

PATTERNS OF HUMAN ERROR IN HOMER*

It has become habitual to approach Homeric man's mental functioning with the categories used today, only to show how different this man was from the later Greek and, moreover, from the modern individual. The studies in Homer's mental terminology begun by Bruno Snell and other German scholars before World War II illustrate this tendency. Although the scholarly value of these studies, which have led us to realize that the Homeric vocabulary lacks terms explicitly designating the person as a whole, is incontestable, in everything concerning the better understanding of Homeric man their effect has been, paradoxically enough, rather negative. Indeed, insofar as such ideas as 'self', 'soul', 'character' are said to be irrelevant to Homer, and what is proposed instead is a loose conglomerate of the so-called 'mental organs', Homeric man is turned into an incognizable entity altogether estranged from everything understood as human today or in classical Greece. At the same time, the essential humanity of Homeric man is immediately felt by every reader of Homer, and the incompatibility of this experience with the image created by terminological speculations about Homeric man is strong enough to call in question the relevance of the results obtained through the terminological approach.¹

The same seems to be true of the interpretation of Homeric man in terms of modern psychology. The psychological approach, initiated by M.P. Nilsson and further developed by E.R. Dodds, emphasized such features of Homeric psychology as the dependence of human behaviour on divine intervention and the predominant part played by the *thumos* in every aspect of Homeric man's functioning. It has been held that the actions and states of mind caused by the gods cannot be regarded as part of the self, that the *thumos* must have enjoyed such a degree of independence that it too could not be felt as part of the self, and that 'all departures from normal human behaviour whose causes are not immediately perceived ... are ascribed to a supernatural agency'.² As a result, today we know much more about the abnormalities of Homeric man's behaviour than about the norm from which these abnormalities deviate. It is not surprising, then, that the theory that Homeric man was psychologically or even anthropologically different from the classical Greek, let alone the modern individual, has taken a strong hold over many current studies in Homeric psychology.³

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¹ For criticism of the terminological approach see especially H. Schwabl, 'Sur Selbständigkeit des Menschen bei Homer', *WS* lxxvii (1954) 46-64; A. Lesky, *Göttliche und menschliche Motivation im homerischen Epos* (Heidelberg 1961) 5-11; H. Lloyd-Jones, *The justice of Zeus*², (Berkeley 1983) 2-3, 8-10; R.W. Sharples, "'But why has my spirit spoken with me thus?': Homeric decision-making", *G & R* xxx (1983) 1-7; R. Gaskin, 'Do Homeric heroes make real decisions?' *CQ* xl (1990) 1-15; S. Halliwell, 'Traditional Greek conceptions of character', in C.B.R. Pelling (ed.), *Characterization and individuality in Greek literature* (Oxford 1990) 34-42, and now also B. Williams, *Shame and necessity* (Berkeley 1993) 21-49.

² E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the irrational* (Berkeley 1951) 13.

³ See, for example, J. Jaynes, *The origin of consciousness in the breakdown of the bicameral mind* (Harmondsworth 1982). Of course, Dodds, who introduced the 'irrational' only to supplement the 'rational', not to supersede it, cannot be held responsible for the far-reaching conclusion that the Iliadic hero 'did not have any ego whatsoever' (73), or that Homeric gods were 'organizations of the central nervous system' (74), or that Homeric man 'did not have subjectivity as do we', or that 'in distinction to our own subjective conscious minds, we can call the mentality of the Mycenaeans a *bicameral mind* (75; Jaynes' italics). The fact remains, however, that in his treatment of Homeric psychology Jaynes does lean heavily upon *The Greeks and the irrational*.

In all these, little justice seems to have been done to the terms of mental behaviour used by Homer himself. To be sure, Homer's mental terminology has been an object of intensive study for more than half a century. Almost invariably, however, the Homeric terms have been treated in isolation from later developments: like precious jewels, Homeric words are valued for their own sake, apparently because of the tacit presumption that they cannot be commensurable with terms of later epochs. This presumption is shared today both by adherents of the terminological approach and by scholars who have challenged this influential trend, in that the latter tend to deny that the terminology can adequately express Homeric man's mental experience. It is however far from proved that Homeric terms of mental experience reject translation into other categories: on the surface of it, the contrary would rather seem to be true. Indeed, as soon as we admit, together with the opponents of the terminological approach, that there is nothing deficient about Homeric man's mental functioning, we shall also have to admit that the terms in which this functioning is described accounted for it no less effectively than the terms of any other historical period. K.J. Dover's sound treatment spares me any lengthy discussion here.⁴ It seems indeed that what mainly prevents us from taking a balanced view of Homeric man is the feeling of cultural superiority with which we approach cultures different from our own, only to impose on them our own inherited attitudes. But if we proceed from the Homeric terms themselves rather than from our own notions and examine these terms in their mutual relationships, there is reason to suppose that it will become much easier to bring them into correspondence with the terms in use in other historical periods. The present study proposes to apply this kind of approach to Homer's terms of human error.

I

The term that most frequently emerges in connection with human error in Homer is *ate*: it is generally agreed that the Homeric meaning of this term would be 'folly', 'blindness', 'infatuation'. A *locus classicus* illustrating how Homeric man would account for behaviour deriving from *ate* is, of course, Agamemnon's famous apology in *Iliad* xix 85-90:

'Oft have the Achaeans spoken thus to me, and upbraided me; but it is not I who am the cause, but Zeus and Destiny and Erinyes that walketh in the darkness, who put into my soul fierce *ate* on the day when in the assembly I, even I, bereft Achilles of his meed. What could I do? it is God who accomplishes all'.⁵

As was shown by Dodds, Agamemnon's explanation of his insulting of Achilles can also account for the other instances where mistaken or wrong behaviour is explained as due to *ate*.⁶ The characteristic features of this kind of behaviour are a temporary lack of understanding; attribution of the act to some external factor, usually the gods; and the fact that the agent is not

⁴ *Greek popular morality in the time of Plato and Aristotle* (Berkeley 1974) 150-51, 156-60.

⁵ πολλάκι δὴ μοι τοῦτον Ἀχαιοὶ μῦθον ἔειπον,
καὶ τέ με νεικεῖσκον· ἐγὼ δ' οὐκ αἰτίος εἰμι,
ἀλλὰ Ζεὺς καὶ Μοῖρα καὶ ἠεροφοῖτις Ἐρινός,
οἳ τέ μοι εἰν ἀγορῇ φρεσὶν ἐμβαλον ἄγριον ἄτην,
ἡματι τῷ δὲ Ἀχιλλῆος γέρας αὐτὸς ἀπηύρων.
ἀλλὰ τί κεν ῥέξαιμι; θεὸς διὰ πάντα τελευτᾷ.

(The English quotations from the *Iliad* are given in the translation by Andrew Lang, Walter Leaf, and Ernest Myers, and those from the *Odyssey* in the translation by S.H. Butcher and Andrew Lang; a few slight changes have been introduced for the sake of terminological uniformity.)

⁶ Dodds (n. 2) 2-18.

recognized either by himself or by others as an autonomous causer of what he has done.⁷ The question however is whether this widespread pattern can account for the whole range of erroneous behaviour in Homer.

