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Stephen Scully
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“Hephaistos’ Shield and Achilles’ Delight:
A Study of *Iliad* XVIII and XIX”

When planning to make Achilles’ armor, Hephaistos predicts that mortals will “marvel” at its creation (18.466-67). That we are still talking about this creation today, in a far away continent and distant age, proves the prediction true. Since antiquity, Homer’s description of Hephaistos’ shield – roughly two hundreds at the end of Book XVIII – has delighted and excited audiences, both for the various scenes on the Shield and for our puzzlement about how they might relate to the poem of which this Shield is a part. Some scholars think of Homer’s description of the Shield as an extended simile, a narrative aside, there for the audience, but not for the characters in the poem.

Particular puzzlement centers on Achilles: what relation, if any, is there between Hephaistos’ sculpted scenes and the hero who bears it? Often, the relation is thought to be ironic. Scholars argue that there is a reason why Homer describes the scenes *as* the divine craftsman is making them, and *not* when Achilles receives the Shield. This is so, the argument goes, because Achilles in his rage to kill Hector could not possibly comprehend Hephaistos’ life-confirming visions of human beings going about the activities of life from one season to the next. Nor could Achilles recognize the joy in life depicted on so many of those vignettes. *Delight* is a word commonly found in the descriptions of these scenes as men plant wheat or bring in the harvest, or young couples get married, or a joyous community watches young women and young men dancing in rows (18.603), and maidens and young men “think carefree thoughts” as they gather the grapes (18.567). What would moments of life’s continuities and pleasures mean to a hero who has just welcomed his imminent death?

People recognize, of course, that human suffering also finds its way onto the Shield: there is a city at war with the horrifying figures of Hate, Confusion, and Death at the center of the slaughter. Poor herders are ambushed while guarding the cattle. Two hungry lions rip apart the innards of a hapless bull. These scenes notwithstanding, one usually reads that the Shield “represents the good life” (this from Oliver Taplin), seasonal renewal and communal harmonies. All this makes it seem as if the ekphrasis stands apart from the story of war which contains it. And, in particular, it stands in contrast to Achilles, especially at this point in the story after Patroklos’ death when he has given up any desire to live and has become a killing machine, desirous to mow down all who stand between him and his intent to slaughter Hektor. So how can the shield’s emblem of life’s continuity relate to its bearer, who desires to bring on the fall of Troy in his killing of Hektor? So, the argument, Homer describes the ekphrasis *as* Hephaistos crafts it, *not* as Achilles’ receives the arms.

The way Vergil imitates this scene in his *Aeneid* supports this view. For those of you who have already read the *Aeneid*, you know that he does *not* copy Homer since he describes Vulcan's shield *as* Aeneas sees it, not as Vulcan is working at his forge. But because in the *Aeneid* Vulcan depicts scenes from Rome's future history, not generic scenes marking the rhythm of human life and the seasons, Aeneas famously *cannot* read Vulcan's depictions. So, from this perspective, even when Vergil is deviating from Homer, he is imitating him: neither the Roman nor the Greek hero is able to read the scenes of the divinely crafted images that they carry into battle.

A recent book on *The Epic City* (Annette Giesecke, 2007) picks up this view, characterizing Achilles' shield as an emblem of "compassion, ... [proclaiming] the senselessness of war and of the inevitability of death that unites all humanity." Achilles, that book argues, carries the Shield "uncomprehendingly" into battle and can only take in the Shield's view of life at the end of the poem when he weeps with Priam and can see "the individualistic heroic code of old...[as] irrelevant and outdated" (30-1).

The ekphrasis seems like a simile in part because the characters in it are nameless and the scenes are generic, but it also seems simile-like because its relation to Achilles seems so off, as if it were a commentary about him and the action rather than an object which befits his nature. It comes at a perfect moment in the narrative, a momentary calm in the story just before the storm clouds of war gather force. It helps, thus, to put into high relief the brutality of war and all that will be lost with the fall of Troy.

