with the Trojan alliance, thus elicit fundamental questions about the individual and community. What constitutes the common realm? How does one’s regime foster or limit virtuous action? How do the virtues of justice, courage, honor, and

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²⁴⁷ In her relation to the warrior, her rationality, and her wisdom learned through suffering, Sophocles’ Tecmessa, in *Ajax*, will remind readers of Andromache. Aristotle will quote lines from this play with a sense of irony, in order to call attention to the rational and prescient qualities of such a woman, despite her lack of agency in the public realm (*Politics* 1260a29-31, in reference to *Ajax* 293).
prudence correspond to each other? And what is the proper relation between private relations and one’s public position? With these questions in mind, we turn to discuss Homer’s presentation of the “heroic code” or “warrior ethic” as it exists in more public-spirited settings, and later, of the Achaean political community before whom Achilles seeks honor for his virtuous words and deeds.
The clearest window into these issues is the famous description of the heroic code or warrior ethic given by the Lycian King and Trojan ally, Sarpedon, in book 12. For that ethic also fundamentally informed the kings who joined the expedition to Troy to form the Achaean alliance; and the different ways in which they subscribed to that ethic would lead to the political practices and problems that we will discuss throughout the chapter.
4.1 The Warrior Ethic as a Public Ethic; The Warrior Ethic as a Glorious Trap: Sarpedon’s Statement

We have discussed how the Trojans depend on their allies, how their allies have fought hard in Troy’s defense, but also how the leading allies look to their own communities to prove their worth. The Trojan alliance lacks unity. That disunity, however, serves to reinforce the Lycians’ - or their leaders’ - own chief motivation for joining the alliance. That is - in addition to the past obligations, future assurances, and the honor in payments extended by the Trojans - the Lycian leaders are concerned to prove themselves worthy of leading the Lycians. A weak alliance with Trojans, where they have been segregated from Hector as well as the other brothers of the Trojan palace, allows Sarpedon and Glaucus, in particular, to focus on their positions as leaders of their own people.

Sarpedon’s famous statement of the warrior ethic makes that focus clear. The context for the statement is a battle near the Achaeans’ ramparts, just before Sarpedon breaches them. He urges Glaucus on, as follows.

“[W]hy is it you and I are honored before others with pride of place, the choice meats and filled wine cups in Lycia, and all men look on us as if we were immortals, and we are appointed a great piece of land by the banks of Xanthos, good land, orchard and vineyard, and ploughland for the planting of wheat? Therefore it is our duty in the forefront of the Lycians to take our stand, and bear our part of the blazing of battle so that a man of the close-armed Lycians may say of us: ‘Indeed, these are no ignoble lords of Lycia, these kings of ours, who feed upon the fat sheep appointed and drink the exquisite sweet wine, since indeed there is strength of valor in them, since they fight in the forefront of the Lycians.’ Man, supposing you and I, escaping this battle, would be able to live on forever, ageless, immortal, so neither would I myself go on fighting in the foremost nor would I urge you into the fighting where men win glory. But now, seeing that the spirits of death stand close about us in their thousands, no man can turn aside nor escape them, let us go on and win glory for ourselves, or yield it to others” (12.310-28).
With obvious differences between them and the Trojan leaders (except Hector), Sarpedon speaks of himself and Glaucus as Lycian leaders and of how they retain their leadership over their people. They have the pick of material possessions and luxuries. Indeed, they are thought of as “godlike,” and Sarpedon’s description of the comforts and pleasures of their lives during times of peace remind the audience of the easy lives of the Olympian gods (see above, chapter 2). The passage also conjures up the excitement amidst “the blazing of battle” that is often felt in war, and which touches many of the warriors of the *Iliad*, such as Diomedes and Hector.\textsuperscript{248} The key to the passage, however, is Sarpedon’s knowledge that neither he nor Glaucus is immortal.\textsuperscript{249}

There are some good things to be said for how mortals differ from the gods. On the one hand, they differ from the gods in that they cannot enjoy such pleasures as purely or innocently as the gods do. On the other hand, as distinct from the gods – and the Trojans (except Hector), for that matter – the leadership Sarpedon describes is not directed toward pleasure. The rewards he describes are more than sources of pleasure: they are symbols of rule and, in turn, of excellence. Glory (*kleos*), represented by the survival of his name in his people’s memory, lasts beyond the warrior’s life: to that extent, it would preserve his existence after death. Put another way, the warrior attains to something analogous to the gods’ status as immortals. The hero can

\textsuperscript{248} See Schein 1984: 83-84 and references. Mueller (1984: 77), however, cautions against viewing the many exciting battle scenes of the *Iliad* without regard to its narrative structure. Cf. also Whitman 1958: 164-72 on the types of warriors who display a simpler psychology and who are probably holdovers from simpler stories inherited by the epic tradition. Achilles, by contrast, comes to a more complex understanding of battle (see below, 4.7).

\textsuperscript{249} See, for example, Benardete 2005: 65.
instead anticipate glory on account of his noble deeds, of which the gods are not capable. The “heroic paradox” is that he can win glory, which carries his name beyond this life, precisely because he risks his life by leading his men in battle. The gods cannot risk anything serious, or gain anything meaningful. As Schein writes with respect to the heroic ethic,

[the gods’] existence, compared with that of mortals, is trivial. They emphasize by contrast the seriousness of the human condition, in which winning honor and glory alone makes a brief life meaningful and enables an individual to stand out in his own and in others’ eyes.  

By facing war as he does he chooses to face a sharpening of the mortal experience all vulnerable, suffering human beings must face, but which most are too afraid to directly confront. His choice thus places him above ordinary mortality. Further, his choice keeps his people alive, as he protects them from harm. In this context, Redfield notes the critical role of the leading fighters in the social world of tribal societies or small communities, where “war is perceived as the most important human activity because the community’s ability to wage defensive war is perceived as the precondition of all other communal values.”  

For that reason, from the perspective of most Lycians, the exemplary Sarpedon is to be treated as a godlike man. At the same time, it is highly paradoxical that, despite war’s importance (or, for that matter, the importance of the godlike man) these are the preconditions for what Lycians cherish or need most - those relations and things that can be enjoyed in peace – which are thus more important to them than war.

250 Schein 1984: 70.

Sarpedon and Glaucus thus also enjoy what Hector wishes to enjoy: honors from their community for their exertions in battle. At the same time, the heroic code would seem inevitably to give rise to questions about the relationships between means and ends. Or, at least such questions are plausible in the case of Sarpedon, Glaucus, and the Lycians. Given that the honors and pleasures that the exemplary warrior claims from the community are symbols of his rule and, more so, his excellence in battle, there should be responsibilities attached to them. There should be no complacency. Instead, wars would help to prove his status in the community; so wars could be means to the end of proving his virtue and obtaining honor and glory. At that point, would the warrior not be on the lookout for opportunities to fight in battle, and not merely in defensive wars?252

These questions pertain to Sarpedon, who has come to Troy from “a very far place” (5.478). Redfield observes that Sarpedon’s choice to come to Troy from so far is one indication of the tenuous character of the alliance.253 Conversely, it indicates that Sarpedon need not have come. The choice to face the heat of battle might seem to grant him more riches and honors, but it could instead render him a victim of the code that he has consummated. “By the whirling waters of Xanthos,” besides his riches, Sarpedon has left behind his wife and baby son (5.480-81). When he is killed by Patroclus, Sarpedon (like Hector, after he is killed by Achilles) will not return to his family. Similarly, he has also brought his warriors from there. It is from these men that he has earned honor or the most prominent position in Lycia, for his exemplary exertions in battle in their defense. By leading them to Troy, however, Sarpedon has imperiled


them rather than led them in their own defense and safety. As we discussed, Hector wishes for a community whose members would prize military valor, and tries to defend Troy alone. He therefore pays off the Lycians, so that he would preserve his all-encompassing role as defender of Troy, although he of course depends on them. By contrast, the valorous Sarpedon and the Lycians constitute a real community. Nonetheless, Sarpedon’s adherence to the warrior’s code, and their treatment of him as a godlike man, brings him and the Lycians to the same fate as all of those who defend Troy.

4.2 The Origins of the Achaean Alliance

The Achaean alliance is not referred to as such in the Iliad: whereas the Dardanians and Lycians are referred to as epikouroi, the Achaeans are not.\textsuperscript{254} They are allies in that they hail from different places rather than living together in one community across the sea, and retain their own respective living areas and commands in the camp and on the battlefield.\textsuperscript{255} However, during the ten years away from home they have become much more unified than the Trojans.\textsuperscript{256} Homer preserves a tension between these two understandings of the alliance – as comprised of separate kings, but also as a unified community – throughout the poem. Where the Achaeans appear as a differentiated but unified community, they stand in significant contrast to the Trojans and their allies: as we saw, the latter do not debate over the direction or meaning of their alliance. These


\textsuperscript{255} See van Wees 1997.

\textsuperscript{256} Taplin’s explanation of the use of the term epikouroi for the Trojans and not the Achaeans is that “[t]he term epikouroi seems to be restricted to those aiding a defensive rather than an offensive war” (1995:58). However, the Achaeans’ unity could well be the reason that the Achaeans are not referred to as such.
different understandings constitute a critical backdrop to the conflict between Achilles and Agamemnon. We turn first to discuss the origins of the alliance, and how it is informed by the warrior ethic, which will help us to understand the background and the political significance of that conflict.

The epic tradition outside Homer tells of suitors—such as Odysseus, Ajax of Salamis, and Patroclus—who competed for Helen’s hand in marriage. She was stepdaughter to Tyndareus, who was then the King of Sparta. To keep relations peaceful, before the decision was made, Tyndareus had the suitors swear an oath to defend whoever would be chosen as husband should any quarrel arise. After Paris took Helen, that oath became the basis for the war against Troy. Homer’s version differs from that story, which sounds more like a fable.\footnote{See Taplin 1995: 56-57; 1990: 67-70.}

In Homer’s account, as Taplin observes, Agamemnon and Menelaus are the summoners who gather the allies.\footnote{Taplin 1995: 57.} The Odyssey refers to their recruitment of Odysseus (24.115). (At some point early on Menelaus and Odysseus made their unsuccessful embassy to Troy [3.162-224; see above, 3.4.1].) The Atridae also used agents to recruit allies, as when Nestor and Odysseus traveled throughout Achaea, including Phthia, where they recruited Achilles and Patroclus (11.767-82).

The Achaean allies differed significantly from the Trojans in their formation, however, which allowed them to achieve greater unity. Unlike the Trojans, most importantly, the Atridae had been wronged—in a way that triggered the warrior’s core ideals of protecting his own family, property, and honor. The Trojans detracted from their honor by taking and not
relinquishing Helen and many possessions, and all of the other Achaeans would have also have acknowledged that violation of xenia against the Atridae. As Taplin notes, with Achilles’ statement at 1.52-53 – that the Trojans did not nothing to harm or dishonor him – “he passes over the motive of simple, unprovoked acquisition of loot by implying…that he would only attack those who are in some way aitioi [culpable].” Achilles thus also recognizes that for the Atridae the Trojans are aitioi.\(^{259}\) Peleus told his son that Athene and Hera would give him strength, by which he seems to have meant that the goddesses supported the punishment of the Trojans, followers of Aphrodite (9.254-55). Thus, for example, when Krethon and Orsilochus are killed, in book 5, we are told that they came to Troy “to win honor for the sons of Atreus, Agamemnon and Menelaus” (5.552-53; cf. 17.92, and \textit{Odyssey} 14.70 and 14.117).\(^{260}\) The brothers’ claim to justice, then, would have contributed to the unity of the Achaean alliance. Odysseus’s accompaniment of Menelaus on their embassy to Troy, and Nestor and Odysseus’s recruitment efforts throughout Achaea were early instances of that unity.

