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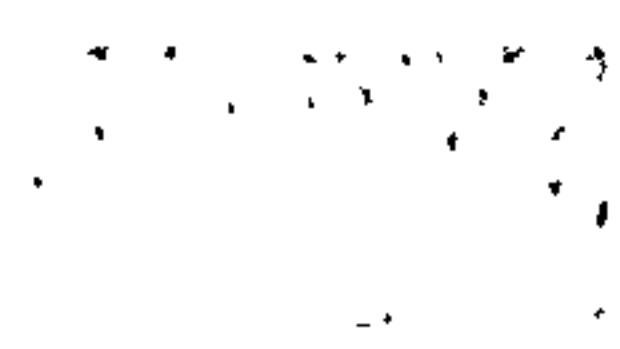
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*Human and Divine Responsibility  
in Archaic Greek Poetry*

*A Dissertation for the Ph.D. Degree  
submitted to the Faculty of Arts,  
University of Glasgow*

*by Ekaterina Dimopoulou*



*Glasgow, March 2001*

## *Abstract*

The purpose of my thesis is to examine the relation between the human and the divine in the Homeric poems, and define thereupon the limits of human and divine responsibility. To this end I particularly focus on the Homeric concepts of fate and divine justice, as these are expressed mainly by the terms μοῖρα and δίκη. Nonetheless, since the Greek terms do not always coincide in their semantics with the respective terms of any modern language, it is regarded as necessary that the field of each term be defined prior to the examination of the concepts themselves. Similarly, issues such as morality and Homeric ethics have to be raised, since they form the basis upon which any discussion of Homeric thought can rely. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* employ the two basic ideas of fate and divine justice each in a discrete manner, and this requires that each poem be examined separately. A comparison between the two works, necessary for a more overall idea of the Homeric world and the Homeric compositions, is incorporated in the chapter on the *Odyssey*.

## *Acknowledgements*

I would like to express my most sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Professor A. F. Garvie; I consider myself extremely fortunate and honoured to have met the scholar and the teacher; to me, he is the paradigm that verifies the imperative of classical studies. His remarks have always been insightful and discerning, as well as discreet and inspiring, while his wide knowledge of and great respect towards the texts had a most valuable and, hopefully lifelong, impact on me. I deeply regret not having indulged in his teaching more frequently. My unorthodox methodology must have been a trial to his patience; however, his supportive character prevailed.

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## *Introduction*

The main interest of my dissertation lies with Homeric man: his own perception of his position in life and his subsequent reaction, as a result of this perception; roughly speaking, that is, his responsibility. But since the Homeric world is doubtless one of intense religiosity - even if not the religiosity to which our Western, post-Christian mentality has got us accustomed to - it is inevitable that any examination and interpretation of Homeric man has to take into account the Homeric gods as well, and man's relation to them. The reason behind this necessity is quite simple: to the initiate of any religion, the divine forms an inextricable element of life and thought, and nothing can be seen but in the light of his relation to the divine forces that, even if imperceptibly, still all too powerfully pervade life.

Thus, it seems that human responsibility is defined first of all and to a large extent as against divine responsibility.<sup>1</sup> The order of nature, as perceived by the initiate, demands a clear distinction between the human and the divine, between the self and the unknown other, the boundaries between the two being fixed and inviolable. According to this natural order man is what god is not: he has limited powers of knowledge and perception, limited

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<sup>1</sup> See Griffin (1980); Clay (1983) 139-141; the lines most characteristically reflecting the divide between mortals and immortals are E 440-42: φράζεο, Τυδείδη, καὶ χάζεο, μηδὲ θεοῖσιν | ἴσ' ἔθελε φρονέειν, ἐπεὶ οὐ ποτε φύλον ὁμοῖον | ἀθανάτων τε θεῶν χαμαὶ ἔρχομένων τε ἀνθρώπων.

physical strength, and more important, a limited life.<sup>2</sup> His mortality is what essentially differentiates him from divinity; for the gods may provide one with more knowledge or strength, but they can never redeem one from death. Death is the one limit, the one truth that no man can ever escape or neglect.

But human responsibility is also defined *by* divine responsibility. Obviously, not everything in life is caused by man; life includes an immeasurable number of elements and forces, over which only naïvety could hope for or claim control. Yet, this simple and not at all surprising statement is the cause of extreme frustration, when it comes to be applied to human life itself. For man, despite his attempts and his wishes, despite even his presumptions, often realises that he can never have total control over his own life, the life which he himself believes to be leading, supposedly being characterised and defined by him.

True, man is well aware of his limits, but he is further aware of an essential paradox of life: he may be a weak and helpless, almost hopeless, prey to time, nature and life itself, yet at the same time he is a free, powerful agent as well, capable of deciding and acting, and facing the consequences. As for the nullification of his plans, he is ready to ascribe it to the divine forces with which he has invested life. Thus, all the events for which he is not responsible he interprets as the result of divine action and interference with

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<sup>2</sup> True, for distanced and dissociated onlookers like ourselves it seems that the gods are a consequence of man's perception of life and not vice versa, that they are a human construction born out of and affiliated to the ideology of the particular society; thus, one could reverse this statement, and say that god is actually what man is not, putting more emphasis on the moulding of the divine by man and according to man's own dispositions, values and even interests; yet, I prefer to approach the subject from the perspective of an initiate for whom the divine is temporally prior to the human.

human affairs. For the divine is believed to have the power not only to intervene in human life, but also to define its course, imposing thus its will as inevitable. At least, this is the explanation that the initiate is willing to offer for the irrational and otherwise inexplicable turnings of life. Behind this reasoning one can detect a natural human tendency to invest all aspects of life with reason; if man is not himself the cause of certain events or situations in life or in nature, and if no cause can actually be found and named in his surrounding environment, then there must be some force, invisible and imperceptible, and more important incomprehensible in its reasoning, yet all too powerful, that motivates life itself; a force doubtless greater than and not as limited as man himself.

