

“WHO SHALL READILY OBEY?”:  
AUTHORITY AND POLITICS IN THE *ILLAD*

DEAN C. HAMMER

THE SOCIETY IN WHICH THE *ILLAD* was composed stood between two worlds: a heroic age born of an historical imagination stretching back to before the Dark Age, and an increasingly interdependent social order, evidenced in the nascent development of the city-state at this time. In understanding the relationship of the *Iliad* to this changing political environment, scholars have taken a number of different approaches. Some, most notably what became known as the Analysts, approached the *Iliad* as a collection of different myths and legends compiled by different authors at different times, making the epic a poor witness to the times.<sup>1</sup> The most damaging critiques of this approach came from two quarters. The first was by Milman Parry who, in demonstrating the formulaic nature of Homeric verse, pointed to the difficulty of establishing multiple authorship within the formal uniformity of the poem.<sup>2</sup> The second, and quite different, challenge came from Finley (1979) who argued that the *Iliad* actually depicted a social system historically grounded in the Dark Age.<sup>3</sup>

Parry's and Finley's theses prompted a prolonged scholarly debate not only about the accuracy of Homer's recounting but what era was being recounted.<sup>4</sup> Even as there was disagreement over these issues, though, there was a general scholarly consensus that whether Homer's view of Achaian society was historically grounded or contrived, “moral standards and values of life are essentially agreed on by everyone in the *Iliad*.”<sup>5</sup> As a work about politics, then, the *Iliad* was generally perceived as simply a “tribal encyclopedia” of inherited lore and political practices of the time<sup>6</sup> or as an idealized picture of a new aristocratic ethos that “united nobility of action with nobility of mind.”<sup>7</sup> Political relationships, including debate

My thanks to Thomas Banks, Jane Borelli, Walter Donlan, and Bill Marty for their comments on earlier drafts of this essay and to Stef Jonkman for her research assistance.

<sup>1</sup> For one of the more recent proponents of the Analyst approach, see Page 1959: Appendix I and II. For a discussion of the Analyst school, see Parry 1987; Clay 1983: 1–7; and Schein 1984: 10–11. In this early debate, a major source of opposition to the Analysts came from the Unitarians, who argued for the poetic unity of the epics. Most notably, see Whitman 1958.

<sup>2</sup> See Parry 1987 for a collection of Milman Parry's works.

<sup>3</sup> For other important work on this issue, see Donlan 1980; 1989a; 1989b; 1989c; 1993; and Donlan and Thomas 1993.

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of this debate about the accuracy of Homer's recounting of his own or Mycenaean times, see Nilsson 1968; Sealey 1976; Forrest 1966; and Posner 1979. For a view of the *Iliad* as an amalgam of different historical practices, see Snodgrass 1971; 1974; and 1980. For an argument that the emergence of the polis is central to understanding the *Iliad*, see Scully 1990 and Seaford 1994.

<sup>5</sup> Parry 1956: 3.

<sup>6</sup> Havelock 1963: 66.

<sup>7</sup> Jaeger 1967: 8.

and council, were “composed summarily and formulaically” and offered “only as the story prompts their intrusion.”<sup>8</sup> It is only recently that scholars have offered a challenge to this univocal reading of the *Iliad*, arguing, instead, that the *Iliad* contains elements of political and ideological dissonance.<sup>9</sup>

The argument of this article continues in this last vein by suggesting that the *Iliad* is not simply a reflection of, but a reflection on, the nature of political authority.<sup>10</sup> The nature of this reflection suggests a fundamental shift in the type of political questions asked, from the “power of authority” to carry out decisions suggestive of Dark Age politics to the legitimacy of authority in making these decisions, a question critical to the formation of an increasingly interdependent polis form of political organization.<sup>11</sup>

To appreciate the importance of this shift for our understanding of the *Iliad*, we need to look first at Finley’s understanding of Homeric political organization. Finley’s argument is that the *Iliad* reflects a Dark Age form of social, political, and economic organization in which the community was made up of distinct households (*oikoi*), each with its own resources and each headed by chieftains protective of their autonomy. Kingship over this community rested upon what Finley (1979: 82–89; 1981: 81) refers to as “might” in which “power depended on wealth, personal prowess, connexions by marriage and alliance, and retainers.”<sup>12</sup> But this kingship was always fragile, as loyalty was more “concentrated in a narrow sphere of kin and followers” than in the larger community, the values of members of the community were more “competitive” than “cooperative,”<sup>13</sup> justice was a “purely private matter,” political relations between the king and

<sup>8</sup> Havelock 1963: 69. More recently, see Stanley (1993: 280), who argues that the choices that arise out of “shared decision-making” in the poem are “either inadequate or irrelevant to the major issues of the poem.” These major issues, for Stanley, occur in the “moral sphere,” not in the battlefield or, presumably, in politics.

<sup>9</sup> See Rose 1988 and 1992; Edwards 1993; and Donlan 1973. That the *Iliad* is not simply performed for an aristocracy nor on behalf of possible benefactors but, instead, has a much wider appeal is argued by Scully (1990) and Kirk (1962: 275).

<sup>10</sup> This, of course, raises the question of the composition of the *Iliad*. It has been suggested that the *Iliad* is more a compilation of different legends than the contemporaneous work of a single poet. While Homer draws extensively from a poetic tradition, the unity of its structure and images, as well as the creative reshaping of this tradition in the development of a unified plot, suggest the work of one poet. I tend to agree with Redfield (1994: 58) that while “stories can be borrowed, plots cannot; the invention of a plot is the essence of the invention of a (narrative) poem.” For an overview of the “Homeric question,” see Schein 1984: 1–44. An important discussion of the formulaic nature of Homer’s work is given by Parry 1956: 1–7. For a discussion of how Homer draws on a repertoire of stories, see Nagy 1979 and 1990; and Page 1959. For criticisms of these views, see Austin 1975; Whitman 1958; and Redfield 1994.

<sup>11</sup> The phrase is from Finley 1979: 115. Evidence of the rise of the polis will be provided later.

<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of the centrality of the *oikos* in the *Iliad*, see also Finley 1979: 77–78, 80–83; Posner 1979; and Runciman 1982. For a critique of this notion of the centrality of the *oikos*, see Scully 1990: chap. 7.

<sup>13</sup> See Adkins 1960. Finley (1979: 117) writes, “The honour of a community was a totally different quality [than that of the warrior], requiring another order of skills and virtues: in fact, the community

other chieftains were governed by informal custom and accepted practices, and political institutions, such as the assembly, “pointed less to the reasons than to the decision itself, and hence to the power of authority.”<sup>14</sup> Not surprisingly, notes Walter Donlan (1980: 9), these “numerous small, autonomous corporations (*oikoi* and lineages), headed by chieftains jealous of their independence, tended to be centrifugal and atomistic,” and thus the larger organization into which they were integrated were “politically fragile and subject to dissolution.”<sup>15</sup>

Finley has certainly captured much of the flavor of the *Iliad*. And, in fact, it is precisely the absence of formalized political institutions that makes any mediation between Agamemnon and Achilles so difficult. To that extent we can understand the *Iliad*, following Finley and Donlan, as addressing the centrifugal tendencies of a Dark Age warrior culture. But the *Iliad* raises a second question about the nature of authority, this question more suggestive of the emerging polis. Though the initial challenge to authority reflects a Dark Age politics in which Agamemnon is seen as acting beyond customary restraints, the question of Agamemnon’s kingship is framed as one not of “might” but of legitimacy. Furthermore, this question of legitimacy is extracted from the personal antagonism between Agamemnon and Achilles and fashioned into a more general critique of the autocratic leadership of Agamemnon. In raising this question of the authority of Agamemnon’s kingship, the *Iliad* does not just convey uncritically the Dark Age assumption that the virtues of individual prowess outweigh the claims of the larger community, nor does the *Iliad* stop at pointing to the conflicting claims of the warrior and the community in a Dark Age society. Instead, Homer moves toward a new comprehension of authority, one that we see addressed in the funeral games. It is generally accepted that the funeral games serve as a ritual form of community reconciliation, with Achilles detached but social.<sup>16</sup> This article looks closer at the nature of this reconciliation, suggesting that in this ritual enactment the funeral games appear as a constructed polis in which we see the emergence of a new

---

could grow only by taming the hero and blunting the free exercise of his prowess, and a domesticated hero was a contradiction in terms.”

<sup>14</sup> Finley 1979: 110, 82, 115. This also seems to be Sale’s understanding (1994: 9, 29, 60) of Achaian politics, which he then contrasts to more developed Trojan political institutions.