The injustice committed by Paris was not the only cause of Agamemnon’s involvement in the war. If it were, as we discussed above (in section 3.1), then the only reason for the war would have been to return Helen and the possessions to Sparta, and Agamemnon’s own involvement in the alliance would be for his brother’s sake alone. Rather than his brother, moreover, Agamemnon is presented as at the center of the Achaean alliance.\(^{261}\) (That is not to

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\(^{260}\) Cited by Taplin 1990: 67.

\(^{261}\) On this and the following points, see Taplin 1990: 67.
say that he is its sole commander, as we shall discuss below.) It would seem, given that Paris’s
injustice was done to him, Menelaus should have put him in that position, rather than
Agamemnon. In addition to being offended by Paris’s action against his family’s honor, he is the
ever brother, who would thus have been called upon to lead the family in their response.
Moreover, Agamemnon rules over a larger territory and warriors than Menelaus does, as the
catalogue of ships in book 2 states (2.576-87). His greater power would also allow him to call on
more allies. With Agamemnon as the central king, “only the Atridae, perhaps, could have
gathered a huge pan-Achaean force.”262 (It is also to be noted, however, that other allies brought
a sizeable number of ships on the expedition – to Agamemnon’s hundred, Nestor brought ninety,
and Diomedes, eighty.263) What becomes clear about Agamemnon’s character later in the war is
that his is a far more commanding personality, for more concerned with rule, than his brother’s.
It was, then, not the aim of redressing Menelaus’s private troubles that resulted from Paris’s
transgression that caused Agamemnon to be involved in the war.

The same went for the alliance’s formation in general (see above, 3.3). When
Agamemnon fears that Menelaus might die from Pandarus’s arrow, he also fears that he will
suffer infamy as leader of a failed expedition (4.169-81; cf. 7.94-122). To keep the war going, it
is necessary that Menelaus not die. In keeping with the general myth pattern that Homer must
follow – he could not go “beyond fate” - the original cause of the war still matters (see 1.1.1c).
Paris’s transgression was, so to speak, necessary although it was not sufficient for the alliance to
form.

262 Taplin 1990: 67.

In this vein, it seems in keeping with what Taplin calls “Homeric anthropology” that the other kings, in turn, would have wished to preserve the norm of xenia. That concern for justice, again, would have been a unifying force for the alliance. The leaders would have joined the alliance (and, as with the Trojans, their respective peoples [laoi] would have followed them) also because, like the Trojans, the Atridae would have appealed to past obligations and made promises for the future. “Once the host is gathered, there [would have been] be much feasting and other morale-boosting activities at the expense of the summoner.” However, these were not the only honors on offer. The expedition also offered the allies – as, indeed, it offered Agamemnon - the promises of booty and glory.

4.3 The Defending Trojans and the Achaeans on the Attack
At the beginning of the chapter we discussed Sarpedon’s account of his motives for joining the Trojans in their defense. In this section we note some important differences between that account and the Achaeans’ reasons for launching their expedition to Troy. In noting those

264 See Taplin (1990: 68), who cites Agamemnon’s reminding the kings of his generosity at Lemnos, when they were en route to the Trojan plain (8.228-32).

265 See, e.g., section 4.4, below. Benardete, in his important article (2000b), is certainly correct to observe that book 5 of the Iliad marks a key transition from the earlier books, that is, from a focus on the origins of the war and the role of Helen, to the wish for glory that characterizes Diomedes, Hector, and others in books 5 through 8 (see above, 3.5). Nonetheless - as neo-analysts such as Kullmann showed, and we discussed above (sections 3.1-3.3) - the Iliad not only begins in medias res, in year ten of the war, the poem also returns to the origins by what we have called, in chapter 3, a series of “flashbacks”: Paris and Helen’s respective roles, the gathering of the hosts (in book 2’s catalogue), etc. Beyond punishing the Trojans, the motive of gaining honor – whether material rewards, or material rewards and glory – explained the allies’ (and Agamemnon’s) involvement in the war from the very start.
differences we will also raise some questions to consider as we turn to in following sections to a fuller account of the Achaean alliance, its role as a community, as well as the war’s effects on that community and its most prominent individuals.

A significant general difference between the Trojans and the Achaeans is that, while an efficient, successful defense of Troy would allow the Trojans to save their blood and treasures, the Achaeans could count on taking booty if their venture were successful. Hans van Wees writes of such attackers:

Homeric princes turn to predatory warfare because those who forcibly seize the wealth of foreigners kill two birds with one stone. They get rich and establish themselves as warriors and men of power.  

Troy’s legendary wealth would have been no small attraction to the Achaean allies, for whom the Trojans were not aitioi or did not cause harm to themselves. The same motive that put the Lycian leaders (together with Hector) at the forefront of Troy’s defense put the Achaean leaders to the enterprise of punishing and plundering Troy. Being subject to the same warrior code as the Lycians, the Achaean kings would, in the same measure, have been impelled, or compelled, to seek glory in battle.

The difference between attackers and defenders in the Trojan War suggests certain questions about justice and about whether the means used to achieve justice undercut that end. As we noted, in book 1 Achilles acknowledges that, while the Trojans did him no harm, they did harm to the Atridae, and he joined the alliance to do the Atridae honor or remedy that dishonor. Other than the Atridae, or even Menelaus alone, then, the Achaean attackers were not directly wronged by the Trojans, while they would stand to gain from a successful victory over Troy.

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Was their decision to attack proportionate to the wrong done to Menelaus, or even the violation of the cultural norm of *xenia*, or did those injustices merely provide the opportunity to attack a wealthy (and weak) city? It is true that the Trojans were intransigent in keeping Helen and the possessions for ten years before the Achaeans arrived to their beachhead outside Troy, and for another ten years during the course of the war, but has the Trojans’ intransigence been cause enough to wage, or continue waging, the war? If not, then would it not also be just for the Trojans (that is, if their leadership were willing) to defend themselves, and therewith, their own honor?\textsuperscript{267} We asked above whether the warrior ethic, as Sarpedon articulates it, does not lead to a continual search for opportunities to do battle. In the case of the Achaean alliance, the foregoing questions suggest how easily the warrior ethic could lead away from the concern to punish injustice or achieve a just result, to endless vendettas or cycles of violence.\textsuperscript{268}

Considerations about the justice of the Achaeans’ expedition could lead in turn to questions about the meaning of the community that they form, as well as questions about the prudence of their aims. For instance, if the war were to be a successful war of aggression on the Trojans, what would result from it for the respective Achaean allies? Would they each return wealthier than they had been before? Would that make them targets of the neighboring cities? Or might not they, much as Sarpedon’s speech and actions suggest, be on the look out for

\textsuperscript{267} Cf. Balot (2001: 61): Warriors “incurred dishonor if they allowed others to take away their possessions,” which caused Neleus’s anger; likewise, Nestor speaks of taking revenge on outrages suffered by his father and his people (11.670-762); see also van Wees 1992: 107 (cited by Balot 2001: 61 n. 12).

\textsuperscript{268} Balot (2001: 62) notes “[t]he ambivalence expressed by the Homeric poems about the morality of forcible acquisition becomes even more powerful when classical Greeks begin to consider the massively complicated moral questions associated with international, and especially imperial, acquisition.”
continual warfare in order to prove their honor? Finally, given that the war has not been terribly successful – by any measure, ten years is a long time to be putting lives at risk – should a prudential calculation to end it not outweigh the concern to reverse the Trojans’ injustice, or the attempt to gain material honors and glory?

In the following two sections, we shall focus our discussion on the internal workings of the regime that the Achaeans form. As we shall note again in section 4.5, the Achaean leaders are not as soft as the Trojans. They are also more disciplined as an integrated community of warriors. We can note that another important consequence of the difference between the Trojans’ defensive position and the Achaeans’ position on the attack: namely, how the Achaeans are thus enabled to become a more cohesive alliance. Whereas the Trojans would have paid their allies for their part in their city’s defense, Agamemnon would depend on the other Achaeans to fight in order to attack the Trojans, and the Achaeans would be rewarded for their exertions with what they took (see below, section 4.5). As a result, Agamemnon would not have been in a position to dole out material goods or honors, and that would have made the Achaeans less determined by hierarchy, more by their own exertions or merits as warriors. We shall return to this and other factors that would make for a more cohesive or unified Achaean alliance, and a more public community.

4.4 An Ally Joins the Achaean Expedition: Peleus’s Instructions to Achilles

4.5 The Achaean Alliance as a Public Community

We noted earlier Benardete’s discussion of the thumotic character of the Trojans, and their lack of discipline on the battlefield, and, by contrast the more disciplined Achaeans. That difference proceeds from the relative equality between the allies, their sense of individuality - but also
mutual shame and concern for honor – as they engage in a common enterprise.\textsuperscript{269} That sense of community is captured in the simple fact, noted earlier, that the Achaeans do not even refer to themselves as allies, whereas the Trojans do. The Achaeans speak a common language. In turn, a more important difference between the enemies is that debate between equals (i.e., inter-elite debate) characterizes the Achaeans, but not the Trojans.\textsuperscript{270} The importance of debate held before the community as a whole is also a strong theme of Raaflaub’s work, as we discussed in the introduction (see above, 1.2.2). Through portraying such debate, Homeric epic attains to a high degree of theoretical knowledge about politics.

Such debate comes into focus straight after the proem to the \textit{Iliad}, in its opening scenes. Achilles, most of all, exemplifies the Achaeans’ achievement of debate over the meaning and direction of their alliance, which so differentiates the Achaeans from the Trojans. Agamemnon’s and Achilles’ respective words and actions in these scenes – though they are initiated, and circumscribed, by deeds of the god Apollo – take place in a human setting that is not itself determined by the Olympians.\textsuperscript{271} The two men appear in a setting that is more or less “political” – that is, where they argue, before the community, about the common good – and the conflict between them serves to define that setting as such. Homer situates the famous debate between them within two Achaean “assemblies of the people,” where several fundamental insights about politics are put forth in the respective characters’ actions and statements. These scenes present

\textsuperscript{269} Benardete 2005: 18-28.

\textsuperscript{270} See Flaumenhaft 2004: esp. 4-6.

\textsuperscript{271} Cf. Lesky 2001.
Agamemnon’s vices and Achilles’ virtues, which, set apart from each other, place their respective characters in a clearer light. In short, Agamemnon’s vices come to sight in his self-assertion, at the expense of the common good of the Achaeans; just as Achilles’ virtues appear in his acts to save the Achaeans. Achilles is also concerned to be honored for his deeds, but pride and honor are also important elements of the political actor’s psychology and experience.

Further, in the second assembly, Achilles outlines an account of the meaning of the war in which the Achaeans have been engaged outside Troy’s walls during the years that have preceded the open conflict between him and Agamemnon depicted in Book 1. That is, the Achaean alliance originated from a voluntary agreement. During the course of the war the alliance constituted itself anew as a political community: the Achaeans formed themselves into a community when their warriors led and fought bravely in battle, and when they assembled to honor the most excellent of those warriors. Achilles charges Agamemnon with being fundamentally unjust for denying the Achaean community. The latest instance of Agamemnon’s injustice is his decision to take the slave-girl, Briseis, from Achilles. Agamemnon’s act also leads Achilles to articulate his own understanding of what constitutes justice amongst the Achaeans.