In keeping with this view, a slew of words and activities appear on the Shield that rarely find their way into the main narrative of the poem. Especially prominent is budding romance and marriage. In the *Iliad* proper, women are either war booty or wives, but on the Shield time and again we hear of *parthenoi*, maidens before they marry, or we see a community coming out for a marriage. In the harsh world of war, Homer uses the language of intimacy to refer to men "mingling in deadly war" rather than to the "mingling" of husband and wife in love and he uses the word *oapistus*, which literally means "wife-talk," more frequently to describe men urging each other on in battle than to refer to pillow talk in the bedroom. Homer's language suggests that the true intimacies of the poem are found in warfare. Hephaistos' language, if we can use that term for the intimacies implied in his sculpture, by contrast, refers to the pleasures of young men and women on the verge of their erotic lives. In the Iliadic world of war, dance refers to men turning their shields to the left and then to the right, but on the Shield time and again young men are dancing with maidens. On the Shield, the word *stikhes* refers to the lines that these dancers make (18.602) but in the *Iliad* proper it refers to the battle "lines" in war. Lattimore, unfortunately, lets his readers down by translating it as "ranks" when describing men at war but as "rows" when describing men and women at the dances. The Shield redefines familiar words in a new setting.¹

¹ The word *parthenos* enters the poem proper only once – and that in Book XXII – when Hektor, all alone outside the walls of Troy, awaits Achilles and dreams back to a time when a young woman and a young man coo sweet nothings to each other. The reminiscence is poignant, Hektor repeating the word twice: there is no way to talk gently to Achilles "the way a maiden and a young man, / a maiden and a young man dally in love-talk with each other" (22.127-28).

Such is one way to read the Shield in relation to the poem – as introducing an alternate reality just at the consequences of war are intensifying. The contrary view is harder to sustain, that, far from being an ironic commentary on Achilles, the Shield gives us a glimpse of the world as Achilles sees it, that Achilles is at one with the god's gift to him. As unlikely as this view may seem, signs in the *Iliad* suggest that this is the way characters in the poem read it.

That said, it is certainly possible that we can embrace multiple ways of reading the Shield ekphrasis, that the audience of the poem might see it in one way and characters in it see another way.

Before we look at these questions further, bear with me as we consider what else in Homer inspires awe and wonder (*thauma idesthai*), what Hephaistos says it will do for all who see it. It's a small group, in the *Iliad* there are only five, including the shield. None of them are from nature; it's craftsmanship in Homer that is awesome, worthy of wonder, artifacts. What kinds of artifacts? And what do the viewers see when they feel this wonder? Two of the other four are pieces of armor, like Achilles' shield: one is the armor which the Trojan ally Rhesus wears: it's made of pure gold and fit for a god to wear (10.439-41). The other is – curiously enough - Achilles' former armor, what Hektor has ripped from Patroklos' corpse and is now wearing. This like Achilles' new armor is divine, but less so as it was a wedding present, given to Achilles' mortal father, Peleus, when he married the divine Thetis (18.83-5). [Achilles' old armor represents a marriage between a mortal and an immortal. With Patroklos' death, Achilles loses that marriage of mortal and immortal and gains an armor that is all Olympian, a point we'll need to consider again later in the paper.] The two other awesome objects in the *Iliad* are exclusively divine: one are bronze rims of Hera's chariot wheels, dazzling in the light and marvelous to see (5.725), and the other, the self-moving golden statues which Hephaistos is making for his house (18.377). It isn't the Grand Canyon but Louis Kahn's Kimball Art Museum or Tadao Anō's Modern Art Museum in Fort Worth or the Chrysler Building in NYC that Homeric audiences looked upon in wonderment. And in all these examples, craftsmanship exceeds human skill.

About these artifacts, four points stand out for me: 1) Sometimes, the *craftsmanship itself* inspires awe and marvel. Homer poses for a moment while he is describing Hephaistos at work on the shield and comments on the god's skill. Adapting Lattimore's translation, I translate as follows (548-49): "Though it was made from gold, the earth seemed dark and ploughed. Such was the surpassing wonder of the shield's forging." The observation could easily stand for any point in the shield's making.