Compare *Odyssey* i 32-42. Zeus complains that mortals usually hold the gods responsible for their misfortunes, although more often than not they themselves are to be blamed for them. To demonstrate this, he adduces the example of Aegisthus:

'Lo you now, how vainly mortal men do blame the gods! For of us they say comes evil, whereas they even of themselves, through their own *atasthaliai*, have sorrows beyond what is ordained. Even as of late Aegisthus, beyond what was ordained, took to him the wedded wife of the son of Atreus and killed her lord on his return, and that with sheer doom before his eyes, since we had warned him by the embassy of Hermes the keen-sighted, the slayer of Argos, that he should neither kill the man, nor woo his wife. For the son of Atreus shall be avenged at the hand of Orestes, so soon as he shall come to man's estate and long for his own country. So spake Hermes, yet he prevailed not on the heart of Aegisthus, for all his good will; but now hath he paid one price for all'.⁸

It can be seen that Agamemnon's apology and the anti-apology of Aegisthus act as mirror-images: Agamemnon, whose action was determined by the gods and by destiny (*moira*), is not held responsible for his act, whereas Aegisthus, who acted against the god's advice and against destiny (*huper moron*), is fully responsible for what he did. Yet, while Agamemnon's apology occupies the place of honour in every standard treatment of Homer's view of man, the anti-apology of Aegisthus is usually seen as relevant to the sphere of ethics rather than that of anthropology.⁹ This is obviously not good enough. If we wish to give an adequate picture of Homer's view of man we must look for systematic rather than statistical regularities, because frequency of occurrence cannot in itself supply sufficient ground for the claim that a given view is the only one relevant to the epics. That is to say, if there are even isolated cases which present Homeric man's behaviour as not falling into current patterns of interpretation, our picture of Homeric man can only be a balanced one if it includes these cases together with the statistically prevalent ones.

As follows from Zeus' speech, Homer's word for the kind of behaviour displayed by Aegisthus is *atasthalie*. Now although the speech of Zeus is with good reason seen by many scholars as representing a later stage of moral thought (see n. 9), *atasthalie* itself (in Homer always in the plural) is a well-established epic word. It occurs eleven times in Homer: five times it designates the behaviour of the suitors (*Od.* xxi 146; xxii 317; xxii 416; xxiii 67; xxiv 458),

⁷ The latter aspect has become so firmly associated with the meaning of the word *ate* that it even caused Aristarchus to change the expression 'Αλεξάνδρου ἔνεκ' ἄτης at *Il.* iii 100 (repeated also at *Il.* vi 356 and xxiv 28) into 'Αλεξάνδρου ἔνεκ' ἀρχῆς; he argued that it would be inappropriate for Menelaus, the speaker of these words, to excuse Paris.

⁸ ὦ πόποι, οἶον δὴ νῦ θεοῖς βροτοὶ αἰτιδῶνται.
 ἐξ ἡμέων γὰρ φασι κάκ' ἔμμεναι· οἱ δὲ καὶ αὐτοὶ
 σφῆσιν ἀτασθαλίῃσιν ὑπὲρ μόρον ἄλγε' ἔχουσιν,
 ὡς καὶ νῦν Αἴγισθος ὑπὲρ μόρον 'Ατρεΐδαο
 γῆμ' ἄλοχον μνηστῆν, τὸν δ' ἔκτανε νοστήσαντα,
 εἰδῶς αἰπὺν δλεθρον· ἐπεὶ πρό οἱ εἶπομεν ἡμεῖς,
 'Ερμείαν πέμψαντες, εὐσκοπον ἀργειφόντην,
 μήτ' αὐτὸν κτείνειν μήτε μνάσθαι ἀκοιτίν·
 ἐκ γὰρ 'Ορέστιαο τίσσις ἔσσεται 'Ατρεΐδαο,
 ὅπποτ' ἄν ἠβήσῃ καὶ ἦς ἱμεῖρεται αἴης.
 ὡς ἔφαθ' 'Ερμείας, ἀλλ' οὐ φρένας Αἴγισθοιο
 πείθ' ἀγαθὰ φρονέων· νῦν δ' ἄθρόα πάντ' ἀπέτεισε.

⁹ It is seen as representing a later stage of ethical thought in W. Jaeger, *Paideia* i, trans. G. Highet (Oxford 1965) 143; A. Heubeck, *Der Odyssee-Dichter und die Ilias* (Erlangen 1954) 81-6; Dodds (n. 2) 32-3; Lloyd-Jones (n. 1) 28-9; for the most recent discussion see R. Friedrich, 'The hybris of Odysseus', *JHS* cxi (1991) 18-19.

twice that of Odysseus' companions (*Od.* i 7; xii 300), and once each that of Aegisthus (*Od.* i 34), of Odysseus (*Od.* x 437), of Hector (*Il.* xxii 104), and of the Seven against Thebes (*Il.* iv 409). Its cognates, the adjective *ἀτάσθαλος* and the verb *ἀτασθάλλω*, designate the behaviour of the suitors, of Odysseus' women slaves, of Euryalus the Phaeacian, of the Epeans in Nestor's reminiscences, of the Trojans, of Achilles, and of the giants.¹⁰

Yet to say that Aegisthus' behaviour differs from that of Agamemnon in that while the latter was due to *ate* the former was due to *atasthalie* is to say almost nothing, because in fact we do not know what *atasthalie* stands for. The usual translation 'recklessness' is simply a convention, and Hesychius' etymology connecting *atasthalie* with *ate*, indicative as it is of a general tendency to ascribe all Homeric errors to *ate*, does not stand the test of linguistics.¹¹ Although it is true that the adjective *atasthalos* is often associated in Homer with *hubris* and its cognates (which is especially true of the *Odyssey*), I cannot agree with J.B. Hainsworth that this association 'is the best indication of the sense of this word'.¹² Note that the two terms are brought into connection with each other only when the behaviour deriving from *atasthalie* is seen as morally condemnable as, for example, in the case of the suitors. This is not so, however, in the case of Hector whose *atasthalie* consists in keeping his troops outside the walls of Troy or in that of Odysseus whose *atasthalie* consists in bringing his companions into the Cyclops' cave; accordingly, *hubris* is not mentioned in these connections. This seems to indicate that *atasthalie* as such is a morally neutral term which can be qualified through *hubris*, not substituted by it.¹³ In view of this, it seems safer to try to arrive at the Homeric meaning of the word by following its broader usage, both thematic and formulaic.

In both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* acts deriving from *atasthalie* are usually represented as having been committed notwithstanding the fact that the agent was explicitly warned not to take a particular course of action. This is true not only of Aegisthus who was warned by Hermes not to kill Agamemnon and marry his wife, but also of the suitors warned by Leodes not to sleep with Odysseus' women slaves, of Odysseus' companions whom he warned not to touch Helios' sacred cattle, of Odysseus himself, asked by his companions not to risk their lives on the Cyclops island, and of Hector advised by Polydamas not to take the troops outside the walls of Troy.¹⁴ Accordingly, they all knew or at least were aware of the possibility that the course of action they were taking could result in disaster. Not so, however, as far as the behaviour deriving from *ate* is concerned. Compare, for example, Helen's apology as pronounced by Penelope in *Odyssey* xxiii 218-224:

'Nay even Argive Helen, daughter of Zeus, would not have lain with a stranger, and taken him for a lover, had she known that the warlike sons of the Achaeans would bring her home again to her own dear country.

¹⁰ *ἀτάσθαλος* *Il.* xi 695; xiii 634; xxii 418; *Od.* iii 207 = xvii 588; iv 693; vi 60; vii 166; xvi 86, 93; xviii 139, 143; xx 370; xxii 47, 314; xxiv 282, 352; cf. *H.Ap.* 67; *H.Herm.* 296; *H.* xv; *ἀτασθάλλω* *Od.* xviii 57; xix 88.

¹¹ See P. Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque* (Paris 1968), s.v. *ἀτασθαλίη*.

¹² A. Heubeck, S. West, J.B. Hainsworth, *A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey* i (Oxford 1988) ad viii 166; cf. S. West ad i 7.