4.5.1 Safeguarding the Common Good: Achilles Saves the Achaeans from Apollo’s Attack (1.8-117)

As the action of the Iliad begins, Homer depicts an assembly of the Achaean men who are witness to a scene of pathetic supplication. At the first assembly, Apollo’s priest, Chryses, supplicates the entire camp - the various Kings, and the lesser men who comprise the Achaean alliance; though especially Agamemnon and Menelaus - to accept his ransom for the release of his daughter, Chryseis. The Achaeans cry out in favor of Chryses’ plea - all except for Agamemnon (1.11-25). Agamemnon focuses on his own desires alone as he harshly denies all
other claims.\textsuperscript{272} He denies the priest, whose supplication it would have been expected and appropriate, because pious and honorable, to grant (see especially 1.21 and 1.28). Instead Agamemnon threatens Chryses with violence should he return to the Achaean camp, mocking the priest’s religious garb for its failure to provide him with any protection against his own power (cf. 1.13-15 with 1.26-28). He also spells out precisely what Chryses must himself fear: that he will take the daughter to Argos to live out her years far away from her father, tending to Agamemnon’s loom, sharing his bed; in short, that Agamemnon will render her his own slave-bride or spoil of war (1.24-32).\textsuperscript{273} With those words Agamemnon also denies the voice of the people. Though it is clear that he is the central leader of the Achaean alliance, or because he is, Agamemnon is expected to protect his soldiers. However, when he denies Chryses and the people’s wish that the priest’s supplication be granted, Agamemnon makes it clear that he does so in order to satisfy his own desires. Thus Agamemnon’s vices emerge in his rejection of Achaean community.\textsuperscript{274}

\textsuperscript{272} On Agamemnon’s emphatic use of the personal pronoun in this opening scene - “in seven lines[,] five expressions of triumphant egotism” - see Griffin and Hammond 1982: 132-33.

\textsuperscript{273} Cf. 6.450-65, esp. 456; Griffin and Hammond 1982: 132.

\textsuperscript{274} Barker notes Agamemnon’s responsibility to protect the welfare of the Achaeans under his leadership (Barker 2009: 40-41 n. 3 and reference). Nonetheless, he questions whether the scene of Chryses’ supplication can properly be said to take place in the political setting of an Achaean assembly because there is “[no] indication of the assembly’s institutional frame” (41 n. 5; see, however, 52 n. 38; cf. Griffin and Hammond 1982: 132). But if the scene does not present a fully fledged assembly, it contains certain elements of one. For it is important that Chryses supplicates all of the Achaeans and that they in turn voice their common wish that Chryses’ supplication be granted and, by contrast, that Agamemnon speaks emphatically in the first person serves to point out that his personal
“The common” is the most fundamental element of politics put forth in the *Iliad*. In stating this we have in mind an ancient or classical conception of politics, which is to be distinguished from modern conceptions, and here the general accounts of Aristotle and Hobbes may serve to point out the most important differences. Hobbes argues that what he refers to as a “commonwealth” is constituted by the aggregate of individuals who comprise it. Its purpose is to safeguard individuals in their own respective conceptions of what constitutes a good or happy life. One’s experience of happiness, however, does not extend beyond oneself. Even those individuals who are concerned with honor do not look to a conception of what is virtuous or honorable that can truly be shared with others: honor is merely one of the tools of power through which one gets others to do one’s own bidding. Individuals, then, naturally look to their own authority marks a denial of the people’s common voice. Later in book 1 Achilles will recount this scene and emphasize Agamemnon’s action as such (1.370-79).

275 See, for example, *Leviathan* 6.58 with 11.1-2.

276 Hobbes’ modern, anti-aristocratic account may be contrasted with Achilles’ understanding of honor. Achilles clearly wished to be thought of like the men whose glory he was singing about when the emissaries arrived at his tent, while he also wished to earn his honor from his contemporaries. Hobbes, it is true, writes that “Desire of fame disposeth to laudable actions, such as please those whose judgment they value” (11.6). But he then goes on to emphasize the negative reasons for acting laudably: “[O]f those men whom we contemn, we contemn also the praises” (11.6; cf. 13.2). Hobbes then writes that “desire of fame after death” also disposes men to laudable actions, which is not a vain fame, “because men have a present delight therein, from the foresight of it and of the benefit that may redound thereby to their posterity, which though they now see not, yet they imagine; and anything that is pleasure in the sense, the same also is pleasure in the imagination” (11.6). Typically, with these statements (and other statements in the same paragraph) Hobbes denies the wish for personal immortality that the love of fame might
good. Moreover, no common authority exists in a world where individuals cannot look beyond themselves. Thus no common good can be said to exist by nature, nor can a realm shared by citizens in common. By extension, others are naturally threats to oneself. To avoid the ensuing state of nature, where every individual is an enemy to every other, all individuals must agree to abide by an artificial authority in order to constitute a commonwealth where they best pursue their own separate conceptions of a happy life. The state is to be created in order to please its members, not to appeal to them to sacrifice or lift themselves beyond their own, individual desires, in order to share in a common understanding and experience of virtue, nobility, or goodness.

In the introduction to the *Politics*, Aristotle states that politics is a constituted by a partnership or community that is more comprehensive than the individual, and familial or tribal attachments. The most comprehensive community, the political community is achieved through debate over what constitutes the harmful and the beneficial, the just and the unjust. Aristotle proceeds to state, in book 3, that different types of regime – those ruled by one, few, or many – are characterized as more or less just depending on whether their rulers rule with a view to the points towards (on which, see above, 2.2). Moreover, just prior to these statements Hobbes makes clear that the imagination of future praise, after death, provides a false pleasure, because those who praise men of the past do so for their own purposes rather than from a true appreciation of the intrinsic quality of the deeds accomplished by those men. “Competition of praise inclineth to a reverence of antiquity. For men contend with the living, not with the dead, to these ascribing more than due, that they may obscure the glory of the other” (*Leviathan* 11.3; this last quote is of a piece with Hobbes’ account of honor and power as put forward, for example, in 10.19-52).
good of the community as a whole or merely to their own good. Aristotle also gives an account of political virtues, which he treats in depth in his ethical writings, the attainment of which requires that one rise beyond one’s own narrow individual concerns in order to contribute to the larger community. When such virtues are understood and appreciated by the larger community, the individual who performs them is honored, and the attainment of such honor, through the practice of virtue, is fitting for the ambitious political actor to pursue.

We have seen that Agamemnon, frequently enough, refers to the Trojan War as *his own* war. In the present case, in denying Chryses, Agamemnon denies the common will of the Achaean alliance in attempting to satisfy his own wish to keep the priest’s daughter for himself. In turn, Chryses is a rather pathetic figure in his fear of Agamemnon (1.33-35, 1.42). Nonetheless, after Chryses leaves the camp and prays to Apollo to punish the Achaean alliance, reminding the god of the priestly offerings he has made, Apollo responds with swift and mighty retribution. Nine days of destruction and death ensue, after which Achilles convokes a second assembly of the Achaean (1.9-10, 1.33-53).

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277 Machiavelli would subtly but clearly reject this element of the classical account. In chapter 1 of the *Prince*, for example, Machiavelli claims that states are to be distinguished by whether they are ruled by one or more than one ruler; given the Thomistic context in which he wrote, Machiavelli thereby rejects the typology whereby rule is characterized as just when it serves the common good. Hobbes also rejects the Aristotelian distinction (see especially *Leviathan* 19.1-2, alongside his many references to Aristotle).

278 Faulkner 2007 discusses a number of contrasts between Aristotle and Hobbes as regards political community and the role(s) of honor.

To be more precise, it is Hera, who, in her pity for the dying Achaeans, puts it in Achilles’ mind to call them to assemble (1.54-56). At the same time, it is Achilles who is able to receive Hera’s direction. It is also clear to him that Apollo is the source of the Achaeans’ woes, and that in order to end them the god must somehow be placated (1.62-67; contrast 1.28). In our first view of him as an actor in the poem, then, Achilles seems to enjoy a certain closeness to the gods and an awareness of their powers.\(^{280}\) Why is it that in her pity for the Achaeans Hera alights on Achilles in particular? It soon becomes clear that Achilles is best able to lead them to safety.

Perhaps the Achaeans’ predicament would have impelled Achilles to take some action even in Hera’s absence. To do so, in any event, he must turn his attention to challenges posed on the human plane. What Homer’s audience knows from the description of Chryses’ supplication and Apollo’s reaction, the Achaeans, or at least the astute Achilles, would have had much reason to suspect. He knows that Apollo is the cause of the Achaeans’ suffering, of which Hera has not advised him. Must he not think that what caused their nine days of woe was Agamemnon’s harshness toward Apollo’s priest when the Achaeans last assembled, ten days earlier (cf. 1.370-82)? As his words and deeds at the assembly also demonstrate, Achilles’ primary motive for convoking it is not that of pious obedience to the goddess, or even fear of Apollo, but to safeguard the Achaeans (1.59-67).

It is clear that something has needed to be done to save the Achaeans from the folly of Agamemnon’s impious violation. To that end, though, Achilles must maneuver adroitly in order to confront the crisis of leadership that Agamemnon has caused. At first he addresses

Agamemnon, saying that the Achaeans’ dire situation will soon require them to abandon their expedition, that is, if they can make it out alive. The earlier assembly made clear that Agamemnon is a leader who commands fear, rejects others’ views, and threatens violence toward those who challenge him, even in defiance of the demands of piety. By contrast, Achilles says that their miserable situation— they will have to end their expedition without success, if indeed they can escape alive— requires that the Achaeans consult a holy man, prophet, or dream- interpreter; that way they could learn the source of the god’s anger— whether Apollo blames the Achaeans for breaking a vow, or not offering a hecatomb— and if the god would end their misery were he to receive the smoke of new offerings (1.54-68). That it would have been difficult to confront Agamemnon head-on perhaps explains why Achilles makes no mention in this public statement of what Agamemnon did to Apollo’s priest.

As Achilles sits down, Calchas, the bird-interpreter and seer, stands up, stating that he has been bidden by Achilles to explain Apollo’s anger to the Achaeans. Whereas Achilles had addressed himself to Agamemnon, Calchas speaks before Agamemnon can give an answer to Achilles; to that extent Calchas depends on Achilles rather than deferring to Agamemnon. Of Calchas Homer states that he “knew all things that were, the things to come and the things past” (1.69-70). However, Calchas says that he will explain Apollo’s anger only if he receives Achilles’ protection, through word and deed, against the mighty Agamemnon, obeyed by all of the Achaeans, and whose unchallenged rule would allow him to be vindictive (1.68-83). To which Achilles replies that he will defend Calchas, with his own life, against anyone in the camp, 281

281 Barker observes that, “by virtue of knowing the past, future and present (1.70) and speaking ‘with good intention’ (euphroneōn), [Calchas] ought to be able to benefit the community” (2009: 41).
even though Calchas is referring to Agamemnon, who now claims to be by far the best of all the Achaeans (1.84-91). So Calchas may openly state it: it was not for some broken vow or the like that Apollo blames the camp, but because Agamemnon so dishonored the god’s priest, rejected the ransom, and kept the daughter; and when these transgressions are remedied, perhaps then the god will have been propitiated (1.92-101).

Point for point, the scene at the start of the second assembly and that of the previous one stand in direct contrast to each other, so that each provides for a sharper consideration of the other. Earlier Agamemnon denied the priest and the voice of the people. Now, having called the assembly, before all of the Achaeans Achilles vows to protect the god’s interpreter, who declares that Agamemnon’s earlier action must be reversed, that Chryses’ initial supplication must be granted. The contrasts also show how the second scene does as much credit to Achilles as the previous one had demonstrated Agamemnon’s vices. Evidently, Achilles has come prepared to address the fateful challenges that this assembly presents. Appropriately, he seeks to discover as clearly and directly as possible what has caused Apollo’s anger in order clearly and directly to remedy it. The directness and extremity of Achilles’ challenge seem altogether fitting on account of two factors that Homer has made clear to his reader: Agamemnon’s character, which would no doubt lead him to dismiss Calchas, the voice of the people, or any challenge less forceful than the one Achilles has put to him; and, as Achilles has mentioned, the dire punishment that has befallen the Achaeans would end their expedition and has placed the entire camp in grave danger. Achilles would make all the difference in this scene by vowing to defend the god’s interpreter with his very life, an oath implying support for the course of action that

282 Hammer discusses the importance of Achilles’ providing the protection that allows Calchas to speak (2002: 83-84); cf. Redfield 1994: 95-96.
Calchas will prescribe. Though others would fear to speak up, Achilles shows the judgment and
courage to defend Calchas’s plea for protection against Agamemnon, even should Agamemnon
oppose him, and he has the wherewithal to do so without hesitation. Achilles seems to
understand that Agamemnon’s position and character require that he engage in this robust, pre-
emptive confrontation. Further, in the most pointed contrast between the first and second
assemblies, Achilles himself implies that Agamemnon’s claim - to be the “best of the Achaeans”
- is false; whereas his own conduct, his ability to discern the appropriate end of saving the
Achaeans, and to deploy the best means to get there, seems entirely praiseworthy.