2) There is magic in Hephaistos' figures - well beyond any thing suggested in the Jackson drawing before you: Hephaistos makes "living art." His figures of metal sing

Better, he reasons, is to bring on the fight and see which one of us Zeus will favor in our duel. Likewise, unlike Hephaistos, Homer has little occasion to talk of marriage, *gamos*, except when he thinks of a young warrior, recently married, who has just been killed on the battlefield and left his bride a widow.

and dance, bleed and moan; his figures move and speak. Thetis first saw this wonder when she arrived at Hephaistos' house. Like the most sophisticated robots of our own times, Hephaistos can make robots that speak and even have "knowledge of their chores," but to the envy of our greatest modern technicians his robots also have "understanding in their hearts." Even by our own standards today, the god's craft exceeds any known to man. So, on the Shield, figures cast in metal fight "just like living men" (18.539). This art is wondrous filled with motion and sound: "dancers beat out the rhythm all together with their feet, / as they sing and shout, skipping along" (571-72); a boy "with a delicate voice" sings a melody (571); bulls leave their stalls and march out to their pasture, mooing as they go, when they are far from home two hungry lions attack the herd and pull down a bull, who fills the air with a death bellow, as men shout at their dogs and the dogs bark in helpless fear and panic (579-86).

3) In making figures of metal "like living men", Hephaistos is like Homer who out of words creates characters who seem to live and breathe, but Homer never presents himself as a craftsman or artist with know-how. Homeric poetry is a gift, not a craft. Epic can cast a spell (*kêlêthmos*) over its audience (11.333-5, 13.1-2; cf. 8.234), but artifice has a different hold over its audience, and it is wonder (*thauma*). How often Homer draws our attention to the Shield as artifice. Every vignette begins "and on it, he made..." or "on it, he was designing;" in almost every scene he alludes to the metals themselves – the tin and gold used to make the bulls, the gold that fashions the vineyard, the silver for the vine poles, and something black to suggest the grapes. Homer is insistent that we see the Shield as a likeness, not as reality itself.²

4) The fourth point comes from the *Odyssey* when the city of Scheria is described as a thing of wonder. Unlike most of the other objects of marvel, but like the Shield, this one is a complex entity, with multiple parts (and thus may give us a glimpse of how Homer's characters read Hephaistos' creation). Over three lines, the city is described as a thing of wonder when Odysseus' first sees it. It goes like this: "he marveled at the two harbors / and the well-balanced ships, and at the gathering places of men, / and at the mighty walls, lofty, fitted with palisades, a marvel to behold" (*Od.* 7.43-5). [Unlike the Shield, this wonder is of something real not a likeness, but it is a picture of many parts.] Here the wonder is *not* primarily on craftsmanship (though the battlements are admired in particular), but on the synoptic vision of the city. With the economy of a Giotto, Homer paints the portrait of the city with three strokes: *the harbor and ships* giving those in the city access to the outside world, *the gatherings of man within the walls* where the essential activities of state take place, and *the city wall*, the essential divide which separates the human order within from the larger, outside world. This is picture of the whole, with the three parts being the three brushstrokes that define that whole.³

² In the *Odyssey*, the wondrous brooch which Penelope gave to Odysseus is of human origin. If not as fantastic as Hephaistos' work, it also makes metal seem "to live." In gold, a dog holds in its forepaws a spotted doe, "convulsing in its death's throes" (*aspaianta*). "All marveled how the dog of gold throttled the golden doe, as it convulsed and tried to break free" (19.226-31). The human and divine pieces are clearly of a continuum, and no doubt more wondrous than anything Homer's audience could buy or commission.

³ The synoptic view of Scheria sets it apart from the outer world, but the many scenes on the Shield very much place humankind in a kind of harmony with the natural world. Its centerpieces are a city at peace and another at war, but in

Back to our original questions. How does Hephaistos' likeness of the human world relate to the war poem and to Achilles? If the ekphrasis is like a simile in some respects,⁴ in others it is not, as characters do, if rarely, respond to the Shield. Surprisingly most mortals take little comfort in Hephaistos' work.

The first to respond are the Myrmidons, Achilles companions, when Thetis brings the arms down from Olympus. Without explanation, Homer says the following:

Placing the arms before / Achilles, the elaborately wrought crafted works clashed loudly. / Fear seized all the Myrmidons; not one of them dared / to look at them straight on, but they shrank back in terror.