<sup>15</sup> See also Donlan 1989b.

<sup>16</sup> It is hard to overstate how prevalent is this notion of the funeral games. For Schein (1984: 156), Achilles has a “detached sociability” with which he “gracefully and peacefully resolves disputes” so as to “avoid disappointment or difficulty.” Whitman (1958: 215) sees Achilles as having “returned to society as its master, quiet-voiced, a little aloof, but just and generous, doubling the prizes freely and adding extra ones.” Saxonhouse (1988: 40) sees the “burial, and the funeral games with Achilles presiding,” as marking “the gradual return of Achilles to the community of men and the moderation of his *thymos*.” For Redfield (1994), the funeral games as a ritual enactment serve as a moment of community reconciliation even as Achilles is not reintegrated into the community. For Scully (1990: 127), Achilles is “gradually (and imperfectly) reintegrated with the social order through the funeral games of Patroklos,” though “he himself still stands at a distance from that order.” See also Seaford 1994: 159–180.

definition of excellence, one that is political, as Achilles demonstrates a flexibility and responsiveness to situations as distributor of the prizes.

#### AGAMEMNON AND THE QUESTION OF AUTHORITY

Agamemnon's leadership is so disastrous, and his blunders often so obvious, that it has seemed unnecessary to inquire any further into Homer's point. When Agamemnon is discussed by scholars, it is to point to a character who is arrogant, at times cruel, and weak as a leader.<sup>17</sup> In one recent interpretation of the *Iliad*, Agamemnon's role is seen as simply that of a "flawed king" who, as he quarrels with the hero, has become a "political irrelevancy during the archaic period."<sup>18</sup> Focusing less on the character of Agamemnon and more on the implications Homer seems to draw from Agamemnon's actions, we will discover that Agamemnon's mistakes are not simply those of an individual whose personality is ill-suited to kingship; rather, Homer is engaged in a more general critique of the nature of the authority upon which Agamemnon premises his leadership.

We can begin to tap into this critique by paying close attention to how *πείθω*, a term that means "persuade" in the active voice and "obey" in the middle and passive voices, is employed throughout the *Iliad*.<sup>19</sup> Although sometimes used in a non-political context (as "to be persuaded by night to sleep"), its political importance is clear. The two meanings the word can take suggest a close connection, and one that will be made explicitly by Nestor, between persuasion and obedience. In examining this connection, Homer shifts our attention from the actions of the king to the reactions of those who are affected by him. In this way, the question of kingship becomes less the Machiavellian issue of how one gets others to obey and more the Weberian question of the legitimacy of authority, why others choose to obey the leader. My suggestion is that Agamemnon at various times employs (or is associated with) two distinct claims to authority: fear and heredity. These two claims result in a leadership that rests not on an understanding of the good of the community but on the silent obedience of what Achilles refers to as "nonentities."

Lest I be accused of resorting to the most egregious of anachronisms by suggesting that Homer is concerned with the question of legitimacy, let me frame this discussion not with my words but with a rhetorical question Achilles asks Agamemnon. Achilles inquires of Agamemnon, "With your mind forever on profit, how shall any one of the Achaians readily (*πρόφρων*) obey (*πείθηται*) you?" (*Il.* 1.149–150).<sup>20</sup> Achilles concedes that Agamemnon will always be able to find those over whom he can rule; that is, Agamemnon has "might." What

<sup>17</sup> For a view of Agamemnon as a more complex character, see Griffin 1980: 70–73.

<sup>18</sup> Stanley 1993: 295.

<sup>19</sup> This approach necessarily abstracts particular words and phrases from the text. I have attempted to contextualize the phrases by discussing events and actions that seem important to the interpretation of these phrases. The approach, though, does allow us to see how similar words and phrases are used differently or given different meanings.

<sup>20</sup> All translations are from Lattimore 1951.

Agamemnon will not be able to engender, if he continues with his practice of sending his warriors into battle and taking the best of the war spoils for himself, is something more like active support for his kingship. Thus, Achilles adds the modifier *πρόφρων*, broadening the issue from obedience to the demeanor of those asked to obey.

Agamemnon, too, recognizes that Achilles' statements go far beyond a particular grievance or breach of custom to a more fundamental question of who shall govern. At one point Nestor, the elder, seeks to temper the anger of the disputants by drawing upon a more conventional understanding of political relationships, pointing to Achilles' importance on the battlefield and Agamemnon's might as king, "lord over more than you rule" (*Il.* 1.281). Although Nestor on other occasions is able to get his way by judiciously deflecting the issue, in this case Agamemnon sees clearly the implications of Achilles' argument. "Yes, old sir," says Agamemnon to Nestor, "all this you have said is fair and orderly," but he then continues: "Yet here is a man who wishes to be above all others, who wishes to hold power (*κρατέειν*) over all, and to be lord (*ἀνάσσειν*) of all, and give them their orders, yet I think one will not obey (*πείσσεσθαι*) him" (*Il.* 1.287–289). Agamemnon casts the issue, however, in slightly different terms from Achilles. For Achilles, the criteria for successful leadership include how "readily" others obey. For Agamemnon this is absent: obedience must be unqualified.

Agamemnon's expectation of unqualified obedience rests on two grounds: fear and inheritance. The *Iliad* opens with Agamemnon seeking to command obedience through the intimidation of first Kalchas, the seer summoned by Achilles to explain the plague, and then Achilles. Kalchas initially expresses his reluctance to speak truthfully about the cause of the plague because he fears he will "make a man angry who holds great kingship over the men of Argos, and all the Achaians obey (*πείθονται*) him" (*Il.* 1.78–79). Even though Kalchas does not explain why the Achaians obey Agamemnon, it is clear that at least for Kalchas Agamemnon's authority rests on a fear of retribution.

Although fear can create compliance, even for a fairly long time (as the experience of the former Soviet bloc suggests), it does not eventuate in a corresponding readiness to comply. Obedience, in the case of Kalchas, becomes a question of silence, of not speaking against the king.<sup>21</sup> Although the fear of force perhaps always underlies authority, a point Homer will make with the example of Thersites, fear is not an adequate substitute for authority. The reason is that such authority crumbles once the fear is neutralized, which is what Achilles does when he guarantees protection from anyone who would seek to injure Kalchas, even Agamemnon. For those, like Achilles, who do not fear Agamemnon, his

<sup>21</sup> The comparison to the former Soviet bloc is striking at this point. The day-to-day response by eastern Europeans to Soviet rule was one of quiet compliance in which public actions and statements were kept to an absolute minimum. Any thoughts that this compliance suggested active agreement with Soviet rule were dealt a sharp blow by the disdain with which these nations treated the Soviet legacy upon the removal of fear.

authority becomes the object not of awe but of derision. Thus, Achilles, in agreeing to protect Kalchas, refers to Agamemnon as one who “claims (εὔχεται) to be far the greatest of all the Achaians” (*Il.* 1.91), suggesting in this context a boast that lacks substance.

Agamemnon quickly turns his anger to Achilles, seeking to humiliate him and strike fear in his heart. In his contemptuous admonition of Achilles, Agamemnon seeks to demonstrate not his worth as a leader but his power, by taking Briseis, Achilles’ concubine. The point, as Agamemnon makes clear, is “that you may learn well (εἰδῆς) how much greater I am than you, and another man may shrink back from likening himself to me and contending against me” (*Il.* 1.185–187). As the word εἰδῆς suggests, it is by seeing the power which Agamemnon can wield that Achilles is to learn to show him honor, to recognize the proper order.

Having shown the limits of fear as a basis for authority, Achilles sets his sights on a much more formidable target: Agamemnon’s inheritance of wealth and the scepter as a basis of his kingship. On numerous occasions this inheritance is claimed, both by Agamemnon and by Nestor, as suitable in itself for the title of “kingliest.” Nestor, for example, early on chastises Achilles for attempting to match his strength with the king since he is “greater who is lord over more than you rule” (*Il.* 1.281). For Achilles, though, this inheritance creates only an illusion of kingship, not a sufficient reason to listen to or obey Agamemnon. Achilles, instead, derides Agamemnon for never having earned his authority through acts of courage. “Never once have you taken courage in your heart to arm with your people for battle, or go into ambushade with the best of the Achaians” (*Il.* 1.225–227). Agamemnon, according to Achilles, hides behind his power, using it not to help his people but to devour them through his greediness (*Il.* 1.231). Achilles refuses to submit to this fate. He exposes the complete barrenness of Agamemnon’s rule, for the only people Agamemnon still has authority over, the only people who will submit to Agamemnon’s leadership, are “nonentities (οὐτιδανοῖσιν),” those who no longer speak or act (*Il.* 1.231). Agamemnon concludes that in any event Achilles has no “right to speak abusively” to him. Achilles responds not by argument but by proclaiming his refusal to become one of Agamemnon’s nonentities:

So must I be called of no account (οὐτιδανός) and a coward if I must carry out every order you may happen to give me. Tell other men to do these things, but give me no more commands, since I for my part have no intention to obey (πείσεσθαι) you.