Though the Iliadic account of politics comes to sight in the poem as a whole, we have
indicated that some of its outlines emerge at the start. These can be stated as follows. The first
point to note in Homer’s depiction of human action and motives is their distinctness from those
of the gods. Both Chryses and Achilles are aware, in their respective situations, of the demands
and the prerogatives of the gods: that the gods have their own motives for acting in human
affairs, and that the gods wield the most power to determine events if they so wish. Each also

283 Might Achilles’ alacrity at this point, also result from his own prudent forethought? For one thing, Achilles knew
it was Apollo who caused the Achaeans’ suffering, and it was Calchas - whose gifts as a diviner have been provided
by Apollo - who answered Achilles’ call. Even though Achilles had first addressed himself Agamemnon, that
Calchas interrupted in order to speak (he says, upon Achilles’ bidding [1.74]); that Calchas demands protection from
Agamemnon; and that Achilles so readily swears to provide him with it, might all suggest that the two have
orchestrated this public exchange. Cf. Taplin 1995: 54. (Elsewhere in the work Achilles adheres closely to his
plans, most notably in his decision not to enter the battle until Hector reaches the Achaean ships. There are also
instances where actors orchestrate events that would be analogous to this one. In book 9, for instance, Nestor and
Odysseus circumvent Agamemnon’s instruction that Phoenix speak first during their embassy to Achilles; see Nagy
1999: 49-52).
believes that sacrifices or other propitiations are necessary (if not always sufficient) to the securing of a god’s protection, in order not to anger a god, or to assuage a god who has been angered (1.114-15, 1.21, 1.35-42; 1.62-67). Further, in having such knowledge - in demonstrating respect for the demands of piety in human affairs - Chryses and Achilles are much more aware of the human predicament than is Agamemnon. Apollo’s punishment cannot be reversed, however, unless Achilles can lead the Achaeans, and Agamemnon in particular, to take the appropriate action. That turns out not to be an easy task, requiring as it does that Achilles turn his attention to the particular human or political challenges of the assembly. Further, nor does Homer present either Chryses or Achilles as motivated primarily by concern for the gods themselves. In his two pleas Chryses wished the Achaeans the gods’ favor for a successful plundering of Troy and, once rejected by the Achaeans, turned to Apollo; in each case he was motivated by his desire to have his daughter returned. In turn, Achilles’ stated concerns are the expedition and the Achaeans’ survival.

The second main point, which is brought into view in the contrast between the first and second assemblies, is that politics depends upon the existence of a community and of a common good. The importance of the common good comes to sight in Agamemnon’s denial of it, which

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284 In his plea for some interpreter of the divine to speak, and in turning to defend Calchas, Achilles shows respect for the demands of piety as a condition for human affairs. As Redfield notes, Calchas is “low in status but has a special potency, not because of his influence with the gods but because of his knowledge of them” (1994: 95). Despite his remarkable power of divination (1.69-70), Calchas’s lowly status at this point would seem to have resulted, not from his inability to direct the gods, but on account of the priority of human affairs. That is, Calchas would have been prevented from sharing his knowledge concerning Apollo on account of Agamemnon’s impiety, his arrogance as a ruler, or some combination of these.
leads to disaster for the community. Likewise, when Calchas calls attention to the danger of a king whose strength enables him to deny any dissent against his rule, he implies that rule for the sake of the ruler’s own good alone, and which elicits fear in those he rules, is unjust. On the other hand, the third significant point, demonstrated by Achilles, is that the community depends upon at least one individual who is exemplary for being able as well as willing to lead for the common good.

4.5.2 Virtue, Honor, and Justice: The Clash between Achilles and Agamemnon (1.101-305)

Soon after Achilles calls the second assembly, the power of Apollo gives way to a much more expansive and complex dramatic unfolding in Homer’s presentation of the conflict between the leading general and leading warrior. Achilles’ intervention is effective: Agamemnon will return Chryseis to her father, and the Achaeans will be saved from Apollo’s attack. Yet that, of course, is where matters really begin. For, while returning Chryseis will avert the crisis that he caused by refusing to return her earlier, Agamemnon immediately sets off another crisis, which initiates the main action of the poem. Although Agamemnon must return Chryseis, he will do so unwillingly; he is extremely angered at the prophet whom Achilles has promised to defend, calling Calchas a “seer of evil,” who always delivers prophecies unfavorable to himself. Then he states that while he will return the girl, it would be unfitting that he be deprived of a prize (geras), and that another girl will have to replace her (1.105-120). Achilles, in turn, reacts just as angrily, calling Agamemnon the “greediest for gain of all men” (1.122).

Thus begins their well-known struggle. Much as in the previous event, where the continuities between the two events strengthen one’s impression, throughout this quarrel in the assembly Achilles seems to be completely in the right, and Agamemnon, completely in the
Achilles is infuriated. Yet his response would seem to articulate the central matters at issue in this quarrel (1.148-71, 223-46, and 292-96). Indeed, his response would clarify the central matters at issue for the Achaean allies in their war against Troy. To begin with, Achilles indicates how he understands it that the Achaean alliance constitutes a freely chosen community, and how Agamemnon has violated this community. Achilles would remind Agamemnon that the allies embarked on the expedition to Troy for his sake. “[W]e followed to do you favor…to win your honor and Menelaus’ from the Trojans” (1.157-60). That is, Paris took Helen, and the Trojans allowed him to keep her inside their walls, which does mean that Menelaus would have had a clear motive to attack them; as would Agamemnon, in that the Trojans’ act against his brother offended their family honor. However, nothing compelled Achilles, or the other Achaean allies who are not subject to Agamemnon’s rule in Argos, to attempt to restore the honor of the Atridae. Achilles emphasizes that the Trojans were as far from offending or doing harm to him as his own native Phthia is separated by mountain ranges, and the sea, from the plains of Troy (1.152-57). Even so, he came. “Yet,” Achilles says to him, “you forget all this, or else you care nothing” (1.160). What Agamemnon has forgotten, or could not care less about, is that the Achaean allies - or, at the least, the Achaean kings - came to Troy not because they were compelled to, but because they chose to. He would seem to owe them a debt of gratitude. At the very least, it would seem - Agamemnon should recognize that, to the extent that their choice to join the alliance was voluntary, that they were not subject to his rule in making it - they are equal members of the alliance, and should not be subject to his rule on this expedition. By threatening to take what already belongs to another Achaean, in effect, Agamemnon denies this. Instead, Agamemnon would act as though the allies were subject to his own, private command.
What is more, by threatening to take another warrior’s prize Agamemnon ignores the Achaean’s exertions on the battlefield. The kings’ decision to help restore Menelaus’ and Agamemnon’s honor meant, of course, that they would fight to do so. Which they have: Achilles and other Achaean’s have done the painful fighting, have formed ambush raids and fought battles against well-defended cities surrounding Troy (1.162-68, 225-27). Then, upon returning to camp, all of the Achaean’s would distribute the booty that was captured on those raids. At such times, for his own efforts, Achilles would receive a prize to take back to his ships (1.163-68). This has been a just practice, Achilles implies, because the initial, voluntary choice to enter the war was a decisive condition for their conduct in the midst of it. Since the warriors who took the enemy’s booty were not themselves subject to Agamemnon’s rule, it would have been unjust if, at those times when the Achaean’s apportioned the war booty, Agamemnon had taken it all for himself; and it has been wrong that Agamemnon has been granted so many prizes as he has (1.161-68). In fact, Achilles is angry that at such times Agamemnon has gotten the greater reward, even though he is a coward who does not display the qualities of a warrior (1.225-31; 1.161-68). It has been entirely fitting, or just, however, that the warriors who have fought courageously have been rewarded in honor of their exertions on the battlefield. The practice of rewarding the best warriors has been just also because the entire Achaean camp (not just the leading kings) would assemble for that purpose, to determine which warriors deserved the honor of such a prize.  

Hence, in addition to showing ingratitude toward the allies, and to denying their freedom as equal members of the alliance, by threatening to take such a prize from one of the warriors Agamemnon also violates the Achaean’s communal decisions to honor those who have best contributed to the war effort.

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Achilles charges that three main attributes that define Agamemnon’s character: shamelessness, greed, and cowardice. Agamemnon has never “taken courage in [his] heart” to arm himself for battles or ambushes, Achilles states, because “in such things [he sees] death” (1.225-28). If he had acted courageously, Achilles implies, Agamemnon might have earned some of the prizes he now possesses. Instead he has turned to abusing his role as leader of the alliance, greedily taking possessions for himself. He is unashamed of both his cowardice and his greed; these three attributes reinforce one another. Further, how can the Achaeans “readily obey” Agamemnon by engaging in this war when - rather than showing them gratitude for helping to restore his family’s honor - he continually takes from them (1.149-51, 158-60)? For Achilles, to remain a warrior in the alliance would be to accept a status of mere subjecthood to Agamemnon, to fight without honor, to be a servant to Agamemnon’s greed, just piling up luxuries for him (1.171). Indeed, not only does Agamemnon take for himself rewards that he has not earned, he would take back those that the assembled people have awarded to their most excellent warrior, “the best of the Achaeans” (1.125-26, 161-62, 244). He is a king who, in front of all of the Achaeans, will “take away the gifts of any man who speaks up against [him]” (1.230). He might be obeyed by the Achaeans, but not “readily” (prophron) which is to say, willingly, as a matter of free choice (1.149-51). 286 As such, says Achilles, those who will remain under Agamemnon rule are “nonentities,” in the same degree as Agamemnon is “a king who feed[s] on [his] people” (1.228-31).

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286 Focusing on Achilles’ question to Agamemnon at 1.149-50, Hammer (1997b) discusses how Agamemnon’s leadership is to be understood as obedience based on force rather than persuasion. Cf. Hammer 2002: 82-92. See also Balot’s (2001) discussion of Agamemnon’s greed and forcefulness.
Agamemnon has collapsed the traditional understanding of the warrior ethic, so that greed and forcefulness have replaced the concern for virtue and the achievement of honor. Simply put, Achilles rails against the injustice of Agamemnon’s rule and, therewith, he points to a clear account of what comprises a just political order. His main charge is that Agamemnon has denied what is common to the Achaean allies. They came independently as a number of kings who led their respective peoples, and since then they have all constituted themselves as a common people who fight together, and who have convened to deliberate and decide upon whom to reward for having best contributed to their side in the war. “The best of the Achaeans” are those who, unlike Agamemnon, have chosen to fight, and have fought bravely (1.225-28). The community’s decision to honor them reflects the esteem its members have for those who display the virtue of courage. Thus Achilles accounts for the Achaeans as comprising a regime that exists, not for the sake of mere life, but to practice the warrior virtues. Being warriors themselves, it is they who can best judge whom to reward or honor, and how to do so, for practicing such virtue. On the other hand, Achilles more than implies that Agamemnon does not deserve such rewards as he has taken, that he rules, as it were, in defiance of the just order of the Achaeans’ regime. His leadership, such as it is, is not the sort to command the respect of the Achaeans, because true warriors wish to obey those leaders who know how to fight. Only such leaders respect courage and inspire confidence through their words and deeds. A war-making regime would fight more freely, and more effectively, under a leader who engaged in the virtues of a warrior.