Again without explanation, Achilles responds in a very different way (19.15-19):

But Achilles / the more he looked, the more the anger filled him. And his eyes, / like sun-glare, glittered terribly under his eyelids. / He was *delighted* holding in his hands the shining gifts of the god. / Then *when he was delighted* in his midriff, *looking at the elaborately wrought works*, / straightway he addressed his mother.

Why these contrary emotions? Part of Homer's brilliance is that he does not explain, just states, leaving it for us to wonder. I don't imagine that it is difficult to understand Achilles' swelling anger. He wants revenge and the Shield gives him the means for that, to re-enter battle and slay Hektor. But why the Myrmidons' fright and Achilles' delight? What prevents the Myrmidons from looking at the arms while Achilles studies them

ever expanding circles moving away from the city – first in plough lands, then to grape groves further from the cities, and further out to pastureland for cows and sheep – nature's bounty is plentiful. It is not an idealized portrait of nature's fecundity as we see in Homer's description of Alcinoo's garden at Scheria or in Hesiod's picture of the just city in the *Works and Days*, but even considering the lions' devouring of a bull, no where else in Homer are humans beings in greater harmony with nature than the scenes we see on the Shield. Such harmony also stands in sharp contrast to what Homer says about life at Troy. After nine years of war, no one plows the fields in front of the city. Rather than wheat, the plains produce war and death. In the *Iliad*, Troy's walls mark a sharp line of demarcation between a city bursting with women and children, and grim death outside. When fleeing from Achilles in Book XXII, Hektor runs past washbasins of cold and hot running water where long ago the women of the city went to do their laundry, but now Hektor runs by it fleeing for his life. When Andromache stands on the city wall in Book VI, her nurse holding Astyanax in her arms, we see the importance of the city wall, at once the sturdy membrane which keeps those within secure and safe, and at the same time the fragile line of defense which, if breached, brings to a crashing end all of civilization within the walls' embrace. Nothing on Hephaistos' Shield suggests such fragility of life, or so it would seem.

⁴ In some ways, Hephaistos' scenes are closest to Homeric similes – each depict characters without names or faces, but they are unlike Homer's similes in one important way: similes in Homer depict nature in her violence, as in fierce storms making havoc of human life or savage animals ravaging livestock. Hardly any similes show the human community in peaceful settings. And Hephaistos' scenes are unlike Homeric similes in another way, too. It is easy for a reader to see the link between the simile and the story. The similes are solid vignettes and yet they are also transparent, linked to the story in obvious ways so that we can with little difficulty see *through* the simile to the storyline. But this isn't the case with the sequence of scenes on the shield. How do we get back from them to the poem? Because they are not nearly as transparent as similes and because each of the vignettes is much longer than the longest of similes, it is tempting to think of Homer's accounts of Hephaistos' scenes as lyric poems which have been inserted into the epic – each one, self-contained, beautifully crafted scene, a stand-alone image.

intently? Some say the armor's gleam is too much for them (though Homer hasn't mentioned its gleam, only the noise when the armor strikes the ground). But why should the gleam be too much for the Myrmidons when Achilles can examine the arms at length? Commentators are equally at an impasse about Achilles' pleasure. We often hear that it derives from the god's craftsmanship. Craftsmanship, as we have seen, *can* cause delight, and Achilles does seem to be thinking of craftsmanship when talking to his mother: "this is work of the gods. No mortal could have made these arms." But what would prevent the Myrmidons from similarly taking delight in Hephaistos' craftsmanship? And it is reasonable to think that at this point in the story Achilles is *only* thinking about craftsmanship? Achilles' anger itself suggests otherwise.

Shared language describing Achilles and the Shield suggests an affinity between him and the god's creation. The same word which describes the glare coming from Achilles' eyes as he looks at the arms later describes the glare coming from the shield itself, making it seem as if a likeness of spirit, we might say, between the hero's inner fire and the shield's outer glare. We see that oneness again when the same verb – *duo*, enter into – describes Achilles' grief for Patroklos (not pleasure this time) and his putting on his new clothing: "His eyes / *glowed* as if they were the radiance of fire. Unendurable grief *entered into* (*dun'*) his heart. Raging at the Trojans / he *entered into* (*dusetō*) (i.e. put on) the gifts of the god which Hephaistos had made for him with much toil" (19.365-68). For Achilles, pleasure, grief, rage, the fire within and gleaming off the arms, are all bound together in a strange and unparalleled set of emotions.