It becomes clear, I hope, why the examination of the idea of the Homeric gods<sup>3</sup> and their interrelation and interaction with man is essential if we are to understand man's idea of himself in the Homeric poems. Not an easy task, certainly, for the Homeric gods are multifaceted and complex, a conglomerate of diverse religious as well as literary elements. Yet, it is against the backcloth of this complex divine world that Homeric man seems to define himself and the limits of his life. Every single idea of his world-view, every attitude of his towards life, seems to be related, positively or negatively, to his conception of the divine.

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<sup>3</sup> The application of the term 'Homeric' should be defined at this point; it does not correspond to any one particular age or reality other than the reality of the poems themselves, which is obviously a fictional reality. The term, therefore, has a restricted meaning, implying only the world of the poems and offering no secure basis upon which any conclusion for a factual reality can be reached. True, a factual world does indeed exist behind Homeric fiction; but this world we can hardly define in time with accuracy. The term is also used for the sake of convenience, when a reference to both poems is made, a distinction being deemed at that point unnecessary.



I have just said that a religious outlook on life entails that the divine and the human represent two distinct spheres of action, the boundaries between which are clearly cut; and that the divine, being definitely more powerful, is the force that causes all the unpredictable changes in life that are not determined by man himself. Both of the Homeric poems share this basic principle of religion: despite the constant interaction between the human and the divine, despite even the heroes' unique position in humankind, it is made more than clear that the two elements can never intersect. However, divine interference with human life has as an inevitable consequence man's dependence on the gods. In the Homeric poems themselves it is more than frequently that we witness this intervention of the gods; it forms an inextricable element of the plot, as the gods may fulfil at times man's plans or wishes, supporting his endeavour physically or emotionally, or, at times prevent him from attaining his end, changing the course of events. Man is conscious of the possibility of divine intervention, which he relates to his own natural and inherent weakness and limitation, and which certainly leads him to the painful conclusion of life's uncertainty. But, however intense and great man's dependence on the gods, it is certainly neither absolute nor passive; that would not be realistic in a work of literature, and it certainly would not be possible in life itself. Despite his lack of control over life in most cases, man has to face his own weakness and fragility; for he has to survive and live.

Inevitably, certain questions emerge: is there a reasoning behind gods' intervention, which could make this intervention predictable? And what are the implications of this reasoning, if it does indeed exist, for human responsibility? How does man react to this concept? What are the limits he decides to accept as a result of the gods' limitless action

and interference with his life? In other words, how do divine action and responsibility circumscribe human action and responsibility?

Two ideas that seem of great significance, and will therefore be examined here in detail, are that of μοῖρα or fate, and that of divine justice, usually connected with δίκη. Moira, the vague and obscure power that is believed to define man's life to a great extent and determine his death, is inevitably related to the divine; it often appears to be identified with the Homeric, Olympian gods, but even when it functions as a totally independent power, it is still a power external to and independent of man, and therefore, of divine quality. Defining human life, it also defines the human perception of life: if life, or at least certain events of life, are already determined and planned, the question of human freedom of will and action is inevitably raised, alongside the question of man's reaction, in practice, to such a belief.<sup>4</sup>

Divine justice, on the other hand, is an idea that allows us to raise some further questions concerning the behaviour of Homeric man. What is the nature of divine intervention? Is it the result of the gods' concern for righteousness, which they sanction with their own righteous behaviour? Or is it rather a matter of chance, actually, of

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<sup>4</sup> The question of freedom of will and action is certainly not raised in the Homeric poems - at least not as such; Homeric man never appears to wonder about the degree or quality of his freedom in life, or to regard his dependence on the gods as a suffocating restriction. The absence of this question from Homeric thought can be interpreted in two ways, the one not necessarily excluding the other: it may be simply because Homeric man does not feel restricted and limited by divine action or intervention; partly because of piety, partly because of necessity, man cannot but accept this power on his life, and distinguishing in a way two planes of truth, live his life as best as he can. At the same time, one could say that Homeric thought is not as elaborate yet as to perceive and formulate in language the subtle implications that this particular religious belief has on human decisions or actions. Either explanation could be seen as being the cause of the other: one could say that an idea does not exist, and therefore is not expressed, as long as man feels no need to express it, but one could also say that an idea may exist in man's thought in a vague and non-articulate form up until the moment that thought and language become so elaborate as to be able to express it.

haphazard decisions taken light-heartedly and on no principle at all, following capricious wishes or whimsical demands? And if the gods are just, does this necessarily entail that human behaviour is determined by the fear of this justice, and evaluated only in terms of divine response? To what extent can a belief in divine justice determine man's decisions and actions, how does it define his freedom of will? In other words, does divine justice function as the sanction of human propriety and righteousness? And can Homeric man actually rely on the gods' justice, as a principle that is inevitable and unquestionable?