As the assembly adjourns, Agamemnon seems to have prevailed. Midway into the quarrel, Achilles states his intention to return to his home, Phthia (1.169). When Agamemnon reacts by telling him to leave, stressing that he leads the alliance, and that he will take Briseis from Achilles - who will thus learn not to contend with him, and how much greater than Achilles
he is - the argument almost ends with Achilles killing Agamemnon (1.180-94). If that were to occur then the war, and the *Iliad*, could not be sustained. (When Apollo attacked the Achaeans Achilles had stated that, if they did not mollify the god then their war-expedition would come to an end. Given his role in the war, Agamemnon’s death would lead to the same result. That Hera intervenes a second time, this time by sending Athena to stay Achilles’ anger, suggests this parallel between the two events [1.53-61; 1.88-96].) Athena descends and persuades Achilles to put away his sword, telling him that she was sent by Hera, who loves both Agamemnon and him equally. She also tells Achilles that some day he will be paid in shining gifts three times over on account of Agamemnon’s outrageous act (1.206-17).

Nonetheless, the goddess is invisible to everyone in the assembly except for Achilles, and although when she returns to Olympus he continues to lash out at Agamemnon with the charges we presented above, Agamemnon is confident in his rule, thinking that Achilles will not be able to overthrow him (1.285-91, 1.318-24). When Nestor intervenes to address them both - although he counsels Agamemnon to respect Achilles’ by not taking his prize, and the decision of the community in granting her to him - he states that Agamemnon is greater, and more deserving of honor, for ruling over more than Achilles does (1.281).\(^{287}\) Agamemnon has stated that this is his understanding of the difference between himself and Achilles. To the latter’s announcement that he will return to Phthia, Agamemnon reacts by saying that he should go ahead and rule over his own, smaller contingent of Myrmidons, whereas many more will follow Agamemnon (1.169-80). As Agamemnon sees it, Achilles is always combative, and has been attempting to rule over all the Achaeans. Despite this, Agamemnon thinks that he has had merely to withstand Achilles’

\(^{287}\) Cf. Barker 2009: 48 n. 24 and references.
abusive words. He will continue to rule unchallenged over all of the Achaeans, one proof of which is that he will proceed to take Briseis for himself (1.174-75, 1.180-87).

As we have seen, however, Achilles has presented a very compelling challenge to Agamemnon, in articulating an account of justice that is based on a persuasive understanding of the Achaean alliance – in particular, its formation as a political community - as it has taken shape at this late stage of the Trojan War. At one point during the argument with Agamemnon Achilles swears upon the scepter that “the sons of the Achaeans” use to administer justice, thus affirming that understanding and that account (1.233-39). Yet the oath Achilles swears bodes ill not only for Agamemnon but the entire Achaean community, and after swearing it he dashes the scepter onto the ground (1.239-46). Finally, as the assembly closes and Achilles admits that he will hand over Briseis, he is also unmoved in his anger toward Agamemnon and confident in his strength (1.292-303). There is much to support Achilles’ confidence, as the epic will proceed to show. Beyond that, Homer will present a subtle and profound interrogation of Achilles’ understanding of justice.

4.6 Achilles and Agamemnon Before and After their Conflict in Book 1

Homer’s presentation of Agamemnon and Achilles throughout the course of the Trojan War, prior to the beginning of their conflict, is remarkably consistent with how they appear in the opening scenes of book 1. Achilles, on the one hand, in keeping with his father’s instructions, has proven to be the model of a traditional warrior. He has fulfilled the role set out by the heroic code. On the other hand, Agamemnon claims to rule over the Achaeans, and remains consistent in his ruthless forcefulness, while quite often he is also skittish and ineffective.
4.6.1 Achilles’ Character and Ten Years of the Trojan War

As the instructions from Peleus remind us, Achilles has grown up during the years at Troy, really only knowing about war. During the years prior to his conflict with Agamemnon, in book 1, Achilles has excelled at fulfilling the duties prescribed by the traditional warrior ethic, in which his father had instructed him (see above, 4.4). As he reminds Agamemnon, Achilles has been at the forefront of the battle. In the battles with cities allied to Troy – whose defeat would have been instrumental to defeating the larger city - Achilles has been the Achaeans’ most effective soldier. When Andromache tells Hector of her city’s destruction, she describes Achilles’ as the leading soldier. It is he who destroyed most of the royal family in conquering the city (6.414-27). He had also conquered Lynnessos, home to Briseis, the woman both Achilles and Agamemnon claim to possess at the start of the poem:

Briseis, whom after much hard work he had taken from Lynnessos after he had sacked Lynnessos and the walls of Thebe and struck down Epistrophos and Mynes the furious spearmen, children of Euenos, [the] king (2.689-93).

Achilles has fulfilled the warrior code in that, while he has conquered cities, he has pursued honor, and respected even his enemy’s honor, rather than pursuing vengeance or simple blood lust (see above, 4.4). That approach leads Achilles to be recognized by his enemies for showing a rather exceptional degree of humanity, given the context of brutal warfare. Andromache’s attestation to this view is all the more impressive in light of the destruction Achilles wrought on her entire family.

It was brilliant Achilles who slew my father, Eëtion, when he stormed the strong-founded citadel of the Kilikians, Thebe of the towering gates. He killed Eëtion but did not strip his armor, for his heart respected the dead man, but burned the body in all its elaborate war-gear and piled a grave mound over it, and the nymphs of the mountains, daughters of Zeus of the aegis, planted elm trees about it...[and] when he had led my mother, who was
queen under wooded Plakos, here, along with all his possessions, Achilles released her again, accepting ransom beyond count (6.414-27).

When he returns to the battle after the death of Patroclus, Achilles’ refusals to ransom various enemy soldiers are clear instances of brutality in warfare, which stem from his own sense of desolation and wretchedness after the death of Patroclus (see, especially, 21.17-135). During the years before book 1’s conflict with Agamemnon, however, Achilles ransomed enemies – thereby earning honor as well as displaying, in the context of brutal warfare, a measure of humanity (see, e.g., 21.75-79).

In keeping with his self-description in book 1 (see above, 4.5.1-2), such are the labors that Achilles has exposed himself to as an exemplary warrior, to the benefit of the community. He has exerted himself on behalf of what he understands to be a common good, the safety and victory of the Achaean alliance. Moreover, it is arguable that – were he and Agamemnon not to have come into conflict - the lengthiness of the war would not have worn Achilles down. To the contrary: the heroic code, as explicated by Sarpedon, suggests that the constant experience of standing on the edge of life and death - and, to that extent, proving himself invulnerable to death - can have been exhilarating to Achilles. He would then prove himself to be a god-like hero. (That experience, in turn, would contribute to his self-understanding as son to Thetis – see above, 2.2; and below, 4.7.) Achilles has taken the traditional warrior code into which he was born to the extreme. He has focused on earning its deeper reward, honor. As we indicated in the previous section (see above, 4.5.1-2) – in contrast to Agamemnon - Achilles has understood the material rewards, which symbolize the community’s recognition of honor, only in terms of such honor. Of course, such an experience of the war would also have made Agamemnon’s challenge to Achilles all the more jarring.
4.6.2 Agamemnon’s Character and Ten Years of the Trojan War

Throughout the poem Agamemnon remains more or less as Homer presents him (and as Achilles characterizes him) in book 1. The history of the war has adversely affected Agamemnon; likely enough, the years have also further solidified his character. We can begin to think about his experience of the war by noting an important reference in book 1 that is picked up in book 2.

In book 1, we saw, Agamemnon called Calchas a “seer of evil.” He continued: “Never yet have you told me a good thing. Always the evil things are dear to your heart to prophesy, but nothing excellent have you said nor ever accomplished” (1.106-08). Book 2 supplies the information to explain what Agamemnon meant by those words. Having received a dream from Zeus that portended a successful Agamemnon has attempted to test the troops’ willingness to fight by telling them that he thinks the entire expedition is doomed to fail (2.98-141). But Agamemnon’s gambit fails: instead, he “stir[s] up the passion (thumos) in [their] breast[s],” and the Achaeans scramble toward their ships (2.142-55). They would have abandoned the expedition. That would have been a thing “beyond fate,” however; and Hera, concerned for the success of the expedition, instructs Athene to persuade the Achaeans to continue the fight (2.155-66). Athene then does so by turning to Odysseus, who is already unwilling to leave (2.166-82). Odysseus, in turn, reminds the Achaeans of a prophecy that Calchas made at the start of their expedition to Troy. When the Achaeans had gathered at Aulis, preparing to depart for Troy – Calchas interpreted a highly strange event. The Achaeans were setting up hecatombs to the immortals, under a plane tree. Then, a great sign appeared:

288 Taplin (1990) demonstrates that Agamemnon’s character remains constant in books 2 through 9 (even apart from what Achilles calls attention to in his challenge to Agamemnon, in book 1). See also Whitman 1958.
A snake, his back blood mottled, a thing of horror, cast into the light by the very Olympian, wound its way from under the altar and made toward the plane tree. Thereupon were innocent children, the young of the sparrow, cowering underneath the leaves at the uttermost branch tip, eight of them, and the mother was the ninth, who bore these children. The snake ate them all after their pitiful screaming, and the mother, crying aloud for her young ones, fluttered about him, and as she shrilled he caught her by the wing and coiled around her. After he had eaten the sparrow herself with her children the god who had shown the snake forth made him a monument, striking him stone, the son of devious-devising Kronos, and we standing about marveled at the thing that had been done. So as the terror and the god’s monsters came into the hecatomb Calchas straightaway spoke before us interpreting the gods’ will: “Why are you turned voiceless, you flowing-haired Achaeans? Zeus of the counsels has shown us this great portent: a thing late, late to be accomplished, whose glory (kleos) shall perish never. As this snake has eaten the sparrow herself with her children, eight of them, and the mother was the ninth, who bore them, so for years as many as this shall we fight in this place and in the tenth year we shall take the city of the wide ways” (2.299-329).

Moreover, Agamemnon seems to have counted on another prediction about the war. Soon after Odysseus has recounted the event of the snake devouring the motherbird and her eight hatchlings, Nestor recounts that other prediction.

The son of all-powerful Kronos promised, on that day when we went in our fast-running vessels, we of Argos, carrying blood and death to the Trojans. He flashed lightning on our right, showing signs of favor. (2.350-53).

Nestor then gives Agamemnon some advice about war tactics. Agamemnon, in turn, says to Nestor:

Once again, old sir, you surpass the sons of the Achaeans in debate. O father Zeus, Athene, Apollo: would that among the Achaeans I had ten such counselors. Then perhaps the city of lord Priam would be bent underneath our hands, captured and sacked. But instead Zeus of the aegis, son of Kronos, has given me bitterness… (2.370-75).
Given Agamemnon’s closeness to Nestor, he probably has trusted the Nestor’s view of the war’s outcome. After all, Nestor’s recounting of the lightning-prophecy would amount to flattery, given that it - unlike Calchas’s prophecy, just recounted by Odysseus - makes no reference to a long war. At the same time, when put in contrast to Calchas’s prophecy, Nestor’s recollection suggests why Agamemnon is so angry towards Calchas. Given that Calchas’s prophecy has not proven false – Troy has not fallen after almost ten years of fighting – Calchas’s appearance in book 1 would have reminded Agamemnon of the long hardship of the war. Agamemnon’s later reference to Calchas, in book 1, would thus display his frustration at the veracity of Calchas’s prophecy and the lengthiness of the war. Perhaps Agamemnon would not have hated Calchas as much as he does were he to have believed Calchas’s prophecy at Aulis. (If he had, he might have judged that the alliance’s war aim would take too long to accomplish, and might have given it up right at the start.) That expectation would make sense of his anger toward Calchas, in book 1: often we are angry at those who have warned us about an outcome that we have not wished for, but that has come to pass. Agamemnon’s expectation that the war would be won more readily, which is instead met with many years of hardship, would have caused him much frustration. That, in turn, might explain Agamemnon’s response to the dream that Zeus sent to him, as well as his response to Nestor, that Zeus has given him bitterness. Agamemnon may have decided to test Zeus’s dream since the god’s thunderbolt flashed so long without the war aim coming to fulfillment.