¹³ See *ὑβρίζοντες ἀτάσθαλα μηχανῶντο* *Il.* xi 695 (Nestor of the Epeans); cf. *Od.* iii 207; xvii 588; xx 370 (of the suitors); cf. also Hes. *Op.* 241; *ἀτάσθαλον ὑβριν* *Od.* xvi 86; xxiv 352 (of the suitors); cf. Hes. *Op.* 134; *ὑβριστὰ καὶ ἀτάσθαλοι* *Od.* xxiv 282 (of the suitors). The same holds good of the expression *ἀτασθαλίησι κακῆσιν* at *Od.* xii 300 (of Odysseus' companions) and xxiv 458 (of the suitors). It is only in post-Homeric Greek that *atasthalie* and its cognates invariably designate the extreme form of presumptuousness involving open impiety, see e.g. Hes. *Op.* 134, 241, 261; *Th.* 164, 209, 515, 996; fr. 30.16 M-W; Thgn. 736, 749; Hdt. ii 111.2; iii.49.2, 80.4; vii 34.2; viii 109.3; ix 78.2; 116.1, or the epitaph of Archidike, quoted by Thuc. vi 59.3. Cf. n. 56.

¹⁴ The verb *οὐ πείθειν/πείθεσθαι* frequently appears in this connection, see *Il.* xxii 103 *ἀλλ' ἐγὼ οὐ πιθόμην, ἦ τ' ἄν πολὺ κέρδιον ἦεν* (Hector of himself) = *Od.* ix 228 (Odysseus of himself). Cf. *Od.* ix 500 *ἀλλ' οὐ πείθον ἐμὸν μεγαλήτορα θυμόν* (Odysseus of himself); *Od.* i 42-43 *ἀλλ' οὐ φρένας Αἰγίσθοιο / πειθ'*; *Od.* xxii 316 *ἀλλὰ μοι οὐ πείθοντο κακῶν ἄπο χεῖρας ἔχεσθαι* (of the suitors; cf. also xxiv 458). Cf. also *Il.* iv 408-09.

Howsoever, it was the god that set upon her this shameful deed; not ever, ere that, did she lay up in her heart this *ate*, a bitter *ate*, whence on us too came sorrow'.¹⁵

Like Agamemnon's act, that of Helen is described as due to *ate* and to divine intervention.¹⁶ But it is also said of Helen that she would never have eloped with Paris had she known the consequences of her deed. This compares well with the following episode from the *Odyssey*. When Odysseus falls asleep on the island of Thrinacia, his companions take advantage of his absence to slaughter the sacred cattle of Helios. Later, Odysseus refers to his unfortunate sleep as having been sent him by the gods εἰς ἄτην.¹⁷ The use of *ate* in this specific context is often seen as close to the post-Homeric meaning of the word, that is, as meaning 'ruin', 'disaster', rather than 'blindness', 'folly'.¹⁸ The obvious reason for this interpretation is that it seems grossly incongruous to treat so innocent an action as falling asleep on the same plane as Helen's elopement with Paris or Agamemnon's insulting of Achilles. However, this is to miss the point at which all these cases concur. Just as neither Helen nor Agamemnon were aware of the possible consequences of their deeds, so also Odysseus did not reflect that his absence could be exploited for the committing of a sacrilege. This seems to have been reason enough for Homer to qualify all of them as *ate*. Consider also the way in which Homer describes the *ate* of Oeneus, who neglected to bring offerings to Artemis: 'whether he forgot or marked it not; and therein sinned he sore in his heart'.¹⁹ That the lack of foreknowledge is essential to Homer's idea of *ate* can also be seen from the fact that the unintentional homicide can well be accounted for as a result of *ate*.²⁰

Thus, although their deeds may in themselves be wrong or even shameful, this is not necessarily to say that either Helen or Agamemnon intended to cause what actually resulted from their behaviour, the Trojan War and the heaviest defeat the Achaeans suffered during it. This appears to be the reason why both of them, although they may indeed be blamed by themselves and others for their deeds, are not seen as responsible for their consequences.²¹ This is not so, however, in the case of those whose errors are ascribed to *atasthalie*: in that they were

¹⁵ οὐδέ κεν Ἀργεῖη Ἑλένη, Διὸς ἐκγεγαυῖα,
ἀνδρὶ παρ' ἄλλοδαπῷ ἐμίγη φιλότητι καὶ εὐνῇ,
εἰ ἦδη ὃ μιν αὐτίς ἀρήϊοι υἴες Ἀχαιῶν
ἄξέμεναι οἰκόνδε φίλην ἐς πατρίδ' ἔμελλον.
τὴν δ' ἦ τοι ρέξαι θεὸς ὤρορεν ἔργον ἀεικέες·
τὴν δ' ἄτην οὐ πρόσθεν ἐφ' ἐγκάτθετο θυμῷ
λυγρῆν, ἐξ ἧς πρῶτα καὶ ἡμέας ἴκετο πένθος.

¹⁶ Cf. *Od.* iv 261-62, where Helen's behaviour is also explained as due to *ate*. Homer's characterization of Agamemnon's behaviour as deriving from *ate* is even more consistent: the state of *ate* is ascribed to Agamemnon no less than eleven times, more than to all the other named individuals taken together, see A.W.H. Adkins, 'Values, goals, and emotions in the *Iliad*', *CP* lxxvii (1982) 307 with n. 33.

¹⁷ *Od.* xii 372, cf. x 68.

¹⁸ See Dodds (n. 2) 19 n. 17; R.E. Doyle, *ATH. Its use and meaning* (New York 1984) 18; W.J. Verdenius, *A commentary on Hesiod, Works and Days*, vv. 1-382 (Leiden 1985) ad 215.

¹⁹ *Il.* ix 537 ἢ λάθετ' ἢ οὐκ ἐνόησεν· ἀάσατο δὲ μέγα θυμῷ; as F. Wyatt, Jr., 'Homeric ATH', *AJP* ciii (1982) 252, correctly emphasized, 'Oineus' *ate* brought on the Calydonian boar and the subsequent trouble between the Aetolians and the Couretes'.

²⁰ *Il.* xxiv 480-81. Note also that the lack of foreknowledge allows to understand how the word *ate* evolved after Homer to mean 'unforeseen disaster'; on *ate* as 'unforeseen disaster' see W. Jaeger, 'Solons Eunomie', in *Scripta minora* i (Rome 1960) 319-24 (first published in 1926).

²¹ See especially *Il.* iii 164-65, in which Priam absolves Helen from responsibility for the Trojan War, and *Il.* xix 270-74, Achilles absolving Agamemnon from responsibility for the Achaean defeat on similar grounds. Characteristically, the *Odyssey* treatment of Aegisthus' partner Clytemnestra in the phrase ἐμήσατο ἔργον ἀεικέες at xi 429 (cf. also iii 235, iv 91-2, xi 430 and 439) is in clear contrast to τὴν ... ρέξαι θεὸς ὤρορεν ἔργον ἀεικέες, a description of Helen at xxiii 222, in that while the former clearly presupposes a premeditated action the latter does not.

warned of the possible consequences of their deeds and still committed them they are set apart from those whose errors were committed under the influence of *ate*.²²

In describing the *atasthalie* of the Seven against Thebes in the *Iliad* and that of Odysseus' companions in the *Odyssey* Homer uses essentially the same formula, κείνοι [or: αὐτῶν] δὲ [or: γὰρ] σφετέρησιν ἀτασθαλίησιν ὄλοντο (*Il.* iv 409; *Od.* i 7), 'they perished by their own *atasthalie*', a fact that indicates the traditional character of the expression.²³ It seems that τούτου γὰρ καὶ κείνοι ἀτασθαλίησιν ὄλοντο at *Odyssey* x 437, adapted so as to describe the disastrous consequences of Odysseus' *atasthalie* on the island of the Cyclops, should also belong here. That both σφῆσιν ἀτασθαλίησιν ὑπὲρ μόρον ἄλγε' ἔχουσιν at *Odyssey* i 34 and νῦν δ' ἐπεὶ ὤλεσα λαὸν ἀτασθαλίησιν ἐμήσιν at *Iliad* xxii 104, although metrically different, return to the basic semantic pattern of the formula shows that these two expressions should be taken as its modifications. It may safely be inferred, then, that 'to perish by one's own *atasthalie*' is essential to Homer's understanding of the term.²⁴ In other words, there is reason to suppose that the agent's responsibility as proclaimed by Zeus in the prologue of the *Odyssey* belongs with the traditional meaning of the word *atasthalie*. The difference between this meaning and that of *ate* cannot be overemphasized: while *ate* usually comes from the outside, *atasthalie* is always man's own.²⁵