(*Il.* 1.292–296)

Achilles must either submit totally to, or reject completely, Agamemnon’s authority. Even in Agamemnon’s most desperate (and seemingly conciliatory) moments later in the epic, he conditions his offer of gifts to Achilles by requiring that Achilles “yield place to me, inasmuch as I am the kinglier and inasmuch as I can call myself born the elder” (*Il.* 9.160).

Achilles will not be the last to bring up this issue of obedience and authority. In fact, we see through the application of the poetic formula, “Come then, do as I say, let us all be won over (ἀλλ’ ἄγεθ’, ὥς ἄν ἐγὼ εἴπω, πειθώμεθα πάντες),” a recurring exhortation to be persuaded. What varies is not the formula but the speaker, the circumstances, and the consequences that follow from the utterance. Each invocation serves to recall not only Achilles’ challenge but earlier invocations and responses, revealing, often in ironic ways, the implications of Agamemnon’s claim to authority.<sup>22</sup>

With Achilles out of the way, Agamemnon’s first assertion of kingship occurs when he decides to test the resolve of his troops by telling them to flee to their ships. In developing this scene, Homer carefully sets out the basis of Agamemnon’s authority, namely his inheritance of Zeus’ scepter from his father:

Powerful Agamemnon stood up holding the sceptre Hephaistos had wrought him carefully. Hephaistos gave it to Zeus the king, the son of Kronos, and Zeus in turn gave it to the courier Argeiphontes, and lord Hermes gave it to Pelops, driver of horses, and Pelops again gave it to Atreus, the shepherd of the people. Atreus dying left it to Thyestes of the rich flocks, and Thyestes left it in turn to Agamemnon to carry and to be lord of many islands and over all Argos. (*Il.* 2.100–108)

Leaning upon his scepter, the emblem of his inherited kingship, Agamemnon recounts the difficulties that have been faced in nine years of battle and concludes with the formula, “Come then, do as I say, let us all be won over (πειθώμεθα); 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” (*Il.* 2.139–141). On this occasion, Agamemnon successfully, though ironically, asserts his authority. The assembly, which includes all the Achaians, eagerly obeys Agamemnon and rises to flee to their ships in desertion of the war effort.

It is Odysseus who must intervene, explain Agamemnon’s actions, and physically strike those who continue to threaten order. Odysseus, too, speaks on behalf of an inherited tradition of kingship, proclaiming to the warriors,

Surely not all of us Achaians can be as kings here. Lordship for man is no good thing. Let there be one ruler, one king, to whom the son of devious-devising Kronos gives the sceptre and right of judgment, to watch over his people. (*Il.* 2.203–206)

The irony of Odysseus’ statement is immediate: although ostensibly speaking on behalf of Agamemnon, Odysseus is the one in possession of the scepter, having taken it from Agamemnon. In upholding Agamemnon’s authority as the one king, Odysseus is actually the only one at this point acting as a king. The breakdown of authority reveals the stark force that underlies politics, a starkness made all the

<sup>22</sup>This builds upon Donlan’s (1979) systematic discussion of claims to authority in the *Iliad*, particularly of the frictions that reside between “position and standing” in Homeric society.

more dramatic as Agamemnon must stand by helplessly as his scepter is used to reassert his authority violently.<sup>23</sup>

This issue of Agamemnon's inheritance comes up again in Book 9, in a curious replay of Agamemnon's nearly disastrous advice of Book 2. Realizing that he has been deceived by Zeus (the source of his scepter), Agamemnon calls the dispirited troops into assembly and reveals to them that it is Zeus' desire that they return without honor. Agamemnon then repeats a phrase whose formula we saw in Book 2: "Come then, do as I say, let us all be won over" (*Il.* 9.26). As in Book 2, Agamemnon then states, "let us run away with our ships to the beloved land of our fathers since no longer shall we capture Troy of the wide ways" (*Il.* 9.26–28).

Interpreting Agamemnon's actions charitably, one could argue that he senses that the gods have turned against the Achaeans and that he seeks only to release the warriors from any further obligation to fight against these increasingly insurmountable odds. Certainly, by the tenth year the original purpose of the battle has receded considerably in the minds of the warriors and other issues of individual pride and glory have become more prominent. Yet, even at this potentially generous moment, the assembly does not rise up in eagerness to flee (perhaps remembering Odysseus' intervention in Book 2) nor does it otherwise affirm Agamemnon's gesture but stays "stricken to silence" (*Il.* 9.29). It is Diomedes who finally breaks the silence, exclaiming that he will not listen to Agamemnon's "folly." Immediately, the issue of authority comes to the surface. Diomedes is careful to point out that it is his "right" in the assembly to speak out against the king. Whether or not Diomedes is speaking about a more formalized right to speak in the assembly or merely pointing to what is customary is difficult to determine. But what is clear is that Diomedes, once having established this right, launches into a critique of Agamemnon's leadership and a defense of his own courage reminiscent of (and perhaps emboldened by) Achilles' argument in Book 1. The young warrior points out that he has been a victim of Agamemnon's unwarranted recriminations and notes that although Zeus gave to Agamemnon "the sceptre" which gave him "honour beyond all," Zeus "did not give you a heart, and of all power this is the greatest" (*Il.* 9.38–39). There is an incompleteness to Agamemnon's claim to authority evidenced in the reactions of others. Unlike Achilles, who expresses his refusal to obey Agamemnon by removing himself from battle, in this case Diomedes indicates his refusal to obey by stating that he will remain to fight even if Agamemnon goes home.

<sup>23</sup> Finley (1979: 111) suggests that Thersites' outburst provides an opportunity for Homer "to write a little essay on social classes and the modes of behaviour proper to each." Other scholars have not been so sanguine. To the extent that Odysseus is acting as a king, some scholars have been bothered by the violent use of the scepter by Odysseus in suppressing the "ugly truth" (Whitman 1958: 161, 261; see also Stanley 1993: 55). Others have pointed to the unsettling aspects of this episode as Thersites' questions remain even after his voice is silenced. See Rose 1988 and 1992; and Donlan 1973. I am inclined to agree with those who see in this episode certain unsettling aspects.



This issue of the basis of authority again arises in Book 14, where for the third time Agamemnon suggests that the best warriors flee from the heat of battle, this time by taking the ships to deeper waters. Once again Agamemnon invokes the formula for others to be persuaded by him and concludes, "There is no shame in running, even by night, from disaster" (*Il.* 14.80). Odysseus immediately intervenes, proclaiming rather forcefully that he wished Agamemnon "directed some other unworthy army, and were not lord over us" (*Il.* 14.84–85). The danger of such statements by Agamemnon, according to Odysseus, is not that he will be ignored but that his position as the sceptered king results in great numbers of people who "obeyed (*πειθοίατο*) him" (*Il.* 14.93).

Agamemnon, responding to Odysseus' rebuke, calls for someone else to speak who has better counsel than his. Diomedes steps forward, though it is in a slightly different role than we just saw him occupy in Book 9. In the earlier book, Diomedes exposed the incompleteness of Agamemnon's inheritance as a basis for kingship, but he did so as an individual warrior defending his honor against the insults of Agamemnon. In this case Diomedes makes a much more concerted effort to establish an alternative basis of authority, particularly necessary in this case given that he is the youngest of the warriors. He begins his speech with the conditional statement, "if you are willing to listen (*πείθεσθαι*), and not be each astonished in anger against me because by birth I am the youngest among you" (*Il.* 14.110–112). Diomedes then portrays himself in the line of a valorous genealogy. Having established his position in the warrior hierarchy, a position which, importantly, Thersites never establishes when he speaks against Agamemnon in Book 2, Diomedes then suggests that the warriors re-enter battle, staying out of reach of further wounds, but still provide encouragement to the other warriors. Diomedes' advice is heeded, as Homer concludes: "So he spoke, and they listened well to him, and obeyed (*επίθοντο*) him" (*Il.* 14.133).