Beyond book 1, Agamemnon approaches the other Achaean elites in a forceful manner, treating them as insubordinates. For example, in book 4, as Taplin discusses, when Agamemnon exhorts the troops to fight in book 4, “he is vehemently rude to Odysseus with out any good cause” (4.327 ff.), and “he goes on to censure Diomedes with just as little cause” (4.365 ff). As we shall discuss below, when he does make an offer to Achilles, in order to try and bring him
back into the battle, Agamemnon does so in order to make Achilles yield to his authority (9.120-61). There, again, the charges Achilles makes against him in book 1 – that he thinks of the Achaeans as his own private army, and that he rules through unwarranted force – are in evidence. Similarly, we saw, at the start and end of book 3’s duel Agamemnon declares that the war against Troy is his own war - not his brother’s, and not a common effort (3.284-91, 4.157-68; see above, 3.1).

In keeping with our observations about the Trojans, as well as Peleus’s instructions to Achilles, Homer seems to account for spiritedness (thumos) as causing the warrior to lack discipline or self-control (see above, 3.4.2, and 4.4). Agamemnon exhibits both of those characteristics. As we have seen, despite Menelaus’s hatred of Paris he takes a more moderate view of the enemy. In his burning anger, by contrast, Agamemnon, aims to plunder and destroy Troy. Conversely, however, at other times Agamemnon wishes to abandon the expedition altogether. His test of the troops, in book 2, where Agamemnon instructs them to give up on the expedition, is not an isolated incident. He counsels the same at the start of book 9 (9.16-28).

At that point it is Diomedes who reacts to Agamemnon, still bristling at the latter’s harshness toward him earlier, in book 4. Diomedes makes the grand claim that even if all of the other Achaeans abandons the expedition, he and his countryman Sthenelus will remain and fight to destroy Troy, because they came with the god rather than for Agamemnon (9.31-49). Diomedes may be compared with Achilles in his view that the war is fought for glory, not for Helen or for simple plunder. Agamemnon’s expresses an understanding of human powerlessness that life is short. For example, at the start of book 9 Agamemnon lists the offer he

289 See Slatkin 2011b.
will make to Achilles in order to bring him back into the war. He then remarks: “Let him give way. For Hades gives not way, and is pitiless, and therefore he among all the gods is most hateful to mortals” (9.157-59; cf. 2.116-22). Agamemnon’s insight might have led him away from the war. Certainly, spending many years of one’s life waging war cannot make much sense, and would cause much frustration.

Agamemnon has been motivated, then, to bring a quick end to the war and to wreak vengeance on the Trojans, but has been unable to do so. He has also been challenged by men, like Achilles and Diomedes, who have different motives for waging the war. Agamemnon’s war-weariness, his demand for vengeance, coupled with his underlying wish to force others (Achaeans as well as Trojans) to submit to his will, would explain other, his behavior during the war. As Taplin has shown, he lacks the foresight and discipline to come up with and execute a winning strategy.\(^{290}\) Agamemnon’s \textit{aristeia} (11.91-180) is not particularly impressive, when compared with those of Diomedes, Ajax, and others.\(^{291}\) It contains a number of sign-posts to the particular brutality of his fighting, which stands in contrast to that of Achilles (see above, 4.6.1). Agamemnon shows no mercy toward the two sons of Antimachus who supplicate him to accept a ransom payment for sparing their lives (11.122-47). Similarly, in book 6 Agamemnon instructs his brother on the battlefield. Menelaus has just captured the Trojan youth, Adrestos, who supplicates Menelaus and offers a large ransom in order to be spared. Menelaus is moved to pity Adrestos (6.37-50).

\(^{290}\) Taplin 1990.

\(^{291}\) Taplin 1990: 72-74.
And now he was on the point of handing him to a henchman to lead back to the fast Achaean ships; but Agamemnon came on the run to join him and spoke his word of argument: “Dear brother, o Menelaus, are you concerned so tenderly with these people? Did you in your house get the best of treatment from the Trojans? No, let not one of them go free of sudden death and our hands; not the young man child that the mother carries still in her body, not even he, but let all of Troy’s people perish, utterly blotted out and unmourned for” (6.52-60).

That instruction is certainly among the most brutal events of the Iliad. Its proximity to the scene between Hector and Andromache (which occurs just over 300 lines later) puts Agamemnon’s words into sharper relief. Moreover, Agamemnon’s harsh treatment of various women forms a clear pattern in the work. Agamemnon thinks of women as possessions. When he makes his offer to Achilles, at the start of book 9, he promises the warrior a number of women in addition to his own daughter. In book 1, of course, he cruelly rejects the supplication of Chrysis to return his daughter. Further, despite his words to his brother in front of Adrestos, as to the Trojans’ transgression against Menelaus’s household, Agamemnon hardly respects his own wife. His favorable comparison of Chryseis to Clytemnestra also might well have reminded Homer’s original audience of the story that Aeschylus would so dramatically tell in the classical period.

Odysseus’s reference to Calchas’s prophecy, in book 2, should also be noted in this connection. We have been prepared for it with Agamemnon’s ominous reference to the prophet as a “seer of evil,” in book 1. The story of the snake devouring the birds is an outlier in the Iliad in so far as it differs from other account of gods sending signals to human beings, in that such moments are usually supplemented by accounts of the given god’s purpose in sending them. It also seems rare for its uncanny imagery of a mother dying alongside her own children. A juxtaposition suggests itself, as usually those who die on the battlefield are described by Homer as dying to be mourned by their parents back home. In turn, these aspects of the strange event at
Aulis resonate with another, quite un-Homeric, story that Homer’s readers might have expected in connection to Calchas and the gathering of the troops at that place: namely, the sacrifice of his own daughter, Iphigenia.\textsuperscript{292} As such, Homer would have subsumed Agamemnon’s character, as known outside the poem, into his treatment of women inside the poem itself. The reference to killing the child within his mother’s womb is more brutal for not being some clearly primitive instance of child sacrifice (as in the Iphigenia story) but an example of the banal but awful brutality that always has and will take place in war.\textsuperscript{293}

Paris’s original transgression preceded more terrible results. In the archetypal war, the Trojan War, Calchas’s prophecy - elicited by the strange and disturbing event of the snake devouring the hatchlings and their mother, witnessed as it was by the Achaeans – points to the deaths of many men, who will be mourned by their bereaved parents. While he has come to punish Paris and the Trojans, Agamemnon outdoes their foppish prince in his approach to women. Beyond loyalty to his brother - a concern to return Helen and the stolen possessions to Sparta; or even to punish Troy, in some appropriate measure, for its transgression - Agamemnon’s own motives have cause him to wage the war. \\[
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\textsuperscript{292} Cf. Barker 2009: 44 n. 9 and references. “The temporal vagueness of Agamemnon’s attack on the seer [in book 1] (‘never,’ ‘always’) may well suggest that the \textit{Iliad} is playing off other accounts.”


It is perhaps worth noting here that Aristotle will begin the \textit{Politics} by differentiating the more civilized, political view of women as not being slaves to men, with the more barbaric view that they are (1252b1-9; see also 1259a37-1260b24). The theme also emerges often in Herodotus’s \textit{Histories}, even at its very start. Such a view denies the basis of the polis. Even where women are unable to become citizens, these writers seem to argue, sexual inequality in the household would prove a bad preparation for public leadership.
It is true that Achilles has even more to do with Troy’s destruction than Agamemnon does. Nevertheless, in addition to his own direct connection to the war, Agamemnon’s association with women in the *Iliad* connects him to the war on a symbolic level. As for the Trojan women, we have discussed Andromache’s understanding of what the war has brought and what it portends. Now, Hector’s doom foretells that of Troy. As for the Trojan women, we have discussed Andromache’s understanding of what the war has brought and what it portends. Now, Hector’s doom foretells that of Troy. He is killed after Achilles chases him under the Trojan wall:

There there are double springs of water that jet up, the springs of whirling Skamandrios… Beside these…are the washing-hollows of stone, and magnificent, where the wives of the Trojans and their lovely daughters washed the clothes to shining, in the old days when there was peace, before the coming of the sons of the Achaeans (22.147-56).

Hector’s death betokens Troy’s destruction. Moreover, Homer connects Andromache’s fate with that of Hector as well as that of the entire city, with pregnant imagery in book 22. On seeing Hector’s corpse dragged by Achilles, Andromache, fainting, throws her veil. As Schein notes, “the word for veil, *krēdemnon*, can denote both a woman’s chastity and the tower of a city,” so “the loss of her veil suggests both the sexual violation of Andromache and the final destruction of Troy.”

Thus will Agamemnon’s war against Troy come to its end.

Agamemnon, we have seen, wished to make clear that the Trojans had caused the war and deserved to be destroyed for their transgressions. He wishes to overtake Troy and to be further rewarded with the city’s possessions. Hector tells Poulidas that much of Troy’s possessions have made their way to Phrygia and Maionia, we presume, to pay for the city’s

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294 Schein 1984: 24-25.

defense. Caroline Alexander observes that in the early first century B.C. Strabo “summarized the far-reaching consequences of the disastrous war at Troy as it was understood by later history”:

For it came about that, on account of the length of the campaign, the Greeks of that time, and the barbarians as well, lost both what they had at home and what they had acquired by the campaign. Troy would be destroyed, and the victors would turn to piracy because of their poverty.”296 The larger epic tradition, told in the *Odyssey* and then in Greek tragedy, would illustrate that legacy.

### 4.7 The Common People and the Achaean Alliance

In addition to Achilles’ and Agamemnon’s different understandings of the Achaean alliance, a fuller account would include the perspective of the common people who are sometimes referred to in the *Iliad*. It is true, that perspective is not static. The poem describes the people as both eager to return home from the expedition to Troy and eager to fight on. Their behavior is highly influenced, perhaps determined, by the Achaean elites - such as Agamemnon, Nestor, Odysseus, and Achilles – the various kings that they followed to Troy. By contrast to the Trojans, we noted, the common troops are characterized by discipline and an appropriate sense of shame before one another. Nonetheless, at times the poem does present them as holding a clear perspective that differs from those of the various elites who lead the Achaeans.

After the dream that Zeus has sent him, when Agamemnon decides call an assembly to test the troops’ readiness for battle, we noted that his speech would reflect his own desire to

296 Alexander 2009: 220, citing Strabo *Geography* 1.3.2.
return home. We can quote it here in order to consider how his words would have resonated with the troops.

Fighting men and friends, o Achaeans, henchmen of Ares: Zeus son of Kronos has caught me fast in bitter futility. He is hard; who before this time promised me and consented that I might sack strong-walled Troy and sail homeward. Now he has devised a vile deception, and bids me go back to Argos in dishonor having lost many of my people. Such is the way it will be pleasing to Zeus, who is too strong, who before now has broken the crests of many cities and will break them again, since his power is beyond all others. And this shall be a thing of shame for the men hereafter to be told, that so strong, so great of host of Achaeans carried on and fought in vain a war that was useless...And now nine years of might Zeus have gone by, and the timbers of our ships have rotted away and the cables are broken and far away our own wives and young children are sitting within our halls and wait for us, while still our work here stays forever unfinished as it is, for whose sake we came hither. Come then, do as I say, let us all be won over; let us run away with our ships to the beloved land of our fathers since no longer now shall we capture Troy of the wide ways (2.110-41).