The other formula to be considered is ἀτάσθαλα μηχανάασθαι / μηχανάασθε / μηχανῶντες / μηχανῶντο 'to plan acts of *atasthalie*' which occurs five times in the *Odyssey* and once in the *Iliad*.²⁶ Since the verb μηχανάομαι with its active participle μηχανῶντες invariably means 'to contrive', 'to design', 'to plan', it is obvious that the acts committed out of *atasthalie* are seen as having been committed deliberately and after premeditation. How one can plan 'his own *atasthalie*' is made clear from the case of Odysseus' companions. That their slaughtering of the cattle of Helios is interpreted as due to *atasthalie* can already be seen from *Odyssey* i 7: 'They perished because of their own *atasthaliai*. Foolish ones, they ate the cattle of Helios son of Hyperion'. Later in the poem Eurylochus, after having been warned by Odysseus not to touch the cattle 'through bad *atasthaliai*' (*Od.* xii 300), takes advantage of Odysseus' nap and persuades the others to disobey their leader. His reasoning as presented in *Odyssey* xii 341-351 is as follows:

²² It is true that Patroclus was advised by Achilles not to get close to the walls of Troy, cf. Heubeck (n. 9) 83. Yet Patroclus' case differs from those involving *atasthalie* in that, while the latter invariably emphasize the agent's disagreement with the advice rather than his being oblivious of it (see above, n. 14), Patroclus accepts Achilles' advice but later forgets it: εἰ δὲ ἔπος Πηληϊάδαο φύλαξεν, / ἦ τ' ἄν ὑπέκφυγε κῆρα κακῆν μέλανος θανάτοιο (*Il.* xvi 686-87). This is why his mistake is ascribed to *ate*, see *ibid.* 685, 805.

²³ 'The word-order [of *Od.* i 7], genitive before possessive adjective, is quite abnormal; presumably this reflects the modification of a formulaic prototype like *Il.* iv 409', S. West in Heubeck, S. West, Hainsworth (n. 12) *ad locum*; cf. G.S. Kirk, *The Iliad: a commentary* i (Cambridge 1985) *ad* iv 409.

²⁴ See D.M. Jones, *Ethical themes in the plot of the Odyssey* (London 1954) 9; H.W. Norheider in *LfrgE*, s.v. ἀτασθαλίη; A. Heubeck, A. Hoekstra, *A commentary on Homer's Odyssey* ii (Oxford 1989) *ad* xii 320-3. Cf. Jaeger (n. 20) 322.

²⁵ According to Dodds (n. 2) 5, 'the agents productive of *ate*, where they are specified, seem always to be supernatural beings'. The two *Odyssey* examples of *ate* as caused by wine (xi 61 and xxi 295-8) are treated by Dodds as a special case which does not disprove the rule, and he regards the *ate* produced in Dolon by Hector (*Il.* x 391) as 'a symptom of Hector's own condition of (divinely inspired) ἄτη', *ibid.* 19 n. 20, cf. Lloyd-Jones (n. 1) 23. However, as Doyle (n. 18) 21 n. 29, remarks, 'the difficulty with this view is that ἄτη is never ascribed to Hector', cf. below, n. 40; moreover, Hector is actually described as producing *ate* in others in *Il.* xviii 311-13 as well, see further n. 37. In view of this, it seems safer to regard *ate* as being usually caused by an external factor, whether a god, or a fellow-man, or wine.

²⁶ *Il.* xi 695; *Od.* iii 207; xvi 93; xvii 588; xviii 143; xx 370; cf. Hes. *Op.* 241. Cf. also κακὰ μηχανάασθαι *Od.* iii 213; xvi 134; xxi 375; ἀεικέα μηχανῶντο *Od.* xx 394; xxii 432.

‘Truly every shape of death is hateful to wretched mortals, but to die of hunger and so meet doom is most pitiful of all. Nay come, we will drive off the best of the kine of Helios and will do sacrifice to the deathless gods who keep wide heaven. And if we may yet reach Ithaca, our own country, forthwith will we rear a rich shrine to Helios Hyperion, and therein would we set many a choice offering. But if he be somewhat wroth for his cattle with straight horns, and is fain to wreck our ship, and the other gods follow his desire, rather with one gulp at the wave would I cast my life away, than be slowly straitened to death in a desert isle.’²⁷

Not even a word of an *ate* clouding the consciousness of the starving men, of gods taking away their understanding. Eurylochus’ pondering which of the two alternatives before him is preferable can only mean that the subsequent slaughtering and eating of the tabooed cattle was envisaged by Homer as the result of a conscious and deliberate choice: this was, as simply as possible, a calculated risk. Thus, *atasthalie* is firmly associated in Homer with the ideas of foreknowledge, responsibility, and planning, and *ate* is equally firmly associated with their opposites. It follows from this that *ate* and *atasthalie* were envisaged not only as not identical but, in fact, as semantically opposite: while *ate* presupposes an error which originates in the irrational, *atasthalie* presupposes an error originating in the rational.

II

Characteristically enough, error originating in the rational is not provided for in current Homeric anthropology. Although the tension between the rational and the irrational in Homeric man’s behaviour has often been the subject of discussion, the assumption that usually underlies this discussion is that all wrong and bad behaviour is treated by Homer as due to the irrational and all right and good behaviour as due to the rational. This is true of E.R. Dodds’ *The Greeks and the irrational*, in which all wrong behaviour is treated as psychologically abnormal and therefore as deriving from the irrational factors; of H. Lloyd-Jones’ *The justice of Zeus*, in which *ate*, understood as man’s yielding to his irrational drives, is treated as the only source of error in Homer; of A. Dihle’s *The theory of will in classical antiquity*, according to which the early Greek view of human behaviour can be exhaustively accounted for by the so-called bipartite psychology, based on the interaction of the rational and irrational factors, and error as the prevailing of the latter over the former.²⁸ In view of this, it seems especially important that the sphere of *atasthalie* in Homer should be defined as precisely as possible.

On the surface of it, the pattern of *atasthalie*, implying as it does the agent’s awareness of the right course of action, fits in well with the later Greek concept of *akrasia*, or intemperance. Only recently, *akrasia* has been restored for Homeric anthropology by Richard Gaskin, who

²⁷ πάντες μὲν στυγεροὶ θάνατοι δειλοῖσι βροτοῖσι,
 λιμῶ δ’ οἴκτιστον θανέειν καὶ πότμον ἐπισπεῖν,
 ἀλλ’ ἄγετ’, Ἑλλιοιο βοῶν ἐλάσαντες ἀρίστας
 ῥέξομεν ἀθανάτοισι, τοὶ οὐρανὸν εὐρὺν ἔχουσιν.
 εἰ δέ κεν εἰς Ἰθάκην ἀφικοίμεθα, πατρίδα γαίαν,
 αἰψά κεν Ἑλλίῳ Ὑπερίονι πίονα νηὶν
 τεύξομεν, ἐν δέ κε θεῖμεν ἀγάλματα πολλὰ καὶ ἐσθλά·
 εἰ δέ χολωσάμενός τι βοῶν ὀρθοκραϊράων
 νῆ’ ἐθέλη ὀλέσσει, ἐπὶ δ’ ἔσπωνται θεοὶ ἄλλοι,
 βούλομ’ ἀπαξ πρὸς κύμα χανῶν ἀπὸ θυμὸν ὀλέσσει
 ἢ δηθὰ στρεῦγεσθαι ἐὼν ἐν νήσῳ ἐρήμῃ.