Human responsibility, then, will be examined here in relation to divine responsibility, on the basis of the idea we form of the latter through the ideas expressed by μοῖρα and δίκη and through the concepts of fate and divine justice. With only minor exceptions, each poem will be examined separately; there are differences between the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* that seem to require such a structure. These differences I interpret mainly as the result of the different function and purpose that each poem has, as becomes obvious from the vital narrative requirements that are peculiar to each of the two plots, and as it is only natural that each poem should project a different outlook on life. The chapter on the *Odyssey* will also examine the relation between the two poems, since certain comparative conclusions should be drawn.

A term which will be featuring fairly often in the examination of Homeric thought is morality. It will prove relevant to the discussion of the gods' behaviour to one another and to the mortal heroes, but it will also prove of importance to the definition of the Homeric concepts of μοῖρα and δίκη. We are accustomed to using the terms fate and justice for the ancient Greek terms μοῖρα and δίκη respectively; still, it is perhaps silently

acknowledged by most, if not all scholars, that the ancient Greek terms have implications that differentiate them sharply from the terms of any modern language. Δίκη appears to be of a narrower meaning than any of its modern equivalents, while μοῖρα, on the other hand, seems to denote more than a plain concept of fate, and to have moral connotations. More important, the two terms appear to be closely related as regards their semantics, conveying what Palmer calls a 'peculiar concept of justice and judgement as the respect for certain limits'.<sup>5</sup> The actual examination and interpretation of the poems themselves will be delayed, therefore, as two introductory chapters, the first on the concept of morality, and the second on the terminology related to the concepts of fate and justice, are deemed a necessary precondition - especially since they are of a rather general character, and relevant to both poems.

Before I enter the subject proper of my thesis, I add a few words on the nature and function of the poems. The issue of epic poetry is indeed vast, and that of Homeric epic in particular even more so. The Homeric Question is certainly to persist, however much we wish for the opposite, and one finds oneself in an extremely awkward position when having finally to confront it and repeat the vague and oblique statements of thousands of years. Are the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* the work of one single poet, or should we assume that each poem should be ascribed to a different composer, as Xeno and Hellanicus thought?<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Palmer (1950) 161f.

<sup>6</sup> D. B. Monro (*Homer's Odyssey: XIII-XX*, v. II, Oxford 1901, 325) first pointed out that the *Odyssey* never refers to the events narrated in the *Iliad*, a view usually known as 'Monro's Law' which was later expanded by D. L. Page (*The Homeric Odyssey*, Oxford 1995, 149-59), who argues that the poet of the *Odyssey* did not know the *Iliad* at all, and that the two poems actually belonged to two different poetic traditions; Eustathius, however, in his προοίμιον, explains the absence of cross-references as a deliberate choice of the poet: ἄ γὰρ ὁ ποιητὴς ἐκεῖ ἐνέλιπεν, ἐνταῦθα προσανεπλήρωσε, a view to which one can subscribe even if different authorship should be accepted for each poem. For *Odyssey's* awareness of the *Iliad* and relevant bibliography see Rutherford (1991-1993); also Schein in Schein (1996) 3-31.

And is it possible that each poem, a work of such extent in a non-literate period, could have been composed by one single person, or are the poems the outcome of continuous and successive re-workings and re-compositions of a basic nucleus, or even the result of stitching together various distinct smaller poems?<sup>7</sup>

For the second question I would follow the unitarians; minor inconsistencies apart, since they can be explained away on the grounds of the oral formulaic quality of epic poetry, the poems are too coherent in their structure and aim to justify an analytic view; our awe at the scale of these compositions is not sufficient a reason for us to dissect what is obviously a well functioning unit. The first question seems doubtless more difficult to answer; differences in style and language are generally accepted to be indicative of different poets, while differences in terms of ideas seem also to point in this direction. It is certainly not possible to decide to which poem the figure of Homer corresponds;<sup>8</sup> considering that in antiquity Homer was believed by some to be the poet of the whole epic cycle, it seems only plausible to assume that, when finally Homer was relieved from this responsibility, the two most prominent poems were confidently and indisputably ascribed to him. On the other hand, the mere fact that antiquity perceived the two compositions as

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<sup>7</sup> For a more detailed outline of the views expressed on the Homeric Questions and relevant bibliography, see Garvie (1994) 3-18.

<sup>8</sup> For the existence of Homer I would agree with Finley (1978:15): 'Homer was a man's name, not the Greek equivalent of "Anonymous", and that is the one certain fact about him. Who he was, where he lived, when he composed, these are questions we cannot answer with assurance, any more than could the Greeks themselves'. For an entirely different view see Nagy (1996), West (1999). The question of the poems' oral or written form of composition and transmission is also crucial in Homeric studies; see Kirk (1962) 177ff., A. Parry (1966), Lord (1968); also Garvie (1994) 15-17. As Kirk observes (1962:186), 'any theory accounting for the transition of the Homeric poems from oral song to written text is conjectural, so that it becomes a matter of choosing according to our taste and our intuitive calculus of probabilities'. I would believe that some form of writing was used for the composition of the poems, the transmission, however, being accomplished orally for a long time after the composition, thus calling for the 'edition' by Pisistratus or his son Hipparchus, which aimed at providing a standard version of the poems. The use of writing is combined with the occasion of the *Odyssey* by Garvie (1994:17f.) - a remark that I would regard as applicable to the *Iliad* as well.

related in some way, seems to underline their accord rather than their discord; for the truth is that there is hardly any essential difference between the poems that cannot be accounted for in terms of different circumstances or different purpose of composition.