There is something sadly ironic in Agamemnon's invocation of the formula for the Achaians to be won over by his advice. Nestor, after all, early on interrupts Agamemnon's attempts to intimidate his followers into compliance by observing that in the previous age of heroes, these great men "listened to the counsels I gave and heeded (*πείθοντο*) my bidding." He goes on to exhort, "Do you also obey (*πείθεσθε*), since to be persuaded (*πείθεσθαι*) is better" (*Il.* 1.273–274). Nestor seems to draw a distinction here between an obedience that Agamemnon insists upon by right and an obedience that arises out of a persuasion of the rightness of the action. Agamemnon, in invoking the formula, seems to take this to heart: rather than issuing commands, he seeks to persuade. But this persuasion, on the three occasions when he uses the formula, does not work as foretold by Nestor. On one occasion, obedience to his word results in near disaster, and in the two other occasions Agamemnon is simply unable to persuade the warriors of the wisdom of his actions.

This stands in contrast to the five occasions this formula is used by individuals other than Agamemnon. Diomedes uses the formula at the end of Book 9 after the disappointment of the embassy to Achilles. Diomedes suggests that the Achaians should pay Achilles no more attention since “He will fight again, whenever the time comes that the heart in his body urges him to, and the god drives him” (*Il.* 9.702–703). After repeating the formula, he suggests sleep to be followed at dawn by a renewed war effort. In sharp contrast to Agamemnon’s counsel of retreat earlier in Book 9 which was refuted by the other warriors, Diomedes’ words are met with acclaim by all the kings. Poseidon (in the likeness of an old man) uses the expression in Book 14 as he rouses the Achaians and advises sound military strategy: give the best armor to the best warriors (*Il.* 14.370–377). The warriors “listened hard to him, and obeyed (πίθοντο) him.” There is an interesting parallel here. Books 9 and 14 both open with Agamemnon invoking the formula, in both cases suggesting that they flee, and the other warriors refusing to follow the ruinous advice. There is, consequently, a need to fill, at least temporarily, the vacuum of leadership created by Agamemnon’s poor counsel. Although the warriors listen and are not persuaded by Agamemnon, they listen and obey the words of first, Diomedes, and second, Poseidon.

The third use of this formula is made by Thoas, a young Achaian warrior, who offers advice at a critical point in the battle in which Hektor is advancing toward the ships. Thoas is described by Homer as a skilled and brave warrior who is unmatched by his peers in debate. Thoas, recognizing that Hektor is being aided at this point by the gods, invokes the formula for the others to be persuaded, and then provides his advice. In direct contrast to Agamemnon’s earlier counsel that the warriors run to the ships while the rest of the soldiers continue to fight, Thoas suggests quite the opposite:

Let us tell the multitude to make its way back toward the vessels while we ourselves, who claim we are the greatest in all the army, stand, and see if we can face him first, and hold him off from them with spears lifted against him, and I think for all of his fury his heart will be afraid to plunge into our Danaan company. (*Il.* 15.295–299)

As Diomedes had denounced the cowardice of Agamemnon in Book 9, Thoas now makes this aspect of Agamemnon’s command clear: in the same situation as Agamemnon faced in Book 14, Thoas advises that the greatest warriors remain and fight rather than flee. With the completion of his counsel, Homer once again ties together persuasion with obedience, as he did at the conclusion of Poseidon’s speech: “So he spoke, and they listened (κλύον) to him with care, and obeyed (ἐπίθοντο) him” (*Il.* 15.300).

The two remaining cases of the use of this formula are interesting in that they occur on the side of the Trojans, both involving Poulydamas advising Hektor. In the first case, Poulydamas suggests to Hektor that storming the Achaian trench by horse would be treacherous. Poulydamas suggests, instead, that the horses be checked and that the Trojans follow Hektor in mass formation (*Il.* 12.61–79). It

is advice to which Hektor listens. In the second instance, Poulydamas, whom Homer characterizes as “better in words” than Hektor, advises retreating to the city to fortify it against the raging Achilles. In this case, Hektor refuses Poulydamas’ counsel, stating, “Not one of the Trojans will obey (ἐπιτείσεται) you. I shall not allow it. Come, then, do as I say and let us all be persuaded (πειθώμεθα)” (*Il.* 18.296–297). Hektor then declares that the Trojans will engage Achilles in battle by the Achaian ships. Lest we miss the point, Homer comments at the conclusion of Hektor’s speech,

So spoke Hektor, and the Trojans thundered to hear him; fools, since Pallas Athene had taken away the wits from them. They gave their applause to Hektor in his counsel of evil, but none to Poulydamas who had spoken good sense before them. (*Il.* 18.310–313)

The decision is, indeed, a significant one as it leads eventually to Hektor’s death and the fall of Troy.

This last action by Hektor parallels Agamemnon’s only successful invocation of the formula that others be persuaded by him in Book 2, the first time he suggests fleeing. In this case Agamemnon is able to stir up the “passion in the breast of all those who were within that multitude and listened to his counsel” (*Il.* 2.142–143). The result is a tumult so powerful that the crowd is almost able to achieve “a homecoming beyond fate” (*Il.* 2.155) and can be checked only by physical force. Hektor, too, when he refuses to listen to those who speak against him, in this case Poulydamas, appeals instead to the passions of the crowd. In both cases, ruin or near ruin is the result. It is this unthinking, impulsive reaction of the crowd that serves as the most telling response to Achilles’ rhetorical question, “Who will readily obey you?” If authority is based solely on fear and intimidation, then the only people who will readily obey the leader, as Achilles points out, are nonentities, those who will not speak against the king. The relationship of a leader to nonentities becomes more like a demagogic one in which the appeal is not to reason or to thought but to a dangerous passion that knows only their immediate feelings. Placed in a crowd and freed from the fear that keeps them silently compliant, the nonentities become dangerous fools who eagerly applaud the most unwise of actions.

It is, interestingly, a series of interventions by those who refuse to be nonentities any longer, such as Diomedes and Odysseus, that ultimately saves Agamemnon from disaster. Nestor’s lesson to Agamemnon about kingship can be read in this same light. Though expressing frustration with the inability of the assembly of all Achaians to come to any decision (*Il.* 2.337–343), thus suggesting a certain dislike for the crowd, Nestor does not dispense with all counsel. Instead, he suggests to Agamemnon, “It is yours therefore to speak a word, yours also to listen, and grant the right to another also, when his spirit stirs him to speak for our good (ἀγαθόν)” (*Il.* 9.100–102). Nestor seeks deftly to balance Agamemnon’s claim to be greater than (φέρτερός) Achilles, a claim of excellence that carries considerable weight in Greek society, with the good (ἀγαθόν) of the community. But beneath

this balancing act is a substantial challenge to Agamemnon's understanding of his authority expressed in two ways. First, Nestor suggests that as a king Agamemnon should not only listen to others but facilitate (κρηῖναι) these expressions of different views (*Il.* 1.100–101). Second, Nestor raises the possibility that there is not an inevitable correspondence between what Agamemnon may desire and the interests of members of the community, a correspondence assumed to exist by Agamemnon. Nestor in an important sense picks up on Achilles' argument by suggesting that the criterion for effective leadership is not the silence of nonentities but the ability actively to engage different, even opposing, views.

#### HOMEWARD ACHILLES

Even though Achilles provides a critique of Agamemnon's political leadership and replaces Agamemnon's claim with his own claim to be "the best of the Achaians," he does not initially offer a suitable alternative to Agamemnon's leadership (*Il.* 1.244). Quite the opposite: Achilles retreats from the political, envisioning an eventual return to his household. Symbolically, we see this retreat when Achilles throws the scepter to the ground, a scepter that in Achilles' own words is used by the "dispensers of justice (δικασπόλοι)" who "administer the justice of Zeus (θέμιστας πρὸς Διὸς εἰρύαται)" (*Il.* 1.238–239). Though Achilles' anger is directed toward Agamemnon, he implicates the entire Achaian community as he not only wishes for, but watches, their slaughter.

Achilles carries this retreat from the political still further when he declares that community sanctions and rewards no longer govern his actions. He states to the embassy:

Fate is the same for the man who holds back, the same if he fights hard. We are all held in a single honour (τιμῇ), the brave with the weaklings. A man dies still if he has done nothing, as one who has done much. Nothing is won for me, now that my heart has gone through its afflictions in forever setting my life on the hazard of battle. (*Il.* 9.318–322)

Phoenix at first implores Achilles to accept Agamemnon's gifts, since by accepting the gifts Achilles will be that much more honored by the community. Achilles then restates his position and adds, "I think I am honoured (τετιμῆσθαι) already in Zeus' ordinance" (*Il.* 9.608). Having rejected that which meant the most to him, the honor provided by the community, Achilles makes clear that he, not the community, will order his life. It is for this reason that the continual assertions the embassy makes about the honor that others, including the three ambassadors, have shown him in the past (see, e.g., *Il.* 9.630–631) do not sway Achilles.