Agamemnon’s attempt at reverse psychology fails: the people immediately scramble to their ships. “The assembly was shaken as on the sea the big waves in the main by Ikaria, when the south and south-east winds driving down from the clouds of Zeus the father whip them” (2.144-46). Perhaps they react to Agamemnon’s overbearing reference to the war as his own accomplishment, rather than one in which they would share. It is noteworthy, however, that Agamemnon focuses on the homes that they Achaeans have left behind. That is particularly noteworthy given that Agamemnon has not himself shown much desire to return to his wife, Clytemnaestra (and what would await him upon returning to his family). In any event, evidently Agamemnon has failed to see how the image of home resonates with the common troops.

Nestor had supported Agamemnon’s decision to test the troops (2.77-83). As the old man who speaks most strongly for traditional rule, he consistently upholds the view that the war and
the Achaean alliance are led by Agamemnon as their chief king.\(^{297}\) (It is he who also refers to the prophecy of the “short war,” as symbolized by Zeus’s thunderbolt at Aulis [2. 350-56; see above, 4.6.2].) When the men flee the assembly, Hera – just as when she saw that Achilles was about to strike Agamemnon, in book 1 – turns to Athene, who then persuades another king, Odysseus, to bring the troops back (2.155-81). Odysseus also supports Agamemnon’s rule. He proceeds to make use of Agamemnon’s own scepter, wields it as a tool of chastisement, striking even at fellow kings as he tells them to respect Agamemnon as the chief king of the alliance (2.185-210). Odysseus, however, understands the community better than Agamemnon does.\(^{298}\) He speaks to Agamemnon before all of the Achaeans. But whereas Agamemnon, when he spoke of the wish to return home, seemed betray merely his own wish to return home, Odysseus sympathizes with everyone’s wish to return home. Likewise, he emphasizes the shame that will befall each of the Achaeans should they return home after a failed expedition (2.278-300). It is in this context that Odysseus, who is mythically patient or long-suffering, tells of Calchas’s prophecy (discussed above, 4.6.1) on the basis of which Odysseus is sanguine about the Achaeans’ victory. The Achaeans should conquer Troy soon, given that they have already been at Troy for nine years’ time (2.299-332). In turn, on hearing this, the Achaeans shout that they remain up to the challenge of sacking the city (2.333-35).

Agamemnon’s leadership as the “one king” - or the view of the alliance as symbolizing that monarchic model – might or might not be called into question by his need of Nestor and

\(^{297}\) Nestor is also similar to Agamemnon in his desire for the total destruction of the enemy (see, e.g., 2.350-56; 6.67-72).

\(^{298}\) See Haft 1990. Cf. 3.192-98.
Odysseus to support his kingship. If these events prove that he is a successful king over the Achaeans, one has to consider that monarchies depend on elites for support. Indeed, Odysseus’s role in ensuring that the Achaeans destroy Troy will even rival that of Achilles.\(^{299}\) In terms of the larger myth cycle surrounding the *Iliad*, it is Odysseus who would devise the ploy of the “Trojan horse.”\(^{300}\) At the same time, however, one must ask whether Nestor or Odysseus (to say nothing of Agamemnon) has a clear vision of what conquering Troy will achieve. Nestor is a man of the past, in terms of his references to either small-scale armed excursions (such as cattle raids and battles that ensued from them [11.670-762]) or to outlandish battles (with beast-men [1.267-68]). As for Odysseus, despite his importance in the war effort, one wonders whether he understands what it is for. While not as vengeful as Agamemnon, he says little about what the meaning of the war beyond not wishing to return home in shame (2.297-98). Moreover, of course, Odysseus will suffer for another ten years before returning to Ithaca. Even allowing for his mythical patience, he might have advised the Achaeans differently when he sympathized with them in their desire to return home, were he to have known his own future.

Odysseus may be less harsh, more understanding, toward the people than Agamemnon or Nestor. Nonetheless, his support for Agamemnon’s kingship - and, therewith, his involvement in the war - are called into question by Odysseus’s approach to the people after they scramble to

\(^{299}\) Both Odysseus and Achilles wish to overtake Troy. They are both visited by Hera and Athene at important points where the expedition might fail (1.193-96, 2.155-65). Similarly, they share an antipathy toward Thersites, who expresses the wish to return home from Troy rather than remain and fight (2.220).

\(^{300}\) Haft (1990) has argued that subtle but effective references in books 2 and 10 of the *Iliad* point to Odysseus’ role in the enterprise.
their ships. Odysseus takes Agamemnon’s scepter, then proceeds to speak to kings or men of influence, as well as to strike a number of men among the people – throughout, enforcing an hierarchical understanding of the community – to bring them back from the ships and re-join the alliance (2.185-210). After Odysseus’s intervention, nonetheless, the Achaeans are presented as the brave and disciplined soldiers that, we have noted, stand in contrast to the Trojans (2.434-83).

At the same time, just like the Trojans, when the Achaean men think that the duel between Menelaus and Paris will end the war, they murmur prayers to Zeus that “whichever man has made what has happened happen to both sides, grant that he be killed and go down to the house of Hades. Let friendship and sworn faith be true for the rest of us” (3.318-23). Despite their bravery, by the end of the poem, with its many instances of brutality in war, references to bereaved parents, and its various images of peace as an alternative to war, it must be said that the Achaeans’ hope that the duel would end the war was not without meaning.

Odysseus’s harshest words are reserved for Thersites. He defends Agamemnon’s kingship against Thersites’ charges (2.212-69). Thersites expresses a simple wish to turn away from the war and return home, and by implication his statement rejects any political hierarchy or order. The people therefore ridicule Thersites when Odysseus cudgels him with the scepter. Thersites would reject the war because he is a coward, not because his honor has been thwarted, as is Achilles’ view. (His charges against Agamemnon parrot, but only parrot, those of Achilles, in book 1. The credit that would go to Achilles for what he says about Agamemnon does not


also redound to Thersites.) We shall turn next to Achilles for a more profound rejection of the war, and an alternative vision. In the context of a poem that investigates war and emphasizes its seriousness, Thersites – who otherwise would probably be a sympathetic figure - is merely comical. Perhaps it should be said, however, that a more robust and rich understanding of war and peace, as well as the proper relationships between the common people and elites, would appear later on the Greek stage, in the comic heroism of Aristophanes.

4.8 Achilles’ Hopes and Disappointments; Discoveries about Politics, and a Return to the Private Realm

In book 9 of the *Iliad* Achilles points to highly significant discoveries about politics and the human situation. As we have seen, during an open assembly of the people that Achilles has called for the purpose of saving the allies and strengthening their effort to break through Troy’s walls, Agamemnon, leader of the Achaean alliance, detracts from the leading warrior’s honor in a forceful show of his own authority. Agamemnon is not challenged by the other Achaeans, either, such that they appear to Achilles as “non-entities.” In his reaction to them, Achilles invokes the virtue he has displayed as a warrior on behalf of the community – he is the “best of the Achaeans,” and unafraid of death – in contrast to Agamemnon’s cowardice, forcefulness, and greed.

Although to Achilles it was an act of madness, Agamemnon’s decision has been made, so the warrior announces that he will leave Troy for his homeland, Phthia, rather than continue to fight a war for a king too cowardly to honor virtue (1.412, 1.169-71). Upon leaving the assembly, however, Achilles turns to his mother, the sea goddess, Thetis. He says first that – because she has borne him to a short life – the chief god, Zeus, should grant him honor at the least, whereas now he has given Achilles “not even a little” (1.351-54). Achilles tells her, if she
has the power, that she should protect him by supplicating to Zeus – whose life she once saved (1.393-96; see above, 2.1). While he remains near Troy, then, Zeus should aid the Trojans to the point that the Achaeans beg for Achilles’ return and restore his honor (1.407-12).

By book 9 an interval of time has passed, during which the battle has indeed favored the Trojans. Book 8 showed that Hector felt confident enough to challenge to best of the Achaeans to a duel, which he fought with Ajax, and it ended in a draw (7.244-312). Diomede has upbraided Agamemnon for his continued failure to lead the charge toward Troy (9.32-49). Achilles, in turn, has hovered around the poem between books 2 and 9, despite being absent from the action.303 After Diomede’s rebukes Agamemnon, Nestor tries to calm the situation; but also – aware that no other warrior than Achilles can turn the war to the Achaeans’ favor – tries to persuade Agamemnon to make amends with the warrior after having dishonored him during the earlier assembly.

Thus compelled to see that the alliance needs Achilles, Agamemnon sends three emissaries to his tent, to award him many gifts. However, Agamemnon makes it clear that he will award Achilles the gifts in order to demonstrate his own power to command obedience rather than to redress the dishonor done to Achilles. They find Achilles delighting in a song of men’s fame (klea andrôn) and eager to hear what they have to say (9.185-89). After the first emissary, Odysseus, delivers Agamemnon’s message, however, Achilles recognizes that Agamemnon would make the offer in order to demonstrate his own power (9.160-61).304

303 See, e.g., Lattimore 1951: 30-33; Nagy 1999: 26-41.

304 See Benardete 2005: 95; Taplin 1990: 71. Agamemnon’s approach may be compared with what Hobbes describes as the sovereign’s view of subordinates: “A sovereign doth honour a subject with whatsoever title, or
Although Odysseus tries diplomatically to correct Agamemnon by not mentioning the latter’s reason for making the offer, Achilles, evidently, divines it. He thus says to the dissembling Odysseus: “As I detest the doorways of Death [i.e., Hades], I detest that man, who hides one thing in the depths of his heart, and speaks forth another” (9.312-13).

Achilles’ reference to Hades is telling. He immediately comes to the recognition that, as he says:

Fate is the same for the man who holds back, the same if he fights hard. We are all held in a single honor, the brave (*esthlos*) with the weaklings. A man (*anēr*) dies still if he has done nothing, as one who has done much (9.318-20).

With that emphatic statement Achilles reflects as much on what he has hoped for as he articulates his recognition that those hopes have been thwarted. A little further in his response Achilles will recount that his mother, Thetis, told him that he carries two different sorts of destiny: to fight in Troy and not return home - that is, to die young - but also to have imperishable glory (*kleos aphthiton*); or to return home and live a long life, but where there will be no excellence to his renown (*ōleto moi kleos esthlon*) (9.412-16). These several statements on honor and glory with which Achilles responds to Odysseus remind one of what he said to his mother just after the assembly in book 1. Together with the image of the warrior in song, they may be put together with the events and statements from the start of the poem, which allows the reader to think about what for Achilles is the fuller meaning of his conflict with Agamemnon. At office, or employment, or action, that he himself will have taken for a sign of his will to honour him” (*Leviathan* 10.35).
some point before the conflict broke out, evidently, Achilles was told by his mother of the two kinds of destiny from which he was to choose, and he chose to fight for undying glory.

Further, Achilles expected that after his death his glory would become manifest in song or poetry that displays his deeds in battle. The best of the Achaeans would be remembered alongside, if not surpassing, such glorious men as he is portrayed remembering in song when the emissaries arrive. Further, given what he first said to his mother in book 1 (that because he is to die young, Zeus should at the least honor him) it now seems clear that Achilles expected that the achievement of undying glory (which his mother told him would follow upon his choice to die young) would also constitute the honor of Zeus; put another way, he has expected that his undying glory among men would be sanctioned by the chief god. It is the promise of such undying glory, sanctioned by Zeus, that would best explain what he had said during the public assembly as to his being fearless before death, while for years he has continually been willing to risk it. At the same time, Achilles’ renown would have been undying or glorious because it would have been a remembrance of deeds that were noble. His expectation of glory and his experience as a warrior have been mutually constitutive: Achilles has been fearless before death because he has expected to enjoy undying glory, sanctioned by Zeus, and he expected these because he has been fearless before death.