Which brings me back to the issue of epic poetry. What I would wish to examine briefly is the way in which the nature and function of the poems influence the development and exposition of theological and philosophical ideas; or the way in which the principles to which the poems conform as compositions, that is their orality and their literary character,<sup>9</sup> circumscribe our expectations and limit our demands of the poems. If nothing else, I hope that the following discussion will prove helpful in drawing the comparison between the two poems.

The Homeric poems belong to an oral tradition of epic poetry, whose aim was the narration of the glorious deeds of heroes and gods.<sup>10</sup> If a definition of the term 'epic' should be given, one could say that, roughly speaking, the epic is an oral composition of narrative character, most often in verse and of a considerable length, whose subject matter is supposed to evolve around a historically true event.<sup>11</sup> According to Hainsworth, the

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<sup>9</sup> The use of the term 'literary', which has obvious connotations that contradict the term 'oral', is employed simply in the absence of any other term that would successfully indicate the poems' purpose.

<sup>10</sup> For the subject of epic poetry as defined by epic poetry itself see l 189, α 337-8, θ 266-9, 488-90, Hes. *Theog.*, 99-101.

<sup>11</sup> True, defining the meaning and function of epic is not as easy as it first appears; since "generalizations are made from particular poems" (Hainsworth (1991) 2), and it is the Homeric poems themselves which, up to this day, are often seen as the epic poems *par excellence*, we are inevitably faced with a huge difficulty: how are we to define the genre on the basis of our perception of the Homeric poems, when it is exactly for the appreciation and comprehension of these poems that we need the definition? This is just another vicious circle one becomes entangled in when dealing with Homer: he is our only source for our understanding of his own poems. Comparativism seems of great help, although it may often lead to mistaken associations and conclusions. Obviously, I am concerned here with the definition of the 'primary' or 'oral' epic. For the distinction between 'primary' and 'secondary' epic, see p. 16.

formal root of the epic is narrative, 'but not just any narrative. The primitive phases of most cultures provide myths and folktales, stories by which men and women have sought to explain the world or escape from its miseries. There are also sagas to record success and eulogies to commend it. The seed of the epic is sown when these are blended, given metrical form, and cast into the narrative mode of heroic poetry'.<sup>12</sup>

Heroic poetry is, then, the form out of which epic poetry emerged, the distinction between the two being made according to their different scale or length on the one hand, and according to their different scope and function on the other. The term refers to relatively shorter oral poems, also known as heroic lays, which were supposedly celebratory accounts of historical events of a glorious past.<sup>13</sup> It actually appears, as is often accepted among scholars, that the primary function of such heroic lays was the narration, and thus crystallisation in memory and time, of past events in the life or history of a group: in this way the unity and even identity of the group were emphasised and validated. A heroic poem was originally 'a chronicle, a "book of the tribe", a vital record of custom and tradition', fulfilling 'the need for an established history',<sup>14</sup> and this function seems to survive in the succeeding genre of epic.

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<sup>12</sup> Hainsworth (1991) 5.

<sup>13</sup> The songs mentioned in the Homeric poems themselves (I 186-89, α 325-27, θ 73-82, 499-520) are probably representative of the genre; they are short enough to be sung within a few moments, and they refer to a glorious, yet not very distant past, which they immortalise. Demodocus' second song (θ 266-366), relating the life of the immortals, corresponds to another traditional form of poetry; as Burkert notes (1985:121), both the formulaic language of passages referring to the gods, and the parallels between archaic Greek and Near Eastern poetry seem to imply the rather frequent presence of the gods in traditional epic poetry; the gods could feature in a poem alongside the great heroes of the past, but most probably there were also poems which dealt exclusively with the gods, as Hesiod's *Theogony* seems to suggest.

<sup>14</sup> Merchant (1971) 1-2.

This historical basis, though, undergoes inevitable transformations in the passing of time, mainly for two reasons: first, because of the oral way of composition and transmission of such chronicles; not having a written and thereupon fixed form, the account of the particular events of interest is conditioned by conscious or unconscious interventions of both the poet and his audience as every new performance is also a new composition: the former's memory and the latter's response or demands are decisive for the way a poem will develop around the historical nucleus, since both of them can lead to omissions or transformations, as well as additions and expansions. Thus, although such poems prove man's inherent fear and struggle against time and life, the further we move from the original composition, and thus from the original event that forms its stimulus, the less accurate the poetic account of this event seems to become. This is not to deny the historical basis of heroic, and consequently epic poetry; the nucleus is definitely there, but one should be very cautious not to use such poems strictly or mainly as historical documents, for this is obviously neither their only nor their most essential quality. The historical nucleus is not immune to change; rather, it is magnified and distorted by the application of a heroic ideal and gradually expanded by the employment of fictional elements.

The second reason that explains the incessant transformations of the original nucleus is that heroic, and subsequently epic, poetry do not consist only of historical or factual elements. As already mentioned, heroic/epic poetry is actually a fusion of fact and fiction, as historical events are intermingled with various myths and folktales - even if the latter are eventually invested with the character of the factual and an epic quality. Particularly interesting in this respect are the implications of this blending of sagas, myths



and folktales: for, obviously, alongside celebrating and commemorating events, it also entertains and even teaches or instructs.