²⁸ Dodds (n. 2) 1-18; Lloyd-Jones (n. 1) 8-24; A. Dihle, *The theory of will in classical antiquity* (Berkeley 1982) 20-47. Jaeger (n. 20) 319-24, seems to be the only one to have recognized that Homer makes provision both for errors that involve the lack of foreknowledge and for those that do not. However, he takes *ate* as an inclusive term comprising both kinds of error: to claim this is to ignore the fact that the Homeric vocabulary possesses a word for an error involving foreknowledge.

showed that Snell's contention that Homeric heroes are incapable of *akrasia* is unwarranted. Gaskin's examples include Helen in the *Iliad* who continues to share her bed with Paris notwithstanding her realization that the latter is unworthy of her affection; Achilles who knows that his persisting in anger is wrong but cannot help it; Hector who flees from Achilles although he knows that he should go and meet him.²⁹ According to this pattern, a mistaken or wrong act would be due to man's inability to exercise control over his instincts, appetites and passions and thus to follow what he knows to be the right course of action, and a correct or good act would result from his victory in this struggle. How would *ate* and *atasthalie* stand in respect of this pattern? The important caveat in this connection is that while *ate* and *atasthalie* are Homeric words, *akrasia* is not. In view of this, it is important to identify the pattern after which Homer's descriptions of acratice behaviour are modelled. Man's interaction with his *thumos* would seem to supply such a pattern.

Consider Odysseus' deliberation within himself in *Odyssey* xx 9-24. Odysseus disguised as a beggar witnesses the shameful behaviour of his women slaves. His reaction is as follows:

'Then the heart of Odysseus was stirred within his breast, and much he communed with his mind and soul, whether he should leap forth upon them and deal death to each, or suffer them to lie with the proud wooers, now for the last and latest time. And his heart growled sullenly within him ... Then he smote upon his breast and rebuked his own heart, saying: "Endure, my heart; yea, a baser thing thou once didst bear, on that day when the Cyclops, unrestrained in fury, devoured the mighty men of my company; but still thou didst endure till my craft found a way for thee from out the cave, where thou thoughtest to die". So spake he, chiding his own spirit within him, and his heart verily abode steadfast in obedience to his word. But Odysseus himself lay tossing this way and that'.³⁰

Odysseus' case offers an excellent example of the kind of behaviour which was later defined as eucratic, temperate. Had he followed the drive of his heart³¹ and begun his revenge prematurely (in which case he would have surely been killed by the suitors), this would have been an example of acratice, or intemperate, behaviour; this is what Achilles would probably have done in his place. Compare indeed Achilles' reaction to Agamemnon's insult in *Iliad* i 188-195:

'... and grief came upon Peleus' son, and his heart within his shaggy breast was divided in counsel, whether to draw his keen blade from his thigh and set the company aside and to slay Atreides, or to assuage his anger and curb his soul. While yet he doubted thereof in heart and soul, and was drawing his great sword from his sheath, Athene came to him from heaven ...'³²

²⁹ Gaskin (n. 1) 10-13.

³⁰ τοῦ δ' ὠρίνετο θυμὸς ἐνὶ στήθεσσι φίλοισι·
πολλὰ δὲ μερμήριζε κατὰ φρένα καὶ κατὰ θυμόν,
ἢ μεταίξιας θάνατον τεύξειεν ἐκάστη,
ἢ ἔτ' ἐφ' μνηστῆρσιν ὑπερφιάλοισι μιγῆναι
ὑστατα καὶ πύματα, κραδίη δέ οἱ ἔνδον ὑλάκτει...
στήθος δὲ πλήξας κραδίην ἠνίπαπε μύθῳ·
"τέτλαθι δῆ, κραδίη· καὶ κύντερον ἄλλο ποτ' ἔτλης,
ἦματι τῷ ὅτε μοι μένος ἄσχετος ἦσθιε Κύκλωψ
ἰφθίμους ἐτάρους· σὺ δ' ἐτόλμας, ὄφρα σε μήτις
ἐξάγαγ' ἐξ ἀντροιο οἰόμενον θανέεσθαι".
ὡς ἔφατ', ἐν στήθεσσι καταπτόμενος φίλον ἦτορ·
τῷ δὲ μάλ' ἐν πείσῃ κραδίη μένε τετληυῖα
νωλεμέως· ἀτὰρ αὐτὸς ἐλίσσετο ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα.

³¹ It is irrelevant whether the object of the interaction is man's *thumos* proper or his heart (ἦτορ, κραδίη): when appearing in the psychological (rather than physiological) context these words are employed as functional synonyms which can easily replace each other in accordance with the given metrical conditions. See further Th. Jahn, *Zum Wortfeld 'Seele-Geist' in der Sprache Homers* (München 1987) 182-94, 293-98.

³² ...Πηλεῖωνι δ' ἄχος γένετ', ἐν δέ οἱ ἦτορ
στήθεσιν λαοίοισι διάνδιχα μερμήριξεν,
ἦ ὃ γε φάσγανον ὄξυ ἐρυσσάμενος παρὰ μηροῦ

As the episode clearly shows, if it had not been for the intervention of Athene, Achilles would hardly have been able to restrain his *thumos* at this critical moment. This is consistent with Homer's general characterization of this hero. Indeed, such expressions as θυμὸν ἴσχειν, δαμάζειν, ἐρητύειν, while not numerous in the epics, are almost invariably associated with Achilles.³³ Thus, not only in the specific passage pointed out by Gaskin but throughout the *Iliad* Achilles affords an example of acratia behaviour.³⁴

Since acts of *akrasia*, resulting as they do from man's lack of self-control, obviously cannot be planned in advance, but acts of *atasthalie*, as is clearly shown by the formula ἀτάσθαλα μηχανάσθαι, are envisaged as subject to rational planning, it is actually out of the question that *atasthalie* can stand for the pattern of behaviour which is usually identified as acratia. The case of Hector provides a good example. Actually, the term *atasthalie* emerges in connection with Hector only once, in his great speech in *Iliad* xxii 99-107:

'Ay me, if I go within the gates and walls, Polydamas will be first to bring reproach against me, since he bade me lead the Trojans to the city during this ruinous night, when noble Achilles arose. But I regarded him not, yet surely it had been better far. And now that I have undone the host by my *atasthaliai*, I am ashamed before the men of Troy and women of trailing robes, lest at any time some worse man than I shall say: "Hector by trusting his own might undid the host".³⁵

At the same time, Homer is consistent in presenting *atasthalie* as the main cause of Hector's fall even without using the word, and this can be seen from the way in which he describes Hector's debates with Polydamas in Books xii, xiii, and xviii of the *Iliad*.³⁶ The latter is

τοὺς μὲν ἀναστήσειεν, ὁ δ' Ἄτρεϊδην ἐναρτίζοι,
ἦε χόλον πάσειεν ἐρητύσειέ τε θυμόν.
ἦος ὁ ταυθ' ὤρμαινε κατὰ φρένα καὶ κατὰ θυμόν,
ἔλκετο δ' ἐκ κολοοῖο μέγα ξίφος, ἦλθε δ' Ἀθήνη κτλ.

³³ For the most part in *Iliad* ix, see σὺ δὲ μεγαλήτορα θυμὸν ἴσχειν ἐν στήθεσσι vv. 255-56, Odysseus to Achilles; δάμασον θυμὸν μέγαν v. 495, Phoenix to Achilles; τοῦ δὲ τ' ἐρητύεται κραδίη καὶ θυμὸς ἀγήνωρ / πωινὴν δεξαμένω· σοὶ δ' ἄλληκτόν τε κακόν τε θυμὸν ἐνὶ στήθεσσι θεοὶ θέσαν εἰνεκα κούρης vv. 635-37, Ajax to Achilles, cf. also vv. 462-63. Characteristically, the expression 'to yield to one's *thumos*' also appears mainly in this book, see μεγαλήτορι θυμῷ / εἶξας vv. 109-10, of Agamemnon; εἶξας ᾧ θυμῷ v. 598, of Meleager; cf. xxiv 42-43; *Od.* v 126.