The Myrmidons' fear at the Shield re-appears in the poem at one other point in the narrative. This when Hektor is standing alone outside the Schain Gates, awaiting to face Achilles in single combat. He has just spoken to this inner spirit, and re-affirmed his resolve to hold his ground and "see to which one the Olympian will grant glory," to him or Achilles. Yet at the sight of Achilles shaking his father's ash spear, Achilles' "bronze" gleaming like the rays of a blazing fire or the rising sun (22.131-35), Hektor's resolve evaporates and he takes flight (22.134-37). The passage reads: "The bronze that closed about [Achilles] was blazing like / the rays of burning fire or of the sun rising. / Fear seized Hektor, when he perceived. No longer did he dare / stand his ground there but left the gates behind and fled, frightened." Hektor is a brave soul; something extraordinary must have hit him to take fright and flee. The significance of this, not only for himself but for Troy, is implied when he runs around the city three times, sealing the fate of the city with his own. Hektor's flight and the Myrmidons' fright are the two passages in the *Iliad* where the sight of the arms instills terror. Three books, and over 1500 lines of hexameters separate the two passages. Some might suggest that formulaic parallels cast over such a wide canvas should be ignored as coincidence, but I believe that it is within the capacity of Homeric artistry for these parallel formulae, like an extended ring composition in the story of Achilles' return to battle, to bridge a broad narrative span, linking the moment when Hephaistos' arms are brought down from Olympus and the culminating duel of the poem. The Myrmidon's terror provides the clue for understanding Hektor's flight. Rather than see the shield as depicting a "world which [the Greeks and Trojans] have left behind and to which they hope to return," as one critic

sees it (Taplin, 205), I suggest that the shield depicts a vision which unnerves even the most resolute of human heroes. Achilles is the exception. But why?

The figure who carries Hephaistos' Shield has vastly changed from the hero we saw in Book I. Shortly after he receives Hephaistos' armor, he renounces his wrath against Agamemnon, going so far as to declare in the public Assembly that his anger against the king is over (19.67). More poignantly, his relation to time itself has changed. When Achilles speaks over the body of Patroklos, he says that he saw his dear friend as the one who would care for his son in future years (19.319-33). With him gone, Achilles' ties to both father and son are severed; now cut off the past and the future, he lives only in the present, an inhuman condition for any human being.

One expression of that inhumanity is his new-found savagery. Before the ninth year, all the stories we hear about Achilles attest to his chivalrous manner in war. He ransomed the vanquished; he gave up Andromache's father's body for Trojan burial which allowed it a remarkable "existence" under the care of tree nymphs. He ransomed Andromache's mother. But now, he is a death machine, merciless but curiously detached, killing everything in sight, aware that he himself is soon to be killed. He calls his victims, "Friends," aware that their deaths and his own are fast upon them (21.106-11). In a famous essay, Simone Weil has written with power how in this state, Achilles is dehumanized, his fury turning him into a thing.

But another expression of that inhumanity is Achilles' movement toward godhood, and especially toward Zeus. This change is particularly difficult for modern audiences to see, and it goes unmentioned in Weil's essay. But much suggests Achilles' movement toward godhead. When the Greeks pause before battle to fill their stomachs, Achilles refuses to eat. Anxious that Achilles might weaken on the battlefield, Zeus sends Athena down from Olympus to have her distill nectar and ambrosia into Achilles' chest (19.348, 354). [How different Odysseus in the *Odyssey* when he sits down at the table with Calypso and eats human food when she enjoys nectar and ambrosia. In that poem, Odysseus is eager to get home to Penelope and has shunned Calypso's offer of eternal youth and everlasting life. That refusal is marked at the dining table. Zeus, by contrast, reaches down to fill Achilles with the divine.] The gesture is complicated, on the one hand suggesting Achilles' mortal weakness, but on the other his form of nutriment causes Achilles to part company from his human comrades and to share in the realm of the divine. If his old armor symbolizes the marriage of the mortal and the divine in Peleus marriage to Thetis, the mortal side of that marriage is lost when Achilles loses Patroklos, his mortal trace horse, and his old armor and is now clothed exclusively in the divine. Hephaistos is aware of the paradox – a mortal clothed in the divine – when he says to Thetis that in spite of the armor's divine craftsmanship, it will not be able to shelter Achilles from death (18.464-67).