The Homeric poems are placed at the end of such an oral tradition, which had doubtless existed for a long time before these poems were composed, and whose beginnings can certainly be neither traced nor defined.<sup>16</sup> This entails that a possible original historical nucleus had already lost much of its coherence and objectivity by the eighth and seventh centuries, when the poems are supposed to have been composed, simply because of accretions and modifications through each new performance. More important, it underlines the fact that the Homeric poems certainly lack the innocence of a quasi-primitive composition; actually, the poet seems to be quite conscious of the tradition in which he belongs and of his relation to it: being aware of his own status as poet and composer, he participates in the very process of development that his tradition inevitably undergoes. Thus, we can see the poet masterfully using his material by means of allusions, additions, modifications or subtractions, so that the desired narrative aim be finally achieved. The poet's freedom is indeed worth considering at this point.

The Homeric poems are 'primary' epics, to be distinguished from 'secondary' or 'literary' epics.<sup>17</sup> The essential point of differentiation between the two is their way of composition: 'primary' epics are orally composed, while 'secondary' or 'literary' epics are

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<sup>16</sup> On the origins of epic poetry the scholars oscillate between the Mycenaean age and the so-called Dark Age, their conclusions being based on the language of the poems and the assumed circumstances that led to the appearance of epic poetry as a genre that exalts the deeds of heroes and gods; see Kirk (1962) chapters 5 and 6.

<sup>17</sup> Merchant (1971) vii; *Beowulf* and the *Song of Roland* are regarded as 'primary' epics, being distinguished from 'secondary' or 'literary' epics such as Virgil's *Aeneid*, Lucan's *Pharsalia*, and Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

obviously written poems, which are further modelled upon the 'primary' epics. This difference is of great significance, for it implies a totally different technique and process of composition, which inevitably affects both the work itself and its function. Thus, oral epic apparently lacks the complexity of a written poem, and at the same time it inevitably lacks the emphasis on the identity and individuality of the poet. Still, it would not seem absurd to talk of 'intertextuality' even in oral epic; for, oral poetry may indeed be self-effacing and impersonal, yet this does not entail that it is also fortuitous or serendipitous. The anonymity of oral poetry should by no means be taken to imply that the oral poets are neither concerned with nor influenced by their artistic self-consciousness.<sup>18</sup> Among the works of 'primary' epic one discerns the same constant flux of ideas as among literary, written poems.<sup>19</sup>

In order that the potential of oral poetry become clear, the principles of its composition have to be considered. Ever since the work of Milman Parry, and later of Albert B. Lord on Serbo-Croatian oral poetry,<sup>20</sup> it has become clear that an important mechanism of oral tradition is the use of formulae, both linguistic and thematic, which facilitate the composition of a poem by means of their memorisation. Repetition proves

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<sup>18</sup> Hainsworth (1991:43) observes that 'it was by necessity, not choice, that Homer was the most self-effacing of artists', obviously referring to the restrictions that orality entailed for a poet; 'The themes and formulas of the old art of song made it easy to re-create a story but almost impossible to perpetuate an individualized conception' (ibid.).

<sup>19</sup> Our evidence for this intertextuality within oral poetry is drawn, unfortunately, not so much from ancient Greek poems as from more recent traditions that, being still alive, allow their examination; comparativism involves definite dangers and therefore demands extreme caution, but it often is our only means.

<sup>20</sup> Milman Parry first expounded his arguments in his doctoral theses *L'Épithète traditionnelle dans Homère* and *Les Formules et la métrique d' Homère* (Paris 1928), now found in A. Parry (ed.), *The making of Homeric verse: the collected papers of Milman Parry* (New York, Oxford, 1987). A. B. Lord followed with *The singer of tales* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, 1960).

essential in a world that knows nothing of writing; this is the only means by which both the content and the art of poetry can be transmitted from one generation to another.

These formulae are not as static as they might appear at first sight; in fact, they are flexible enough to allow modification and adaptation to the particular narrative needs of each poet. As a consequence, oral poems often consist of elements of different ages or perhaps also different places, accommodated in and absorbed by tradition, creating thus a conglomerate that can hardly be said to correspond to one particular historical reality. Contradictions and inaccuracies are inevitable, especially since tradition and its poets are not in the least concerned with historical accuracy or consistency. With every new poem being a new interpretation of the traditional material, the narration concerns after all 'a timeless event floating in a timeless, ... in a non-contextual world'.<sup>21</sup>

Tradition, then, seems to have an ambivalent power on its poets, exercising, one could say, both centrifugal and centripetal forces: on the one hand it appears to provide all the necessary material for poetic composition, around which material each new poem is to evolve and develop; on the other, this material exhibits a dynamic quality that is evident in the very freedom with which the poet handles and reshapes stories already told and known to their audience. If we should confine ourselves to the use of thematic formulae in the Homeric poems, one could say that the very plot of both poems is merely the manipulation of a traditional theme for the construction of an entirely new narrative: in the *Iliad* the theme of a hero's *χόλος* is transformed into Achilles' *μῆνις*, the powerful wrath that

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<sup>21</sup> Finley (1978) 172. See also Finley in Emlyn-Jones et al. (1992:114), who opposes the tendency to treat the Homeric poems as historical sources: 'True, we have nowhere else to turn at present, but that is a pity, not an argument'.

destroys so many lives and brings such suffering to the hero himself, while in the *Odyssey* the theme of νόστος is combined with that of revenge, both of them being then incorporated in the heroic setting of the Trojan war.