³⁴ Cf. J. Griffin, *Homer on life and death* (Oxford 1980) 73-76, Lloyd-Jones (n. 1) 23, takes Achilles' mentioning of ἄται in his speech addressed to Agamemnon after their reconciliation (*Il.* xix 270) as meaning that both Agamemnon and Achilles acted under the influence of *ate*, but I agree with Adkins (n. 16) 308, that the passage should be taken as relating to Agamemnon alone. *Il.* ix 510-12, where Phoenix seems to threaten Achilles with *ate* unless he accepts Agamemnon's gifts, seems to be more relevant in this connection. Yet, contrary to what Wyatt (n. 19) 256, contends, this theme is not developed further; see M.W. Edwards, *The Iliad: a commentary* v (Cambridge 1991) ad xix 270-5.

³⁵ ὦμοι ἐγών, εἰ μὲν κε πύλας καὶ τεῖχρα δῶ,
Πουλυδάμας μοι πρῶτος ἐλεγχείην ἀναθήσει,
ὅς μ' ἐκέλευε Τρωσὶ ποτὶ πτόλιν ἠγήσασθαι
νύχθ' ὕπο τήνδ' ὀλοήν, ὅτε ὤρετο δῖος Ἀχιλλεύς.
ἀλλ' ἐγὼ οὐ πιθόμην· ἦ τ' ἄν πολὺ κέρδιον ἦεν.
νῦν δ' ἐπεὶ ὤλεσα λαὸν ἀτασθαλίησιν ἐμήσιν,
αἰδέομαι Τρῶας καὶ Τρωάδας ἑλκεσιπέπλους,
μή ποτέ τις εἴπησι κακώτερος ἄλλος ἐμείο·
"Ἐκτωρ ἦφι βίηφι πιθήσας ὤλεσε λαόν".

³⁶ *Il.* xii 195-264; xiii 723-757; xviii 243-315. In *Iliad* xii, before the attack against the Achaean camp, Polydamas interprets an omen to the effect that it would be unwise to proceed with the attack. Hector disagrees, abuses Polydamas, boasts that he is under the protection of Zeus (which is true for the time being), and leads the troops. In the last analysis Polydamas is of course right, because this is the very action that will eventually bring on the Trojan disaster; but the attack in question is a success, and no judgement is passed on Hector's behaviour at the moment. In *Iliad* xiii Polydamas interferes again with Hector's leading the campaign. This time he is much more specific: Hector is incapable of being persuaded by advice (ἀμήχανος ... παραρρητοῖσι πιθέσθαι, v. 726); being an excellent warrior, he claims to excel all men in counsel as well; but the gods are not in the habit of granting all

especially important, in that it provides the background for Hector's self-accusation in his last speech.

What happens in *Iliad* xviii is this. In view of Achilles' return to action, Polydamas suggests that the troops should be taken into the city, but Hector disagrees. When the Trojans take Hector's side, the poet comments on this as follows: 'Foolish ones, for Pallas Athene bereft them of their wit. And they gave assent to the ill advising of Hector, but none hearkened to Polydamas who devised good counsel'.³⁷ The behaviour of the Trojans, whose wits have been taken away by Athene, is described in terms of *ate*.³⁸ Not so, however, in the case of Hector, and this is made perfectly clear from the phrase *κακὰ μητιδῶντι* which characterizes his position in the discussion. Like *μηχανάομαι*, discussed in Section One, *μητιάω* is a purely 'rational' term which can only relate to the deliberate activity of *metis*.³⁹ That is to say, as against the 'good counsel' of Polydamas Hector forces on the Trojans his own advice, which happens to be bad.⁴⁰ A bad judgement, however, is nevertheless a judgement, and this explains why the fall of Hector is ascribed in *Iliad* xxii to *atasthalie* rather than to *ate* or *akrasia*.⁴¹

Nor can *ate*, irrational though it is, be identified with *akrasia*. We saw indeed that, as distinct from *akrasia*, which presupposes man's awareness of the right course of action, no such awareness is implied in the Homeric idea of *ate*. The problem of an acratist man is not that he does not see the right course of action but that he is incapable of following it: 'thou seemest to speak all this almost after mine own mind', Achilles says to Ajax in *Iliad* ix 645-648, 'but my heart swelleth with wrath as oft as I bethink me of those things, how Atreides entreated me arrogantly among the Argives, as though I were some worthless sojourner'.⁴² Yet, when Homer describes Agamemnon's insulting Achilles in *Iliad* i, he does not represent him as he represents Achilles in the same episode, namely, as being in inner conflict: Agamemnon simply does not think of the possible consequences of his behaviour, and this is exactly what *ate* is about.

Thus, *akrasia* differs from both *atasthalie* and *ate* in that, while *atasthalie* is purely rational and *ate* purely irrational, *akrasia* participates in both: it is in fact a blend of the rational and the irrational in which the irrational gets the upper hand. We can discern, therefore, three patterns of error in Homer: *ate*, which originates in the irrational, *atasthalie*, which originates in the

their gifts to one person. The characteristic features of *atasthalie* are already present in this rebuke; but this time Hector follows Polydamas' advice to summon the council and to discuss the plan of action, and the theme is dropped, only to emerge again in *Iliad* xviii. For the analysis of these books in the light of Hector's error see J.M. Redfield, *Nature and culture in the Iliad* (Chicago 1975) 143-53; M. Schofield, 'Euboulia in the Iliad', *CQ* xxxvi (1986) 18-22.

³⁷ *Il.* 18.311-13 νήπιοι· ἐκ γὰρ σφῆων φρένας εἴλετο Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη. Ἰὼν Ἔκτορι μὲν γὰρ ἐπήνησαν κακὰ μητιδῶντι, / Πουλυδάμαντι δ' ἄρ' οὐ τις, ὃς ἐσθλὴν φράζετο βουλὴν.

³⁸ That putting *ate* into the heart and taking away the understanding are events of the same order has been shown by Dodds (n. 2) 2-4.

³⁹ Cf. above, n. 26. Note that at *Od.* iii 213 *μητιάσθαι* is a *varia lectio* of *μηχανάσθαι*. Note also that the error of Odysseus' companions is described at *Od.* xii 373 by means of the same verb (οἱ δ' ἑταροὶ μέγα ἔργον ἐμητίσαντο μένοντες), that a similar language is used for describing Clytemnestra's crime at *Od.* xi 429 (ἐμήσατο ἔργον ἀεικέες), and that the verb *μητιάω* can take *βουλή* as a direct object, see *Il.* xx 153-54, cf. vii 45.

⁴⁰ Note that in his reply to Polydamas Hector not only adduces arguments which are meant to counterbalance Polydamas' advice but also envisages the possibility of his single combat with Achilles, see *Il.* xviii 284-309 and Edwards (n. 34) *ad locum*.

⁴¹ Cf. R.D. Dawe, 'Some reflections on *ate* and *hamartia*', *HSCP* lxxii (1967) 99: 'those who ... believe in an *ate*-stricken Hector will find nothing in Homer's actual language to support them'.

⁴² πάντα τί μοι κατὰ θυμὸν εἴσαιο μυθήσασθαί / ἄλλα μοι οἰδάνετα κραδίη χόλω, ὅποτε κείνων / μνήσομαι, ὡς μ' ἀσύφηλον ἐν Ἀργείοισιν ἔρεξεν / Ἀτρεΐδης, ὡς εἶ τιν' ἀτίμητον μετανάστην. Cf. Gaskin (n. 1) 12-13.

rational, and the yielding to one's *thumos*, later termed *akrasia*, which participates in both.⁴³ As far as I can see, the three patterns in question exhaustively describe the whole range of human error in Homer. In the *Iliad*, such major errors as Helen's eloping with Paris, Agamemnon's insulting of Achilles and Patroclus' fatal attack on the walls of Troy are described as due to *ate*; Hector's refusal to take the troops into the city, eventually leading to military disaster and his own death, is described as due to *atasthalie*; finally, Achilles' persisting in his anger which led to the death of Patroclus is seen as a direct result of his inability to control his *thumos*, that is, of what later came to be called *akrasia*. In the *Odyssey*, Helen's eloping with Paris and, accordingly, the Trojan War as a whole are, again, interpreted as a result of *ate*, and the same interpretation is given to Odysseus' sleep on Thrinacia which led to the seven-year delay of his return; Odysseus' entering the Cyclops' cave, the slaughtering of the cattle of Helios by his companions, the suitors' behaviour in the house of Odysseus and Aegisthus' murder of Agamemnon are interpreted as due to *atasthalie*; there is no conclusive example of acratia behaviour,⁴⁴ but Odysseus' taking control over his heart as described above shows that this model was certainly in the poet's mind.