And then we hear that when Achilles tries on this new armor, "it became like wings and lifted up the shepherd of the host" (19.386). There is nothing like this in the rest of the *Iliad*. If Achilles is becoming more savage, he is also becoming more divine, moving

upward toward the Olympian. This state has little to do with justice, as mortals conventionally understand the term.

The observation lies at the heart of my understanding of the *Iliad* and brings me to several questions on your poster related to this question of justice. In one, the organizers of this talk asked me to discuss how the trial scene on the shield might relate to Achilles. If this question means: does this scene of justice on the Shield mean anything to Achilles at this time? My answer would be, I think not. At one time in the poem, it would have, but not at this point in the story. The scene on the Shield certainly contrasts with what we witness in Book I when Agamemnon out of personal interest irreparably fractured the social order, and from that perspective the trial scene resonates with the explosion of Book I and with what Ajax says about accepting blood money in Book IX, but at this point in Achilles' evolution - in his divine savagery, if we can use that phrase - Achilles is a very different character from the hero we were introduced to in Book I. There have been a number of stages in his journey from then to now. The most noteworthy is his rejection of the heroic code altogether in his answer to Odysseus in Book IX when he preferred a long life without fame to a short one with fame. Even then, justice was not a significant part of that choice, or rather since a good and a bad man shared the same fate of death, he chose, understandably, life. But even that was also only a point along the way. After the death of Patroklos, I do not believe that justice, at least of the kind, represented on the shield, matters greatly to Achilles. He has in large measure left those human coordinates behind.

Another question on the poster asks: what do the arms and the shield suggest about Zeus, the social order, the polis, and forms of prosperous social cohesion? Readers of the *Iliad* are continually asking whether the gods are just. In particular, they stress the justice in Troy's fall. Jasper Griffin, for example, writes: "It is vitally important for the *Iliad* that at bottom, beneath all the apparent indifference or amorality of heaven, the cause of the Achaeans is just" (1995, 80). But is this so? Again, only in a secondary way. While mortals discuss this matter, Zeus does not.

The Zeus of the *Iliad* is not greatly concerned with justice in the sense of crime and punishment. Rather, he is what I would call an existential god, for want of a better word. I don't mean this in the sense of French existentialism in figures like Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, but as a god who oversees the existence of things. Much more than Hera or Athena or Poseidon, Zeus is the primary god responsible for Troy's fall. No city in the *Iliad* can fall without Zeus' blessing, and Troy is no exception. Zeus more than any other god insists on its demise, and yet it is also true, as he says himself, "there is no city in all the world under the sun and starry heaven / that has ever been more honored in my heart than sacred Ilios" (4.45-6). There need be no contradiction in these two statements. Our understanding of Zeus' fondness for Troy and his insistence on its fall lies in the way Zeus frames his love for Troy, placing it in its cosmic frame under the sun and stars. From such a perspective, the sacred city, glorious and beloved as it is, is also mortal, "the city of mortal men" as Zeus says, and from that perspective it is part of the earth, not different in kind from the leaves of the tree. In this regard, Zeus' insistence on Troy's fall has little to do with Troy's history, a particular fate for a particular city. Rather, Troy

is an emblem of all cities. We see that when Hera says that Zeus can destroy any of her favorite cities, when so ever he chooses, whether it be Mycenae, Argos, or Sparta (*Il.* 4.51-3). It isn't that each city is guilty of a particular crime and receives a particular punishment. The making of the city is the greatest of all human achievements, much greater than anything a hero does – or does not do – on the battlefield. But for all of its greatness, its sacredness, it is also mortal. Here the title of the *Iliad* is important. It is the story of Ilios, the city, not only because it is there that the battle takes place, but also because it is Zeus' will that Troy fall. Achilles is an agent in that will. The *Iliad*, in my reading, is an uncompromising poem that at once acknowledges the *polis*, even in its nascent form, as the glory of human achievement, and, like all things of this earth, mortal and doomed. [In Homer, there is nothing of human achievements more sacred than the city. By far and away the most frequent epithet for Troy in Homer is "sacred Ilios" (*Ilios hire*); it cannot be explained away as a happy formula. We note it is the epithet Zeus uses for Troy when he casts it in the frame of the sun and stars.]