Two remarks follow on the observation of the poet's freedom. First, it would appear that the 'literary' quality of the poems is brought to the fore. As noted earlier, epic poetry aims at celebrating as well as commemorating, or even instructing.<sup>22</sup> The sophistication of the Homeric poems, however, their elaborate way of structuring the plot and their indulgence, one could say, in narration itself seem to prove that we have before us works of literature, and however different the scope or function of this particularly and amazingly distant literature, it is beyond doubt that it enjoys a freedom of composition which entails that quite often the narrative purpose proves more important than the purpose of historical accuracy or religious or social didacticism. No religious idea proves so powerful as to confine the poet's imagination and narrative, and no belief in the necessity of consistency of historical or other information seems to determine the unfolding of the plot. The narration of stories is what mostly concerns the poets, and to this end they often have to be self-contradictory. Self-contradiction and inconsistency have often puzzled scholars, but this is after all another piece of evidence of the poems' literary character: the end is the narration itself, and the absence of any systematic thought exactly

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<sup>22</sup> That epic poetry had a didactic function cannot be doubted; after all, it was one of the few means by which ideas and beliefs, as well as practices and customs, could be communicated in this non-literate world; see Burkert (1996:56): 'the tale is the form through which complex experience becomes communicable'; also Hainsworth (1991) 17; however, I would avoid going as far as Havelock (1978:4ff.) does into arguing for a primarily didactic purpose; epic poetry seems to have been more than a 'cultural encyclopedia' (56); observing that the poems' instruction is not only 'literary or aesthetic, but sociological and utilitarian', including 'technology, ... military skills... civic conduct, morals and religion' he then asks 'is it possible that ... although from the standpoint of a modern critique this view of Homer is indeed secondary and may even seem perverse, it reports a role played by the poems which was in fact the primary one they were called to play in their own time and circumstance?' (7). See Macleod (1983) 6, n.2, on the regular use of τέρπειν for epic poetry.

proves that the exposition of such a thought which would be clear and perfectly consistent, is neither the immediate nor the primary aim of the poets.<sup>23</sup>

The literary character of the poems, however, has another implication - and this is the second remark. The idea of intertextuality was mentioned earlier in relation to oral poetry: orality and the use of formulae do not necessarily entail that the poets lack the knowledge of interaction between different compositions, performances or traditions. The self-effacing character of oral poetry is more a necessity than a choice, the result of non-literacy. It is indeed true that the poets do not appear *in propria persona* in the poems, nor do they ever seem to express their own views openly, but this should not be taken to imply that they are unable, nay unwilling, to offer a more or less idiosyncratic re-presentation of their traditional material.

To come to the Homeric poems, there are distinct differences between the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, as noted, which demand that we should talk of two different poets. As far as the ideological aspect of the works is concerned, it will become clear later on that the concepts of fate and justice are employed in a fairly discrete manner. Fate is an all-important motive power of the Iliadic plot, a compelling and ineluctable reality imposed on man, while justice is only of minor significance; in fact, it is never an essential idea for the construction of the plot, and we only infer the existence of the idea from occasional and indirect references to it. In the *Odyssey*, on the other hand, fate is only used when necessary, and then without having the dark connotations of the Iliadic fate, while justice

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<sup>23</sup> See Clay (1983:5-6), who explains the poems' inconsistencies as a result of the poets' concern for the immediate effect that each scene would have on the audience.

is an essential idea of the very plot. This difference between the two poems has often been seen as indicative of a development in archaic Greek thought. The *Iliad* is supposed to reflect a world of more 'primitive' ethics, where both gods and men are absorbed by their heroic code of τιμή and ἀρετή and where, consequently, it is only natural that morality is not highly developed yet, while any idea of justice is only elementary; the *Odyssey*, on the other hand, proves to present us with a more elaborate sense of morality, both because the heroes are more, and more obviously, concerned with moral principles, and because the gods are now more interested in human affairs in a moral fashion, and more morally disposed towards human life, aiming at preserving a just order.

This evolutionary theory, the model of a linear development of moral thought that corresponds to the chronological order of the poems, should be seen perhaps in the light of what has already been said about the poems' literary quality and the poets' freedom. Before any generalisation about the identification of the poems with any historical reality be admitted, the aim and perspective of each poem should be considered. In anticipation of the conclusion that is to be drawn later on, let me state here that the differences between the two poems are to be interpreted as a result of their different function and perspective rather than of their different place in this evolutionary model.

Neither the oral character of the poems, nor the necessity of a formulaic composition prove as powerful a restraint on the poet's own will. This will, which, it has to be admitted, was largely conditioned by the demands of the audience, could go beyond the limitations imposed by tradition, creating astonishingly varied interpretations of life itself. The different application of the concepts of fate and justice in the poems is

accompanied by a different atmosphere and outlook on life, and I would think that it is the latter that determines the former and not vice versa. If such an interpretation seems to be in conflict with our perception of oral poetry, it should perhaps be worth reconsidering the potential of this 'primary' form of literature.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> For an interesting discussion of the poems' different perspectives, seen in relation to the oral theory, see Kullmann (1985), who denies the possibility of a development of thought from the *Iliad* to the *Odyssey*; according to him, 'The difference between the two views of religion is too fundamental to allow such an assumption' (14), and the poems most probably represent two independent but contemporary religious conceptions.