We can see, therefore, that *atasthalie* not only cannot be reduced to the other patterns of error but it represents a pattern which is indispensable for the correct understanding of the course of action in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. This is not to say that this pattern is of equal importance for either Homeric poem. Although both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are, as we saw, well acquainted with the tripartite division of human error, their attitude to the patterns of error dealt with above is different. In the *Iliad*, *ate* is the dominating pattern. It serves to account not only for the errors of the protagonists, such as Helen and Paris, Agamemnon, and Patroclus, but also for those of many a minor personage, and in Books ix and xix it is even given a sort of theological foundation. However, as far as the *Odyssey* is concerned, *atasthalie* dominates the scene: the two major misdoings of the poem, of the suitors and of Odysseus' companions, are consistently accounted for as due to *atasthalie*, and Zeus' handling of the case of Aegisthus in the prologue is, to borrow Dodds' expression, 'programmatically' to the poem. And the programme is carried out not only in respect of the suitors and Odysseus' companions,⁴⁵ but also in respect of Odysseus himself, for the adventure on the Cyclops island was entirely his own initiative: accordingly he is the only one to blame for its disastrous consequences.⁴⁶

⁴³ There is reason to suppose that of the three patterns of error *akrasia* is the latest. First, the only Homeric formula in which man's interaction with his *thumos* is cast, ὀχθήσας δ' ἄρα εἶπε πρὸς δὴν μεγαλήτορα θυμὸν (*Il.* xi 403; xvii 90; xviii 5; xx 343; xxi 53, 552; xxii 98; *Od.* v 298, 355, 407, 464), could only have been created after the disappearance of the digamma, see A. Hoekstra, *Homeric modifications of formulaic prototypes* (Amsterdam 1965) 68-70. Second, as distinct from the expressions involving *ate* and *atasthalie*, those rendering the idea of restraining one's *thumos* are for the most part individual expressions: in fact, the only formula that can be taken into account in this connection seems to be [οὐ] ἐρητύει' ἐν φρεσὶ θυμὸς (*Il.* 462; xiii 280); on the distinction between formulaic and individual expressions see e.g. M. Finkelberg, 'Formulaic and nonformulaic elements in Homer', *CP* lxxxiv (1989) 179-97. Third, the larger part of these expressions is concentrated in the problematic Book ix of the *Iliad* (see above, n. 33). Finally, the very fact that man's inability to restrain his *thumos* has no term of its own seems to indicate that what is dealt with here is a developing concept.

⁴⁴ Teiresias' instructions to Odysseus in the Nekyia contain what seems to be an interpretation of the Thrinacia episode in the vein of *akrasia*: ἄλλ' ἔτι μὲν κε καὶ ὧς κακά περ πάσχοντες ἴκοισθε, / οἳ κ' ἐθέλης σὸν θυμὸν ἐρυκακῆειν καὶ ἐπαίρων *Od.* xi 104-05. In the rest of the *Odyssey* the same episode is interpreted through the *atasthalie* of Odysseus' companions and the *ate* of Odysseus himself.

⁴⁵ Dodds (n. 2) 32-33; Lloyd-Jones (n. 1) 29.

⁴⁶ Cf. R.B. Rutherford, 'The philosophy of the *Odyssey*', *JHS* cvi (1986) 150-51; S. West in Heubeck, West, Hainsworth (n. 12) ad i 7. According to Friedrich (n. 9) 27, this episode fulfils Zeus' words in the prologue in that Odysseus is punished by Zeus for his *hubris* on the Cyclops island. This is to misunderstand the message of Zeus' theodicy; had Zeus simply meant that mortals are punished by the gods for their misdoings there would have been nothing unusual about this theodicy. What Zeus does mean and what is being carried out throughout the poem is the

III

In view of the above discussion, it can be illuminating to compare the tripartite division of human error as attested in Homer with similar classifications in later Greek sources. The specific classification I have in mind is that introduced by Aristotle in his discussion of *proairesis* in Book iii of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle starts by dividing all human actions into involuntary and voluntary; the first category comprises actions committed under compulsion or in ignorance and the second those committed in full knowledge. Man is not held responsible and is not punished for the involuntary actions, and he is held responsible and is punished for the voluntary ones. The voluntary actions in their turn are divided into two categories: those committed in passion and those committed as a result of calculation. Man is held responsible for both kinds of error, because in both cases he had exact knowledge of what he was doing. Voluntary actions committed in a state of passion result from *akrasia*, and those committed as a result of calculation result from *proairesis*. The difference between the two is that whereas the actions that are due to *akrasia* do not issue from preliminary reasoning (τὸ προβεβουλευμένον), those due to *proairesis* are only such as have been decided on the basis of such reasoning.⁴⁷

It is not difficult to see that, when put into Homeric terms, Aristotle's involuntary actions committed out of ignorance would be equivalent to those deriving from *ate*, his voluntary actions committed out of passion, i.e. the akratic ones, would be equivalent to man's yielding to his *thumos*, and his voluntary actions committed in full knowledge and after preliminary reasoning would be equivalent to those deriving from *atasthalie*. Aristotle's term for the source of the latter is *proairesis*, and *proairesis* is defined by him as 'deliberate desire of things in our own power'.⁴⁸ Let us return for a moment to Eurylochus' deliberation which led to the slaughtering of the cattle of Helios. Although Eurylochus hopes that he will manage to avoid the god's anger by building him a temple on his return to Ithaca, he is at the same time fully aware that he may well be punished by death for the sacrilege he is about to commit. His reasoning is quite simple: of the two kinds of death threatening him he prefers the quick death by drowning to the slow death by starvation. His analysis of the situation is as rational as it can possibly be; yet his choice between the two options (and we must not forget that Odysseus made the opposite choice under the same circumstances) is solely rooted in his wish: 'rather with one gulp at the wave would I cast my life away, than be slowly straitened to death in a desert isle' (βούλομ' ἀπαξ πρὸς κῦμα χανῶν ἀπὸ θυμὸν ὀλέσσαι ἢ δηθὰ στρεύγεσθαι ἐὼν ἐν νήσῳ ἐρήμῃ *Od.* xii 350-351). That is to say, whether or not we take *proairesis* as understood by Aristotle as commensurable with the modern concept of will,⁴⁹ there can be no doubt that Homeric *atasthalie*, which has been shown to correspond to the negative aspect of Aristotle's *proairesis* (which, of course, comprises both erroneous and right decisions),⁵⁰

idea that there are errors committed ὑπὲρ μόρον, that is, not in accordance with the divine design—of these errors, mortals are the only authors.

⁴⁷ *Eth.Nic.* 1110a1-1112a17; cf. *Rhet.* 1373b25-38; 1374b1-9.

⁴⁸ *Eth.Nic.* 1113a11 βουλευτικὴ ὄρεξις τῶν ἐφ' ἡμῖν.

⁴⁹ According to J. Burnet, *The ethics of Aristotle* (London 1900) 109, 'this [i.e. will] is after all the best rendering of the word'; according to Dihle (n. 28) 57, 'one other detail in Aristotle's moral and psychological doctrines could have led to the concept of will as isolated from both instinct and reason'.