What Achilles imagines is a return "homeward (οἶκος)" (*Il.* 9.393) where he will see his father again, marry, and enjoy a long life (*Il.* 9.415–416). It is within this context of Achilles' return to the *oikos* that we can place Phoenix's response. Phoenix, in tears, begins his speech by declaring his loyalty first and foremost to Achilles and the *oikos*: "If it is going home (νόστον), glorious Achilles, you ponder in your heart . . . shall I, dear child, be left in this place behind you all alone?" (*Il.*

9.434–435, 437–438). What Phoenix recalls is his gratitude and responsibility to Peleus and his love toward Achilles as the child he raised. For that reason, Phoenix says that he “would not be willing to be left behind” (*Il.* 9.444–445).

Phoenix is engaged in a far more complex balancing process here than has often been appreciated. What he attempts to show is a connection between the *oikos* and the larger political community. Phoenix’s responsibility was to raise Achilles, but for Phoenix this meant teaching Achilles to be a “speaker of words and one who accomplished in action,” both excellences that make men “pre-eminent” in the wider community (*Il.* 9.443, 441). Achilles is unmoved by the desire for preeminence, contenting himself, instead, with consolidating his household ties by inviting Phoenix to stay the night.

Achilles’ re-entrance into battle is premised, as well, on a vendetta, a form of justice that is personal rather than mediated by the community. Achilles states that he has no desire to “be among men” (*Il.* 18.91) until Hektor “pays the price (ἀποτίση)” (*Il.* 18.93). Achilles later proclaims, in a graphic statement of the desire for vengeance that underlies a vendetta, “Food and drink mean nothing to my heart but blood does” (*Il.* 19.213–214). Since a vendetta is unmediated, the extent of retribution is bound only when the anger of the aggrieved party is sated. And Achilles’ anger is boundless. The price for killing Patroklos will include “the armour and the head of Hektor” (*Il.* 18.334–335) and the sacrifice of twelve Trojan children at the pyre of Patroklos (*Il.* 18.336–337).<sup>24</sup> But even that will not be enough as Achilles rages out of control, at one point even desiring to devour (ἔδμεναι) Hektor’s raw flesh (*Il.* 22.346–348).<sup>25</sup> Achilles thus becomes what he had previously accused Agamemnon of being, a devourer of people. Certainly Agamemnon and Achilles are not morally equivalent: Agamemnon threatens his own people for his benefit, while Achilles devours the enemies of the Achaians. But for Homer, human civility is threatened by the act of feeding on human flesh, whether that human be friend or foe.

#### THE FUNERAL GAMES AS POLITICAL ENACTMENT

Homer has left us with a problem. As both Agamemnon and Achilles threaten the foundations of community civility, neither provides a suitable answer to Achilles’ initial question of why anyone should readily obey the king. Throughout the *Iliad*, Homer has brought into question the traditional answers: wealth, heredity, even prowess in battle. None of these attributes confers the legitimacy deemed necessary for successful leadership. It is in the funeral games that Homer suggests an alternative model of leadership, one that addresses the issues of authority raised by the *Iliad*.

<sup>24</sup> On this issue of blood vengeance, see Finley 1979: 94.

<sup>25</sup> There is a clear resonance of this in Arist. *Pol.* 1253a29, where he writes that the man who is without a polis “must be either a beast or a god.”

There is good reason to look to the games for a discussion of important community issues. Games were not simply about play, as suggested by the intensity (almost to the point of death) with which the participants engaged in the contests. The games were "the outstanding, ritualized, non-military expression of a value system in which honour was the highest virtue." These games, because of their centrality in religious celebration and the unifying force they exercised on "the politically fragmented and often warring Greeks," often served in Greek literature as forums for discussions of the political activity of the era.<sup>26</sup> Certainly Homer's discussion does not appear in the critical form of later elegiac verse; but the games even for Homer, as they mirrored society, served as an important avenue for an examination of that society.<sup>27</sup> In looking at the funeral games as a customary form of community remembrance, scholars have seen the purpose of the games as both a ritualized enactment by which a "wounded and disordered" community can reassert "its structure and its vitality"<sup>28</sup> and as a means for the gradual reintegration of Achilles into the social order.<sup>29</sup> What has not been recognized is that in reasserting its vitality, the community, through the games, revisits the still unsettled issue of authority raised in the beginning of the *Iliad*. The community appears as something different in the funeral games, though: not as a Dark Age confederation of chieftains but as a constructed polis in which leadership is called upon to provide solutions that cut across kinship ties.

That the *Iliad* provides evidence of an "awareness" by Homer of the "growth of the city-state in his own time" has been suggested for some time by scholars.<sup>30</sup> Recently, however, an even stronger claim has been made suggesting that "neither the *Odyssey* nor especially the *Iliad* would exist in its present form if the ideals and manners created by the new polis had not already been taking shape."<sup>31</sup> We do not yet see the developed form of the polis of fifth-century Athens, one in which there exists a self-conscious civic community, with formalized economic and political institutions seen as authoritative by the community's subgroups. But there are certain recognizable characteristics of the political organization of the late eighth century B.C. that distinguish it from earlier Dark Age organizations. There are hints of the political and economic integration of rural and town inhabitants within a bounded territory. Corresponding to this, we see some

<sup>26</sup> Finley 1981: 131-133.

<sup>27</sup> Adkins (1960: 56), for example, looks at the chariot races as revealing a "microcosm" of "the tangle of values" in Greek society. For the role of rituals as "social dramas" that promote reflection on society, see Turner 1981.

<sup>28</sup> Redfield 1994: 210.

<sup>29</sup> Scully 1990: 127.

<sup>30</sup> Snodgrass 1980: 27-28. See also Ehrenberg 1967: 10-11.

<sup>31</sup> Scully 1990: 90. This, of course, raises the question of when the *Iliad* was composed. Fairly strong evidence dates the composition of the epic in the eighth century B.C. See Edwards 1987: 159. See also Austin and Vidal-Naquet 1977; Murray 1980. This issue is made all the more complex by anachronistic references to Mycenaean times and by the different traditions and tales that are woven into the epic. See Snodgrass 1974.

sense of a people, or *demos*, who have some allegiance to a political community that extends beyond their immediate household, kin, or other corporate loyalties. This *demos*, it should be noted, consists no longer of subjects, but not yet of citizens. They appear more as an audience to which the leaders must play.<sup>32</sup> More formalized institutions are also established that can make limited claims upon the leaders and the people. This includes the creation of a public space for the articulation of preferences and the resolution of community disputes. There are not, however, highly developed mechanisms of coordination able to answer to the demands of an increasingly complex and interdependent community life. This, in fact, is part of the problem. In this early polis leaders must address not only the centrifugal forces that divided earlier Dark Age societies, but also the nature of a political leadership suitable for addressing increasingly complex issues of economic distribution that cut across kinship ties.<sup>33</sup>

The most commonly noted instance of an awareness of polis life is in Homer's depiction of Achilles' shield where we see evidence of an assembly meeting in the marketplace, elders arbitrating a dispute, and the development of agriculture (*Il.* 18.483–607). There are a number of references by Homer, as well, to walled cities, and "even the camp of the Achaian heroes before Troy is fitted out with the essential characteristics of a city: city wall, meeting place and religious altars."<sup>34</sup> Numerous references are made to debates that occurred within the council and assembly, including statements that Odysseus is good both in council (*βουλάς*) and war (*Il.* 2.273) and Achilles' claim that while he is unsurpassed in battle "there are others also better in assembly (*ἀγορῇ*)" (*Il.* 18.106). Diomedes also refers to his "right (*θέμις*)" to speak in the "assembly (*ἀγορῇ*)" (*Il.* 9.33).

What indications do we have that the funeral games appear as a constructed polis? First, we have the performance of Patroklos' burial rites by the Achaians as a whole. Though it is still the responsibility of Achilles to see to Patroklos' burial, Agamemnon (and not Achilles, as the head of the Myrmidons) gives the orders "for men and mules to assemble from all the shelters and bring in timber" (*Il.* 23.111–112). There is still a distinction for Achilles between "close mourners" and the rest of the Achaians, but as Achilles requests that Agamemnon disperse the others, he asks for all the "leaders (*ἄγοι*)" to remain (*Il.* 23.163, 160). This

<sup>32</sup> See Runciman 1982.