## *H o m e r i c M o r a l i t y*

Morality is a concept of elusive and, therefore, highly controversial substance. The vital issue regards obviously the qualities that allow an act to be termed moral. An exhaustive enquiry into morality would certainly demand more than a mere examination of the criteria upon which the distinction between 'moral' and its opposite may be effectively drawn, for the question, as approached by philosophy at least, involves not simply the act, but the motivation behind the act too. The problem is obviously much more complex than it first appears. I will try to avoid any detailed discussion of the issues that do not pertain to the question of morality in Homer, insisting only on those aspects that prove of great significance for our understanding of the Homeric world.

I will begin with a basic distinction that Papanoutsos draws in his *Ἠθικὴ* between two uses of morality:<sup>1</sup> first of all, morality is used to define particular phenomena of our consciousness; thus, moral phenomena form a distinct field or function of our consciousness to be distinguished from the *non-moral* fields or functions of, say, aesthetic or theoretical phenomena. In the second use of morality moral deeds (that is deeds that accord with a behavioural norm) are distinguished from *immoral* deeds (that is, deeds against a behavioural norm), in other words we have an evaluation in qualitative terms: moral/good against immoral/bad - an evaluation that the first meaning certainly lacks. A

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<sup>1</sup> Papanoutsos (1970) 367, n.1.



further distinction can be drawn between morality and ethics: ethics denote the behavioural norms which are established in a society as a result of the moral function of our consciousness, while morality as an evaluative principle develops around and is defined against ethics or a set of behavioural norms; as a consequence, moral evaluation can only be relative, determined by the behavioural norms of a particular society.<sup>2</sup>

Obviously, if we thus perceive morality, we can hardly characterise any type of society as *amoral*. Homeric morality need mean nothing more than the ethics or code of behaviour that forms the basis of Homeric society; and this particular morality inevitably implies evaluation, a distinction between right and wrong, which functions as a factor that determines and at times limits one's behaviour. In other words, decisions are taken and courses of actions are accomplished on the basis of the norms required by ethics and in view of the evaluation that is anticipated by the agent.

There is a danger lurking in this last statement that the conclusion should be drawn that morality is just another idea subject to relativistic definitions or approaches. If each society has its own principles of ethics which form and define right and wrong, or moral and immoral, an act is evaluated not against an abstract idea of right and wrong, but rather against the particular system of values of one particular society, its ethics, which provides its own definition of right and wrong by establishing what is permitted and what is forbidden. Morality, then, is largely moulded by the values and principles of each particular society, thus assuming a particular character itself.

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<sup>2</sup> The distinction between ethics and morality, or between a descriptive and an evaluative function of the term, is certainly a logical or methodological distinction which hardly ever has an application in real life. We can describe or evaluate the ethics of a society as observers, yet the ethics and the morality of this society itself seem to be ultimately one and the same thing. This almost artificial distinction is necessary, if we are to understand the difference between the terms 'moral', 'non-moral', 'amoral' and 'immoral'.

This is indeed true to a certain extent; admitting the contrary would be absurd, to say the least. However, it seems that the similarities between different societies are more, and more important than the differences, and what actually hinders the perception of the similarities is not the difference in the concepts themselves, but the difference in their expression.<sup>3</sup> What is worth considering, then, is whether the various principles and ethical codes of different societies may ultimately be reduced to one basic principle common to all societies and essential indeed for their existence.

It is more than obvious that morality relates to society; it reflects a collective end of peaceful and advantageous symbiosis. Rules are set and codes develop in order that conflict be limited to the minimum, and, in an ideal society at least, in order that all members of society be equally benefited. Morality, then, both as a code of ethics and as the evaluation of behaviour, inevitably entails limits on the individual for the sake of a social whole, and ideally this would signify mutuality in the relation between individuals. Thus, I would come to the conclusion that morality corresponds to that particular behaviour that takes into consideration, either consciously or subconsciously, the existing limits and boundaries that define and distinguish my from your vital field of existence; somehow, it is the conditioning of my absolute freedom of action through the acknowledgement of the existence of an infinite number of circles in the world, with an equally infinite number of centres and peripheries, each circle representing the vital field of an individual, which I am

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<sup>3</sup> By difference in expression I do not mean the employment of different words for what is basically the same concept; rather I mean that each society seems to have different ways of imposing and sanctioning such essential concepts. If, as I shall try to explain soon, morality is a subconscious social mechanism that aims at stability and prosperity, this is doubtless the aim of all societies, whatever the sanctions and the means they employ for this aim. Even in a totalitarian state, where the centralisation of power seems to imply that the interest of one person defines the principles to be followed by the many, as long as the many believe in those principles as the means to the stability and prosperity of the society, and follow them willingly, we have essentially the same principle.

neither allowed *nor willing* at some point to violate.<sup>4</sup> The social mechanisms of sanctioning such a behaviour vary according to the structure and general qualities of each society, yet whether by means of shame or guilt,<sup>5</sup> or even fear, the principle that is most interesting is the very self-limitation within one's defined boundaries and the avoidance of an offensive intrusion to another's marked off territory. In anticipation of what will follow, let it be said at this point that, inasmuch as a decision is based, consciously or subconsciously, on such principles, as indeed it has to be, whether by obeying them or by defying them, I regard it as a moral decision.<sup>6</sup>