How then might we understand Zeus' insistence on a city's fall? Of all human creations, it alone enables mortals to live apart from nature. Of greatest significance it provides a space where humans can pass on succession from father to son to the son's son in peace; that is, it appears stable and secure amidst nature's mutability, the wall being crucial for separating human rhythms from nature's. Zeus' insistence on the city's fall is to pronounce that such freedom from nature's laws is illusory.

This is the same vision of humankind that we get on Hephaistos' Shield. Like Zeus' framing of Troy, so Hephaistos casts the city of peace and war, and all the other human scenes, within the frame of Earth, Heaven, and Sea, followed by the Sun, Moon, and stars (18.483-89). What Hephaistos sculpts is much more elemental than what Jackson draws on your handout. There he has Helios, the sun god, leading the chariot of the sun, its four horses most prominent – all very anthropomorphic mythology in Jackson's rendering. Not so in Homer. The Shield reference is much closer to something that one would find in Genesis I, where the divine is outside time and space. Hephaistos sculpts the Earth itself, and Heaven, and the Sea, as if they were objects within an even larger cosmos, something like what today we see of the Earth from a distant satellite, turning around and taking a picture of our planet from deep space, where our globe is a beautiful blue dot in the enveloping darkness. (This is the long view. Homer also switches his lens and shows us with great sensitivity how humans suffer and the pathos of death, including the death of the city.) Like Odysseus' view of Scheria, the Shield offers a synoptic view of man's place in the vast cosmos. It's this framing that I suggest causes most mortals to shake, and the Myrmidons and Hektor to flee, while Achilles in his divine savagery takes delight. The delight has less to do with individual scenes, whether it be a community debating over a murder or a king feeling joy when his people are happily bringing in the harvest, than with a vision of the whole. Homeric characters do not tend to read things piecemeal, this in contrast to Aeneas at Carthage, for example, who responds to the sculpture on Juno's temple at Carthage, frieze by frieze. But the Myrmidons and Hektor see the Shield in a glance, as a whole, the human a glorious part of the whole, but in the end only a part, and that framing proves too much for ordinary mortals to bear. Achilles' capacity to see this with delight identifies him, temporarily, with an Olympian vision

which sees the mortal – in its pain and glory, but mostly in its splendor – from a divine and, I would say, particularly from Zeus’ perspective. It is not a vision, I would say, for Achilles to savor when his spirit calms at the end of the poem.

Another of the poster’s questions: why are there no gods in the city of peace? I don’t know. Perhaps John Alvis or one of you in the audience may have a view about this. I will note that Athena and Ares are city-defenders in the city-at-war scene, but, as we know, Greek gods possess contrary powers: city-defenders are also city-destroyers, as we see of the Athena, cult goddess of Troy and also eager to see Troy fall. (cf. *hymn* 11.1-4).

So in a sense I have already answered the last question asked by the poster: does the cosmos on the shield look forward to or away from Plato’s *Republic*? An interesting question. You can tell from the way I read the Myrmidons’ (and Hektor’s) reaction to the shield that I would say the shield’s vision looks away from Plato. [As Plato repeatedly says, philosophy has been for a long time at war with poetry. That war is fiercest for Plato in his attack against the way Homer and Hesiod portray the gods. For the philosophers, gods can only be pure and just and good. Even above the gods are the forms which the gods at the rim of heaven can see straight on (*Phaedrus* 247c).] While Plato recognizes that it is not possible for humankind to create a perfect city here on earth, one can, if one is a true philosopher, colonize a city within oneself (592ab). Cosmos harmony in Homer, as I take it from the synthetic view of the Shield, is cold to human desires or capabilities. Man has a glorious but limited place in the divine cosmos. And this is a view that only Achilles, of all mortals, can gaze upon with pleasure.