<sup>33</sup> This is in contrast to Stanley (1993: 280, 295), who sees the political conflicts set up in the *Iliad* as largely irrelevant to archaic issues. For comparisons of a chiefdom form of polity to a polis, see Runciman 1982. Evidence of the move toward an increasingly interdependent polis during the latter part of eighth century B.C. is corroborated by other changes, including the switch from pastoralism to agriculture, increased trade, and growing social and political complexity. See Snodgrass 1980: 28, 35–37, 40; Murray 1980: 57–68, 100–108, 211–218; Finley 1981: 88–89; and Murray 1990. For a discussion of factors influencing the rise of the polis, see Starr 1977: 48; Finley 1981: chap. 8; and Snodgrass 1982: 669, 679. For those who see evidence of the emerging polis in depictions of Troy, see Scully 1990 and Sale 1994. I do not find their arguments to be at odds with the suggestion here that some of the same issues of authority that confront the polis are played out in the Achaian camp.

<sup>34</sup> Murray 1980: 64. See *Il.* 11.805–807.

burial in which all the Achaian leaders are involved contrasts with the normal practice of burying the warrior in the homeland.<sup>35</sup>

Second, Patroklos is buried, and a tomb created, in what becomes the "wide assembly (εὐρὺν ἀγῶνα)" for the games (*Il.* 23.258). As burial "in the city market place or even in the council chamber becomes the unique, honorific exception" with the development of the polis, the placement of Patroklos' tomb is suggestive of a cult of the dead around which communities would unite.<sup>36</sup> The funeral games organized around hero cults would eventually become institutionalized in the pan-Hellenic games which served as a "temporary but recurrent, community" in which "citizens" are "gathered for a few days of a polis in replica."<sup>37</sup>

Third, in introducing the prizes for the contests, Achilles provides the material resources of the community accumulated through conquest and exchange over the years. More importantly, in announcing how the prizes will be distributed, he makes this apportionment a public activity instead of a private matter. This, in principle, is no different from Agamemnon's role in Book 1. What is different, as we will see, is how each of the leaders responds to public challenges to the apportionment. Where Agamemnon will treat the distribution of war booty as a private activity, an act of largesse on his part, Achilles seems able in the funeral games to recognize the legitimacy of public claims that may contest the apportionment of the property. Such "communalization" of property, albeit one limited to select groups of society, is important as it reveals "an ideology basic to the polis."<sup>38</sup>

Fourth, we see in the funeral games more formal institutions for adjudicating disputes. Phoenix is made an "umpire (σκοπόν)" (*Il.* 23.359) with specific responsibilities: "to mark (μεμνέωτο)" the running so that it can be later recalled (in case of dispute) and to "bring back a true story (ἀληθεῖν ἀποεῖποι)" by being able to attest, impartially, who was winning at the turning point (*Il.* 23.361). Such a role is reminiscent of the polis scene on Achilles' shield in which an "arbitrator (ἴσορι)" is sought to resolve a dispute by speaking "the straightest opinion (δίκην ἰθύντατα)" (*Il.* 18.508). The leaders of the Achaians will be looked to in the funeral games, as well, as ones who can "judge (δικάσσετε)" between two disputants impartially (μηδ' ἐπ' ἀρωγῇ) (*Il.* 23.574).

Finally, we see the invocation of Zeus as overseeing the orderly apportionment of the prizes (see *Il.* 23.584–585), a role for Zeus associated with the development of the polis.<sup>39</sup> This role of Zeus is seen another time in the *Iliad* in which Zeus is viewed as punishing those "in violent assembly (ἀγορῇ) that pass decrees that are crooked" (*Il.* 16.387).<sup>40</sup>

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, the description of the death and burial of Sarpedon (*Il.* 16.455–457).

<sup>36</sup> See Burkert 1985: 191–192.

<sup>37</sup> Pozzi and Wickersham 1991: 5. See also Burkert 1985: 193.

<sup>38</sup> Nagy 1990: 269.

<sup>39</sup> See Nagy 1990: 272, 275; Donlan 1980: 10–11; Kullmann 1985; and Edwards 1987: 130–131.

<sup>40</sup> Dodds (1951: 32) sees this statement as "a reflex of later conditions which, by an inadvertence common in Homer, has been allowed to slip into a simile."



With this setting, we can now look at how these issues of distribution and leadership are raised in the first event, the chariot races, considered the most honorable of the funeral games. Achilles announces that he will not compete since everyone knows that his horse is the quickest. This statement is often understood as a sign of Achilles' continuing detachment from the Achaian community. But Achilles' outsider status has evolved into a healthier stance. Where before Achilles stood apart from the community, watching their slaughter, here he occupies a role within the community: initially, that of distributor of the prizes, ultimately, that of arbiter of disputes. There is no small irony here as the mediating role Achilles will assume stands in contrast to (and with the rise of the polis will usurp) the private vendetta carried out by Achilles on Patroklos' behalf. None of this is anticipated by Achilles, though. Instead, he sees himself as having only a limited role, that of supplying the prizes. The distribution of prizes is assumed to be a fairly straightforward act: there are a graduated series of five prizes with the best horseman receiving the top prize.

Achilles' role quickly expands as he encounters a rather trivial quarrel between Aias and Idomeneus about which of the horsemen is winning. Initially, Idomeneus calls upon Agamemnon to serve as the witness for which horseman is ahead. Agamemnon is strangely silent. The audience cannot help but remember how poorly Agamemnon had handled earlier conflicts, most notably with Achilles. The argument becomes more heated and "the quarrel between the two of them would have gone still further, had not Achilles himself risen up and spoken between them" (*Il.* 23.486–498). Achilles counsels patience, telling them that in time they will be able to see the first- and second-place horses. Achilles is able to persuade Aias and Idomeneus to be patient by getting them to imagine themselves as another warrior watching such a quarrel. "If another acted so," suggests Achilles, "you yourselves would be angry" (*Il.* 23.494). This ability to place oneself in another's position stands in dramatic contrast not only to Agamemnon's inability to place himself in the position of the other warriors—a point made by Achilles (*Il.* 1.149–151) and Nestor (*Il.* 1.272–274)—but to Achilles' earlier refusal to "take pity on all the other Achaians" (*Il.* 9.301–302). This capacity, Kantian in its modern expression, serves as a necessary aspect of Achilles' leadership as he responds later to a dispute with Antilochos. Ultimately, this empathetic understanding serves as a prelude for the reconciliation of Achilles and Priam in the final book.<sup>41</sup>

Achilles' skills at mediation are extended even further with the completion of the race—an expanded role for Achilles that is often overlooked because his initial statements of non-involvement are seen as conclusive.<sup>42</sup> The contest illustrates the contingency and unpredictability of human action, from Diomedes losing his whip

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, *Il.* 24.517–518; 24.542–546.

<sup>42</sup> Stanley (1993: 230), for example, sees Achilles' role as embodying the internalization of value, neglecting in turn his role in resolving real conflicts that emerge. King (1987: 37–38) sees only the "isolated figure" of Achilles in the funeral games. And Schein (1984: 156) describes Achilles' "mood" as "a controlled, detached sociability."

and then having it restored, to Eumelos' chariot being destroyed and Antilochos driving recklessly. Because of this, distributing the prizes poses a special problem for Achilles since "the best man (ὁ ἄριστος)" in Achilles' estimation, Eumelos, finished last (*Il.* 23.536). To rectify this seeming imbalance between the honor bestowed by the community and the excellence of the man, Achilles proposes giving Eumelos second prize. In making this offer to Eumelos, Achilles appears to reject as well his own earlier claims to self-sufficiency; namely, that he does not need the honor or the gifts of others. For Achilles now, it is not enough that Eumelos be the best man; he must be honored sufficiently by the community.