⁵⁰ The most typical Homeric example of the latter is the consideration of possible alternatives leading to a reasoned decision as, for example, in Odysseus' soliloquies in *Od.* v 408-23 and 465-73, adduced in Dihle (n. 28) 191 n. 33. Dihle comments on them as follows: 'In both cases, Homer describes in great detail what goes on in the mind of Odysseus before he makes the choice of the means and ends of the action required in the given situation—without using, of course, the word προαίρεσις'.

should be approached along the same lines. Considering that Aristotle's division of error closely follows the forensic practice of the Athenian courts,⁵¹ it seems reasonable to conclude that the principles on which man was recognized as either responsible or not for his actions did not differ greatly in Homer's times from those of Aristotle.

This is not necessarily to say that the classification of human actions into voluntary and involuntary would be the same in Homer and Aristotle. The way in which both treat errors caused by the excessive consumption of wine provides a good example. In Homer, such errors are treated as deriving from *ate* and thus as those for which the agent is not held responsible; in Aristotle, the same errors are treated as resulting from *akrasia* and, as with other acratia acts, as those for which the agent is held responsible.⁵² Moreover, to judge from Aristotle's examples of acts due to the agent's ignorance and therefore classed as involuntary, that is to say, acts which Homer would ascribe to *ate*, only such errors as unintentional homicide would continue to figure on Aristotle's list.⁵³ That is to say, although the tripartite division of human error remained the same, its content underwent some significant modifications after Homer.

Note that the tripartite division of human error is discussed twice in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: in the discussion of *proairesis* in Book iii this division is taken in the perspective of individual responsibility, and in the discussion of justice in Book v it is taken in the juridical and moral perspective. The latter yields *atuchema*, misadventure, and *hamartema*, mistake, for the terms of involuntary error; *adikema*, an act of injustice, for an error committed in a state of passion and without preliminary reasoning (although the act is unjust, the agent is not a vicious man); finally, the one who commits a crime *ἐκ προαιρέσεως* is defined as an unjust and vicious man (*ἀδίκος καὶ μοχθηρός*).⁵⁴ Comparison of this classification with that found in Homer shows that the distinctive characteristic of the Homeric terms for error is their morally neutral character. This is true of *ate*,⁵⁵ which embraces morally condemnable acts, such as that of Helen and Paris, together with morally neutral ones, such as Odysseus' falling asleep on Thrinacia; and this is also true of *atasthalie*, which makes no distinction between the mistakes of Hector and Odysseus and the crimes of Aegisthus and the suitors.⁵⁶ When Homer wishes to emphasize the morally condemnable character of a given act, he does so by applying to it terms of ethical evaluation (see above, n. 13).

Let us suppose now that all human actions in Homer, and not only those to which terms of ethical evaluation are actually applied, are approached in the perspective of such evaluation. Clearly, this would sharply diminish the cases of *ate*, for neither an Agamemnon nor a Helen would now be able to plead not guilty on the grounds of ignorance. In other words, many involuntary errors would now be classed as voluntary ones, and only those subsumed under the category of accidents would continue to retain their former status. As treatment of errors of this

⁵¹ See Burnet (n. 49) 108-09; Dover (n. 4) 146-54; Dihle (n. 28) 185 n. 85. The following passage of *Hippias Minor* seems to be especially illuminating in this connection: 'And how, Socrates, can those who intentionally err, and voluntarily and designedly commit iniquities (οἱ ἐκόντες ἀδικοῦντες καὶ ἐκόντες ἐπιβουλεύσαντες καὶ κακὰ ἐργασάμενοι), be better than those who err and do wrong involuntarily (τῶν ἀκόντων)? Surely there is a great excuse (πολλὴ συγγνώμη) to be made for a man telling a falsehood or doing an injury or any sort of harm to another, in ignorance (μὴ εἰδώς). And the laws are obviously far more severe on those who lie or do evil, voluntarily (τοῖς ἐκούσι), than on those who do evil involuntarily (τοῖς ἄκουσιν)' (371e9-372a5); tr. B. Jowett.

⁵² *Od.* xi 61; xxi 295-98; *Eth.Nic.* 1113b30-33.

⁵³ See *Eth.Nic.* 1111a8-21.

⁵⁴ *Eth.Nic.* 1135b11-1136a9; Aristotle's terms are given in D. Ross's translation.

⁵⁵ See Dodds (n. 2) 5-6; Adkins (n. 16) 324-26 and *Merit and responsibility* (Oxford 1960) 50-1.

⁵⁶ Heracles of *H.Hom.* xv should also be added to the list of heroes whose *atasthalie* cannot be easily measured by moral or religious standards, see πολλὰ μὲν αὐτὸς ἔρεξεν ἀτάσθαλα, πολλὰ δ' ἀνέτη (v.l. ἔξοχα ἔργα) at v. 6. Cf. also ἀτάσθαλον Ἀπόλλωνα at *H.Del.Ap.* 67.

sort as misadventures would be more appropriate for this new idea of involuntary error, this would account for the decline of *ate* in its traditional sense.⁵⁷ Furthermore, approaching all human actions in the perspective of ethical evaluation would also radically change the traditional understanding of the voluntary error: when taken in this perspective, many voluntary errors would become voluntary crimes. This would account for the decline of *atasthalie* and its replacement by such religiously and morally coloured terms as *hubris* and *adikia*.⁵⁸ It is at the same time clear that not any error, voluntary though it may be, deserves such harsh treatment, so that it can be expected that the change in the understanding of both the voluntary and the involuntary error would contribute to enlargement of the intermediate sphere of *akrasia*, a pattern of error according to which the agent knows what is right and good but his passions prevent him from following the right course of action. After Homer, this pattern not only enormously increases in popularity, but also is provided at last with a term of its own.

We saw above that although the principles according to which Homer and Aristotle classify human errors are the same, their evaluation of the same acts is often different. We can see now that this difference was due to introduction of terms denoting forms of error which are also terms of ethical evaluation.⁵⁹ At the same time, Aristotle's discussion of justice clearly shows that these terms were superimposed on the existing patterns of error rather than supplanted them. In other words, although the shift in the terminology of error may well be indicative of significant developments in the realm of ethics, it does not suggest a different kind of psychology for the Greeks of the classical age. The essential distinction between the involuntary action committed in ignorance and the voluntary action committed out of knowledge remains the same.

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⁵⁷ Note at the same time that the terms in which Sophocles treats Oedipus' involuntary error in the lyrics of *Oedipus at Colonus* do not differ essentially from those of Homer, see esp. 525-26 κακῶ μ' εὐνῶ πόλις οὐδὲν ἴδριν / γάμων ἐνέδησεν ὄτα.

⁵⁸ After emerging on a number of occasions in early Greek poetry and prose (see above, n. 13), *atasthalie* disappears so completely that it is even quoted in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* as an example of a 'strange' word, see *Rhet.* 1406a9. It is not until the second century AD that the word emerges again, see Luc. *Astr.* xx, cf. *Cont.* iii; Arr. *An.* vii 14.5, cf. vi 27.4; *Ind.* xiii 13.

⁵⁹ This is not to say that classical Greek did not possess a morally neutral term for error: *hamartia* with its cognates was just such a term. See Dover (n. 4) 152: 'it was possible to distinguish between error (*hamartiā*, *hamartiēma*, verb *hamartanein* or *exhamartanein*) on the one hand and crime, wrong-doing (*adikiā*, *adikēma*, verb *adikein*), sin or impiety (*asebeiā*, *asebēma*, verb *asebein*) on the other'. At the same time, *hamartia* was used as an inclusive term for human error both in the sense that 'not all errors are crimes or sins, but any crime or sin can be called "error" in Greek (*ibid.*) and in that it is 'something which can be either entirely the responsibility of the man who makes it, or can be something induced, normally by the gods', Dawe (n. 40) 94. This can be the reason why *hamartia* was chosen by Aristotle in the *Poetics* for designating the tragic hero's error.