Unlike Achilles, who has watched the war and sung of the glory of men, between books 1 and 9 Homer’s audience has become aware of significant barriers that would stop Achilles from fulfilling his wishes. Book 5 showed in Diomedes a hero who displays resemblances to Achilles, failing to earn glory even despite fighting against the gods. Further, just prior to book 9 (as

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we discussed above, in chapter 2), the immortals have come to an agreement to stay out of the war and, thereby, to preserve the dividing line between themselves and mortals. In any case, the goddesses who, we are told in book 1, love Achilles and Agamemnon, have had their own motives. During the second assembly, Achilles thought that he should obey Athene, and not kill Agamemnon, because gods listen to men, just like men who listen to gods. Certainly, he expects that Athene is right in stating that Agamemnon will repay him several times over for his outrage against Achilles (1.188-218). By book 4, as we have discussed, it becomes clear that Athene and Hera’s partisan feeling toward the Achaeans is merely instrumental to their desire for Troy’s destruction. After the accomplishment of that, Achaean cities (such as Argos, Sparta, and Mykenos) mean nothing to them (see above, 2.1). Beyond their own ends, the goddesses do not care about the concerns of the Achaeans. Being a goddess, Athene’s prediction from book 1 is fulfilled with emissaries’ offers, in book 9; but, again, Agamemnon’s plentiful gifts carry precisely the opposite meaning to that which Achilles had expected.

To Achilles, Agamemnon’s decision in book 1 stemmed from his fear of death and hence his blindness to virtue. At the same time, however, when Agamemnon denied Achilles’ excellence and honor he would have obliterated the undying glory that was to have earned. Although, before the conflict, it had been Achilles’ understanding that with his great courage alone he would meet the great test that Thetis had announced to him, Agamemnon’s decision marked a rupture in that understanding. That was what enraged Achilles, and it signaled to him that he was not being granted “even a little” of the honor Zeus owed him - so that he attempted to have demonstrated what he thought was the true order of the political community, through asking his mother to supplicate for Zeus’s intervention. Yet by the time the embassy is sent, Zeus either has not intervened in his favor or, if he did intervene, it has been too little to re-establish Achilles’ honor. Either way, at this point Achilles has come to recognize that his great
expectation was, instead, a false hope, that he has been laboring and sacrificing himself for an illusion. He now compares his work to the sacrifice of a mother-bird, who brings morsels to her unwinged young, while she herself suffers (9.323-27). Indeed, where the bird exerts herself from an instinct to preserve, Achilles finds that his efforts lead nowhere.

Without what he had hoped for from Zeus, as Agamemnon’s decision remains in force, Achilles’ new understanding seems to be that the autocratic, piratical character of Agamemnon’s rule really has dominated and will continue to throughout the entire war venture on which the Achaeans have long since embarked. Given, then, that the rupture that occurred in book 1 has proven to be real and irreparable, what the conflict with Agamemnon seems to make clear to Achilles is that he could never achieve glory among the members of the political community in perpetuity when he does not enjoy their honor in the here and now. One might note how this constitutes a fundamental problem, that virtue - which is somehow higher, nobler, and purer - depends for its honor on those who are not virtuous or even base. Achilles, however, views honor as worthless, and the posthumous glory in which honor was to have culminated, as non-existent. Nor does he continue to urge himself toward the practice of virtue without regard for the rewards of honor and immortal glory; so that his new understanding of the relation between honor and virtue seems also to make it quite unclear for him whether even the latter really exists. That is a profound disappointment.

And yet, Achilles’ very reflections on the emptiness of honor in the war also lead him to a momentary but highly significant awareness of an alternative to his life of battle - in the love one feels for his own wife. That is how Achilles says he feels toward the woman over whom the conflict began when Agamemnon took her from him; thus he intuits a transfiguration of Briseis,
from a token of his honor to the “bride of [his] heart” (9.336). As such, he states that he will return from the shores of Troy to Phthia his homeland, and turn his cares to marriage (4.393-409).

Achilles’ reflections provide for a remarkable reinterpretation of the meaning of the war as a whole. The poetic image of the mother-bird that Achilles conjures up - given its connection to the strange image that the bird-interpreter, Calchas, interpreted, in book 2 – connect the war to the realm of becoming and death. The omen in book 2 was a grisly image of destruction, where the snake devoured the unwinged birds. However, Achilles’ comparison between his own labors and mother-bird’s serves to highlight the difference between the work of war and the sustenance of life. Now, then, Achilles - that manliest of men, who has grown up in war - discovers an association with the feminine. The various images that reach back to book 1, beginning with abduction of Chryseis – which is itself symbolic of Helen’s abduction - point to the role of women in the war. In book 1, Achilles understood Helen’s abduction as the cause but not the meaning of the war, which was the pursuit of honor on behalf of the Achaean community. With his reference to the mother-bird, Achilles has also reinterpreted the war as, after all, an effort to rescue Helen for Menelaus (9.323-27). Needless to say, this insight contains a much more profound view of the marriage bond than Menelaus could have come to - to say nothing of Helen, or Paris, or of Agamemnon. Being based on his insights into the problem of honor in politics, Achilles’ wish to return home also differs from that of Thersites; the latter could never have gone through the experiences necessary to come to such insights.

Given the sympathetic view of Andromache, and the role that Achilles has performed in her tragic existence, Achilles’ insight might well conjure up her wifely and maternal qualities. At the same time, Hector, despite his love for Andromache, would also fall short in Achilles’ new perspective on the war. For Achilles’ new perspective amounts to a rejection of the warrior ethic. The Trojan War is no longer understood, as he had experienced it, to provide the basis for seeking honor. Now he sees that, since every man deserves to enjoy familial love during the span of his life, there is no reason for him - or, for that matter, the other Achaeans - to risk death, or for the war as a whole, so that just one man’s wife should be returned to him (9.336-42; 9.417-19). The *Iliad* thus provides for a different perspective on the human condition – on the importance of the sub-political or private realm - arising from the reflections of one who has devoted himself to engagement in the public acts of warfare.

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5 Conclusion

In book 9, Achilles provides an important moment of closure in Homer’s account of the Trojan War. It is true that, after a few moments, Homer will turn to describe Achilles’ decision to remain close to Troy - and the poem continues. Nonetheless, the movement of action and thought that takes place between the start of the poem and the section in book 9, we have seen, forms a highly significant conceptual set. In its poetic logic, this part of the Iliad is an inquiry into the meaning of war, virtue, honor, and claims to rule, as well the hope for immortality, and the inescapability of death - the awareness of which would point the warrior towards a new understanding of political order, wherein the violence of war is subordinated to what is cherished in times of peace. Achilles’ understanding might, then, point to a fuller understanding than Hector’s: the polis is to be defended – and actions are honorable – where they are in the service of a political community that allows for the enjoyments of peacetime. Finally, by the end of the poem, Achilles and Homer’s reader are to come to an even deeper understanding of the human situation, but one that is also implied in what Homer has presented in books 1 through 9.

Achilles’ insight into the importance of the feminine and the domestic sphere is short-lived. After all, he has had little experience outside of warfare. Given his character, it is hard to imagine him staying down on the farms of Phthia after he has engaged in warfare at the head of the grand Achaean alliance. At the same time, we learn from Achilles’ response to the story about Meleagros – told to him by one of the emissaries, his guardian, Phoenix – that Achilles will not care whether the members of the community awards him with gifts or honors for his deeds to save them. Meleagros was one of the “great men” or heroes of the past (tōn prosthen...kleaandrōn hērōōn, 9.524-25) – one of those, it seems, whose praises Achilles sings when the emissaries arrive at his tent. Phoenix tells of how Meleagros did not save his
community from the enemy – instead, he stayed by his own hearth, with his wife, Cleopatra – even until the community was on the very verge of destruction. By then, the community refused to give him gifts of honor. Phoenix warns Achilles not to make the same mistake and wait until the Trojans are about to burn down the Achaean’s ships, but instead to re-enter the battle against Troy (9.522-605). Achilles, however, has been disillusioned of the belief that gifts guarantee honor and undying fame. He says that he will indeed wait until Hector reaches his own ships before he re-enters the battle (9.608-10, 9.649-55). While he does not depend on honor from the community, Achilles believes that he is honored by Zeus (9.607-08). As we argued in section 2.2, after book 9, Achilles believes that Zeus’s honor will ensure that he is rewarded - even by becoming a god - for his feats as a warrior. That wish amounts to a reprise of the wish for immortality through undying fame (which we discussed in section 4.8); albeit, in the second instance Achilles pursues a more thoroughgoing kind of immortality.

If Achilles imagines Meleagros happy without rewards from the community – or, as he imagines himself in such a position – he does not consider a certain vulnerability to which, in retrospect, the Meleagros story points. Cleopatra’s name, reversed, is Patroclus’s name. Now, brideless, Achilles is still closer to his dear brother in arms than to any woman. As we discussed in section 2.2, Achilles will discover that his wish for complete independence from the community - through performing feats that only Zeus would honor – can not compensate for the death of his dear friend. Gone, then, is Achilles’ wish for immortality, much as he is disillusioned of his wish for kleos when told of Agamemnon’s offer, in book 9. Likewise, similar to his awareness, in book 9, of the importance of marriage – although, tragically, when he

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308 See Nagy 1999: 105.
can do nothing but lament his loss of Patroclus – Achilles will recognize that friendship is to be cherished (18.80-99). Thus Achilles’ insight there, again, as to the importance of private or non-political attachment, is much more profound, while it is much more painful, than the one he came to in book 9.

To conclude, we come to see that politics, as it comes to sight in the Iliad, gives rise to, or participates in, a number of tensions that comprise the human condition. As a public activity, a plane on which human beings engage in a common enterprise, politics must be understood in contrast to a number of different spheres – the sub-political, the private, and attempts to transcend politics. In the Iliad, other than the poet, Achilles is best situated to understand those tensions, not least because he is successful at the arts of political activity. Achilles’ experience of war, as an attempt to gain independence from the community while also contributing to it, leads him to a number of limits – from below (as imposed by the petty rule of Agamemnon) as well as from above (as imposed by the immortal gods). Ultimately, although he comes to learn it too late, Achilles’ experience points to the importance of peace, much as his vulnerability as a mortal being points to the importance of existence. An ordering of the human experience would be found through a judicious balancing of the various tensions that comprise the human condition. Such a balancing is more difficult in warfare, although perhaps the various tensions can come more clearly to sight in that setting. For its beautiful portrayal of such key

\[\text{309 On similarities between Homer and Achilles, see Martin 1989; Ahrensdorf 2014.}\]

\[\text{310 War also brings out a certain degree of alacrity, meaning, and friendship that may be hard to replicate in peacetime. Cf., e.g., Keegan 2000: 426, cited by Alexander 2009: 147-48. Further, thinkers such as Xenophon, Plato, and Aristotle would turn to political philosophy as an engagement between friends that would transfigure the}\]
tensions, the *Iliad* provides a vital account that would help us understand our ever-present predicament.

experience of engaging in noble acts on the battlefield. On Plato, cf., e.g., Lutz 1998; Ludwig 2002: 368-69; Zuckert 2009. One of Aristotle’s many references to Homer is in book 2 of the *Politics*, where he discusses how those who seek honor can engage in intractable factional conflict, and Homer’s Achilles illustrates the point. The best remedy for such desire is to be found in philosophic inquiry (1266b24-1267a15), of which the *Politics* as a whole might well be considered an example (see, e.g., Davis 1996).
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