This poses a dilemma for Achilles, since in upholding the centrality of community recognition of one's excellence he risks a replay of the agonistic notion of honor that divided him and Agamemnon in Book 1. And, indeed, though there is initially general approval of Achilles' gesture, Antilochos, who finished second, quickly challenges the decision. Echoing Achilles' appeal to Agamemnon in Book 1, "And now my prize you threaten in person to strip (ὕπαιρσεςσθαι) from me," Antilochos asks, "You mean to take (ὕπαιρσεςσθαι) my prize away from me . . ." (*Il.* 1.161; 23.544). Though it may be that Eumelos "himself is great," what counts, according to Antilochos, is the outcome of the race (*Il.* 23.543–547). And more importantly, what counts is that he receives *the* prize apportioned for second place. Antilochos does state that another prize may be given to Eumelos from Achilles' own shelter, a prize that may even be greater than the second prize. But important in this statement is an implicit distinction Antilochos draws between communalized and still personal property. Of his own property, Achilles may dispose as he wishes. But once that property is offered for public competition, be it in the games or in war, it becomes subject to public claims and rules, whether implicit or explicit, that may conflict with the desires of the distributor. One such rule, as stated earlier by Achilles, is that "it is unbecoming" for a king, when acting in the name of the people, to "call back things once given" (*Il.* 1.126). So adamant is Achilles about this principle that when it is violated, he almost, but for the intervention of Athene, strikes Agamemnon. Similarly, Antilochos vows to fight whoever might take the mare.

Achilles' response to Antilochos stands in dramatic contrast to Agamemnon's earlier statements about his prerogatives as leader. Agamemnon is never able to separate his private desires from the norms of public distribution, responding to Achilles that the Achaians must either give him a "new prize chosen according to my desire" or "if they will not give me one I myself shall take her, your own prize, or that of Aias, or that of Odysseus" (*Il.* 1.135–138). Achilles, on the other hand, does not respond with "might" but recognizes Antilochos' public claim to the property and awards a separate and private gift to Eumelos "that will mean much to him" (*Il.* 23.262).

As often happens in politics, though, solutions to conflict turn out to be temporary. Antilochos, previously the victim, now becomes the accused as Menelaos protests Antilochos' reckless horsemanship. Menelaos appeals to the

leaders to judge (δικάσσετε) between the two of them to arrive at justice (θέμις) (*Il.* 23.574, 581). Just as quickly, Menelaos proposes that Antilochos swear an oath to Zeus that he did not cheat. Antilochos gives in, offers Menelaos the mare he had won and anything else Menelaos may want from Antilochos' home. Menelaos, won over by the supplication, gives the mare back to Antilochos.

In interpreting this episode, Finley (1979: 80–81, 110) has argued that this dispute between Menelaos and Antilochos “was a purely private matter” between two households in which the aggrieved party could choose the suitable remedy. But there is an important difference in the resolution of this dispute: all of these actions are carried out in a public forum, even if they contain remnants of older forms of private resolution. Thus, Menelaos appeals to both the leaders (ἡγήτορες) of the Argives and their counsels (μένδοντες) to judge impartially between the two. Achilles, if we are to follow earlier illustrations of such deliberations, would likely have acted as an arbiter, deciding whose judgment was the straightest.<sup>43</sup> Menelaos opts, instead, for Antilochos to swear an oath to Zeus, still in front of the assembly, that he had used no trickery in the race.

What gets replayed here is how private disputes, whether the personal antagonism that drives the conflict between Agamemnon and Achilles or this particular quarrel, invariably spill over into the public realm as they involve issues of distribution. And their resolution, Homer seems to suggest in this scene, rests ultimately on an ability of individuals to give up something: whether it is to relinquish their vendetta and be ruled by the judgment of another party, as is first proposed, or to recognize the inevitability of mistakes in judgment and, thereby, give up some of one's anger. It is this latter course that the dispute ultimately takes as Antilochos responds to Menelaos that his youthful “mind is the more active but his judgment is lightweight” (*Il.* 23.590). Menelaos, in turn, indicates that he “will be ruled by” this “supplication” and will even give to Antilochos “the mare, though she is mine, so that these men too may be witnesses that the heart is never arrogant (ὑπερφίαλος) nor stubborn (ἀπηνής) within me” (*Il.* 23.609–611).

Both the capacity for forgiveness and the possibility of public mediation are present here. The two are closely connected because both rest on the ability of individuals to recognize their dependence on others. The capacity for forgiveness is essential for political action, for as Hannah Arendt (1959: 213) suggests, “Without being forgiven, released from the consequences of what we have done, our capacity to act would, as it were, be confined to one single deed from which we would never recover. . . .” Unable to forgive Agamemnon, Achilles must remove himself from action. And unable to forgive himself for the death of Patroklos, Achilles reacts in a violent and boundless frenzy that ends only in a moment of forgiveness. Public mediation, too, rests on our recognition of the public consequences of our deeds, a recognition initially absent in and almost destructive of the Achaian community.

<sup>43</sup> See *Il.* 18.501–508 and Van Wees 1992: 34.

Achilles completes the distribution of the prizes by awarding Nestor, who does not compete, the unclaimed fifth prize. Throughout the *Iliad*, Nestor is the central critic of claims to self-sufficiency, suggesting instead that "the gods give to mortals not everything at the same time" (*Il.* 4.320). This is an important action of Achilles in that he recognizes, and pays honor to, the centrality of diverse contributions to the survival of the community. Achilles' act is a recognition not only that no mortal is complete but that Nestor, even as he is no longer the best horseman, is still to be honored by the community for his counsel.<sup>44</sup>

Although Achilles pays honor to Nestor and seems to have taken Nestor's advice of the necessity to listen to counsel, the leadership required by Achilles goes beyond that articulated by Nestor. Importantly, Nestor understands the basis of leadership in a more traditional way, as one of "might." In addressing the argument between Agamemnon and Achilles, Nestor articulates clearly this traditional basis of kingship: "Nor, son of Peleus, think to match your strength with the king, since never equal with the rest is the portion of honour of the sceptred king to whom Zeus gives magnificence" (*Il.* 1.277–279). Nestor's role throughout the *Iliad* is that of an elder whose advice invariably involves the voice of experience or an appeal to an earlier age.<sup>45</sup> This role is played out in the funeral games, as well, as Nestor advises Antilochos about how he can compensate for his slower horse with greater skills (*Il.* 23.306–348). This is important in understanding the vantage point Nestor occupies in Achaian society. His age brings him deference and his arguments are grounded in a time that predates the memory of others. The result is that Nestor's role as an advisor is rarely even indirectly challenged, though it may be, as in the first book, outright ignored.

Achilles, in the role that he assumes in the funeral games, occupies a very different vantage point. In resolving the conflicts, Achilles does not appeal to some distant past. In fact, tradition seems strangely inapplicable as the warrior whom Achilles thought to be the best chariot racer (on the basis of past experience), turns out not to win. The solution Achilles proposes must rest, instead, on what works in this circumstance. Furthermore, whereas Nestor is always able to pronounce a final judgment on a particular situation, we see in the situation with Achilles a much more complex, interdependent politics in which decisions give rise to new problems. Achilles' initial decision as to the distribution of the prizes is immediately challenged, leaving him to cast about for a new solution. We have, it seems, a new politics born of and immersed in contending (and not easily resolvable) interests. Thus, Achilles finds himself pulled into this political role only as conflict arises, and must make judgments that affect others who, in turn, become parties in the conflict.

<sup>44</sup> Stanley (1993: 225–226) suggests that this valedictory reward, the final time we see Nestor, is suggestive of "a Nestor of many words but few deeds, whose contribution to the present remains in doubt." This seems contrary to the tone of the funeral games and to the respect paid to Nestor throughout the *Iliad*. Achilles can move beyond Nestor without necessarily removing him.

<sup>45</sup> See *Il.* 1.259–273, 7.124–160, 11.669–802.

This politics of mediation is important in the more socially and economically complex environment of which Homer was a part. In the opening of the epic, neither Agamemnon as “lord (ἄναξ) of men” nor the godlike (δῖος) Achilles possesses a nature suitable for the transition to a leadership in a more interdependent political environment. The intimidation of Agamemnon could be tolerated only by people who neither spoke nor acted, individuals who would not be contributors to the developing cities that rested on greater specialization, redistribution, and coordination than earlier kinship organizations. So, too, Achilles’ expectations of leadership in the beginning are too rigid, holding the community to a higher standard than is humanly possible. This makes him a great hero, but not necessarily an effective leader. Achilles isolates himself, thinking that the community can offer him no benefits that he cannot provide for himself. He is wrong, and for that both he and the Achaians suffer. As Achilles emerges from his self-imposed isolation, he begins to move from heroic leadership premised on self-sufficiency to a political leadership in which excellence is measured by the recognition and successful mediation of difference. By the end of the funeral games, we are told that when Achilles spoke, the warriors “listened close to him and obeyed (ἦδὲ πῖθοντο) him” (*Il.* 23.738).<sup>46</sup>

At first glance, it might appear difficult to reconcile Achilles’ emergence from isolation in Book 23 with his separation from the other warriors in the opening of Book 24. If the *Iliad* were only an epic about political mediation, then the concluding book might surprise us. But the *Iliad*, from its beginning when the anger of Achilles is connected to the devastation of the Achaians, explores both the communal and individual implications of human action. In the final two books we see Achilles address the implications of his actions on both levels. In Book 23, Achilles does not simply stand by as the community heals itself; rather, he becomes involved in advancing a notion of mediation that had been absent in the opening of the *Iliad*. Book 23, thus, is not just about reconciliation; it points to the causes and means of resolving such clashes in the future.

Resolution at one level, the community, does not bring reconciliation at a second level, namely, Achilles’ personal anguish over the loss of Patroklos. Book 24 is about the almost unendurable grief that accompanies the death of a loved one, a loss magnified by Achilles’ own responsibility. This is not to say, however, that there is no connection between these two books. As I suggested earlier, the empathetic understanding displayed by Achilles in mediating the conflict in the chariot races lays the groundwork for the poignant meeting with Priam. This ability to empathize derives in part from a recognition of interdependence, a recognition that Achilles now extends to his enemy. Even as their fates have collided, Achilles identifies a mutuality in their mortal suffering. It is with this recognition of interdependence that Achilles can return Hektor’s corpse and agree

<sup>46</sup> As further confirmation of this leadership status on the part of Achilles, Martin (1989: 59–60) notes that in the funeral games, Achilles repeatedly issues *muthos* commands to all the Achaians.

to an oath not to attack Troy during the funeral. As Homer closes his epic, he returns us to the community. Achilles now eats, sleeps, and lies with Briseis, everyday rituals of a healthy community that we might not notice but for Achilles' earlier refusal to participate in these same actions. The final scene of the *Iliad* ends not with the heroic action of an individual but with the Trojans brought together in communal remembrance of their dead. We move in this epic from an Achilles whom, as Agamemnon confidently proclaims, no one will obey, to an Achilles at the end who is listened to and obeyed. As Achilles assumes the mantle of leadership, however reluctantly, he reminds us that humans, unlike gods, are by necessity political. Beneath the institutions and formal procedures that define our modern state lie our political acts—born of interdependence, nurtured by difference, and necessitated by our mortality.

DEPARTMENT OF GOVERNMENT  
FRANKLIN AND MARSHALL COLLEGE  
BOX 3003  
LANCASTER, PA 17604  
U.S.A.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adkins, A. 1960. *Merit and Responsibility: A Study in Greek Values*. Oxford.
- Arendt, H. 1959. *The Human Condition*. Garden City.
- Austin, M. M. and P. Vidal-Naquet. 1977. *Economic and Social History of Ancient Greece: An Introduction*. Berkeley.
- Austin, N. 1975. *Archery at the Dark of the Moon: Poetic Problems in the Odyssey*. Berkeley.
- Burkert, W. 1985. *Greek Religion*. Tr. John Raffan. Oxford.
- Clay, J. S. 1983. *The Wrath of Athena: Gods and Men in the Odyssey*. Princeton.
- Dodds, E. R. 1951. *The Greeks and the Irrational*. Berkeley.
- Donlan, W. 1973. "The Tradition of Anti-Aristocratic Thought in Early Greek Poetry," *Historia* 22: 145–154.
- 1979. "The Structure of Authority in the *Iliad*," *Arethusa* 12: 51–70.
- 1980. *The Aristocratic Ideal in Ancient Greece*. Lawrence, Kansas.
- 1989a. "Homeric τέμενος and the Land Economy of the Dark Age," *Museum Helveticum* 46: 129–145.
- 1989b. "The Pre-State Community in Greece," *Symbolae Osloenses* 64: 5–29.
- 1989c. "The Unequal Exchange Between Glaucus and Diomedes in Light of the Homeric Gift-Economy," *Phoenix* 43: 1–15.
- 1993. "Duelling with Gifts in the *Iliad*: As the Audience Saw It," *Colby Quarterly* 24: 155–172.
- Donlan, W. and Carol G. Thomas. 1993. "The Village Community of Ancient Greece: Neolithic, Bronze, and Dark Ages," *Studi Micenei ed Egeo-Anatolici* 31: 61–71.
- Edwards, A. T. 1993. "Homer's Ethical Geography: Country and City in the *Odyssey*," *TAPA* 123: 27–78.
- Edwards, M. W. 1987. *Homer: Poet of the Iliad*. Baltimore.

- Ehrenberg, V. 1967. *From Solon to Socrates: Greek History and Civilization during the 6th and 5th Centuries B.C.* London.
- Finley, M. I. 1979. *The World of Odysseus*. Rev. ed. New York. Orig. publ. New York 1954.
- 1981. *Early Greece: The Bronze and Archaic Ages*. London.
- Forrest, W. G. 1966. *The Emergence of Greek Democracy, 800–400 B.C.* New York.
- Griffin, J. 1980. *Homer on Life and Death*. Oxford.
- Havelock, E. A. 1963. *Preface to Plato*. Cambridge.
- Jaeger, W. 1967. *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture* 1. Tr. G. Highet. New York.
- King, K. C. 1987. *Achilles: Paradigms of the War Hero From Homer through the Middle Ages*. Berkeley.
- Kirk, G. S. 1962. *The Songs of Homer*. Cambridge.
- Kullmann, W. 1985. "Gods and Men in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*," *HSCP* 89: 1–23.
- Lattimore, R. tr. 1951. *Homer: The Iliad*. Chicago.
- Martin, R. P. 1989. *The Language of Heroes: Speech and Performance in the Iliad*. Ithaca.
- Murray, O. 1980. *Early Greece*. Stanford.
- 1990. "Cities of Reason," in O. Murray and S. Price (eds.), *The Greek City: From Homer to Alexander*. Oxford. 1–25.
- Nagy, G. 1979. *The Best of the Achaeans: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry*. Baltimore.
- 1990. *Greek Mythology and Poetics*. Ithaca.
- Nilsson, M. P. 1968. *Homer and Mycenae*. New York.
- Page, D. 1959. *History and the Homeric Iliad*. Berkeley.
- Parry, A. 1956. "The Language of Achilles," *TAPA* 87: 1–7.
- ed. 1987. *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry*. New York.
- Posner, R. A. 1979. "The Homeric Version of the Minimal State," *Ethics* 90: 27–46.
- Pozzi, D. C. and J. M. Wickersham (eds.). 1991. *Myth and the Polis*. Ithaca.
- Redfield, J. 1994. *Nature and Culture in the Iliad: The Tragedy of Hektor*. Expanded ed. Durham, N.C. Orig. publ. Chicago 1975.
- Rose, P. 1988. "Thersites and the Plural Voices of Homer," *Arethusa* 21: 4–25.
- 1992. *Sons of the Gods, Children of Earth: Ideology and Literary Form in Ancient Greece*. Ithaca.
- Runciman, W. G. 1982. "Origins of States: The Case of Archaic Greece," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 24: 351–377.
- Sale, W. M. 1994. "The Government of Troy: Politics in the *Iliad*," *GRBS* 35: 5–102.
- Saxonhouse, A. W. 1988. "Thymos, Justice, and Moderation of Anger in the Story of Achilles," in C. H. Zuckert (ed.), *Understanding the Political Spirit: Philosophical Investigations from Socrates to Nietzsche*. New Haven. 30–47.
- Schein, S. 1984. *The Mortal Hero*. Berkeley.
- Scully, S. 1990. *Homer and the Sacred City*. Ithaca.
- Seaford, R. 1994. *Reciprocity and Ritual: Homer and Tragedy in the Developing City-State*. Oxford.
- Sealey, R. 1976. *A History of the Greek City States ca. 700–338 B.C.* Berkeley.
- Snodgrass, A. M. 1971. *The Dark Ages of Greece*. Edinburgh.
- 1974. "An Historical Homeric Society?," *JHS* 94: 114–125.
- 1980. *Archaic Greece*. Berkeley.

- 1982. "Central Greece and Thessaly," in *The Cambridge Ancient History*<sup>2</sup> 3.1. Cambridge.
- Stanley, K. 1993. *The Shield of Homer: Narrative Structure in the Iliad*. Princeton.
- Starr, C. G. 1977. *The Economic and Social Growth of Early Greece 800–500 B.C.* New York.
- Turner, V. 1981. "Social Dramas and Stories about Them," in W. J. T. Mitchell (ed.), *On Narrative*. Chicago.
- Van Wees, H. 1992. *Status Warriors: War, Violence and Society in Homer and History*. Amsterdam.
- Whitman, C. 1958. *Homer and the Heroic Tradition*. Cambridge.