Morality, then, is first of all the limitation of the individual in a society by means of a behavioural code that forms the society's ethics, and it is also the subsequent evaluation of the individual's actions according to his degree of keeping within the proper limits as defined by ethics. In either case, morality seems to constitute a *condicio sine qua non* for the very existence of society, the absence of which entails the absence, or perhaps the dysfunction, of society itself; two or more entities can co-exist only after a mute, conscious or subconscious, consensus to moral limitation and co-operation, and this consensus inevitably leads to the gradual establishment of values and principles against which an act will be evaluated. This

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<sup>4</sup> The agent's *will* to act morally is related to the issues of motivation and intentions, which will be discussed presently; it will become clear that even when it is supposedly external sanctions of propriety such as fear or shame that define behaviour, one can be internally motivated, fear or shame having been integrated into one's own thinking in such a way as to form ultimately a personal will.

<sup>5</sup> Shame and guilt may be ultimately very close as regards their meaning, yet it has to be admitted that they have been used in a rather different way by different societies, and have therefore different implications; it is on the grounds of this difference that I distinguish the two here.

<sup>6</sup> According to this approach to morality, I would regard as immoral the behaviour of the suitors in the *Odyssey*, and in the *Iliad* Paris' abduction of Helen, Agamemnon's arrogant behaviour in general, however mitigated this may be at times by his status as commander-in-chief, and perhaps also Achilles' obstinacy or rather obsessive self-absorption, although it is expected, if not demanded, to some degree by the very code of Homeric society. That this is actually more than my own personal evaluation of the heroes can easily be manifested by the poems themselves: the evidence is both the negative comments occasionally expressed by the heroes, and the unfavourable characterisation offered by the poet himself. Besides, I would definitely regard as immoral most of the behaviour of the gods - but this is an issue of a much more complicated nature, which will be discussed in due course.

seems to be the essential element of all societies; what ultimately and fundamentally distinguishes one society from another is the solution each one provides to this rudimentary problem of co-operation and co-existence that forms the basis of a social constitution; in other words, the values that a society employs as mechanisms that will limit its members and will ensure their moral behaviour, their adherence to its code of ethics.

One further remark: obviously, I do not purport to use morality as indicative of a purely internal disposition, according to which the agent behaves morally out of a genuine and deeply felt concern for morality *per se*, and in which case no motivation of self-interest may be discerned;<sup>7</sup> consciously avoiding any connection of morality with intentions or motivation, I prefer to focus on the act itself on the condition that it presupposes a distinction between right and wrong, not because intentions are insignificant in any respect, but because such a discussion would entail a sequence of thought that is alien to Homeric man. I would tend to believe that even when no concern for morality *per se* is discerned, behaviour can still be seen as internally motivated. The possibility of moral behaviour exists in all societies, irrespectively of the sanction employed in order that moral behaviour be ensured. I take this to be an essential function of human notional or emotional mechanisms. Internal or external motivation is difficult to distinguish even in oneself, and any attempt to do so seems to lead to crude generalisations and categorisations.

To come to the poems, according to what has been said up to now, the distinction between right and wrong should be drawn against a set of principles which

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<sup>7</sup> The idea of a Kantian, pure morality, which is supposed to eliminate all traces of self-interest in its pursuit of duty, has also been criticised of a self-interested motivation by Schopenhauer, just as Plato's theory of virtue has been accused of egoism; see Konstan (1999) 6-8.

would define the limits and the boundaries of each member of the social group. The principles of which the Homeric code of behaviour consists are basically simple principles of everyday life present in most, if not all societies, such as the respect that must be paid to the gods (Δ 48-49, 503), the elder (I 494-495), the priests and the seers (A 23), or the dead (Π 456-457). Or they can be principles that create and are created at the same time by the special character of the period; thus, kingship is believed to be divinely constituted and established, closely connected with Zeus himself, and therefore never questioned (A 277-279, B 196-197, 204-206, I 98-99). Αἰδώς, in such cases a feeling of respect sometimes connected with fear, is the appropriate behaviour towards a king, whether this is Agamemnon whom everybody is obliged to obey, for he is βασιλεύτερος (A 277-281; I 160-161), or any other king who is respected and obeyed by his own people (B 213-214; M 310-312; Π 269-272).

Two other essential features of Homeric ethics are ἱκεσία - supplication, and ξενία - hospitality, or guest-friendship. The two are not unrelated, since a ξεῖνος can be seen as an ἰκέτης, and an ἰκέτης can easily become a ξεῖνος. Both, moreover, seem to function as necessary principles in an age of instability and insecurity: referring to an essentially reciprocal relation, they ensure protection for both parties by demanding adherence to a series of almost ritual acts and behavioural norms of mutual respect.<sup>8</sup> As Gould states, regarding ἱκεσία, 'it is a game of life and death'.<sup>9</sup> The sanction offered through the connection of both principles to Zeus seems therefore to be explained: his concern for and protection of the principles operate as the necessary means that would check a possible violation.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> For the ritual accompanying ἱκεσία, see Gould (1973) 75-82.

<sup>9</sup> Gould (1973) 81.

<sup>10</sup> The relation between Zeus and the principles of ἱκεσία and ξενία is discussed in pp. 189, 193.

ἱκεσία does not form a major issue in the *Iliad*. The references to it certainly exist, but they are never extensive, nor do they have any particular function in the main plot.<sup>11</sup> In the *Odyssey*, on the other hand, it is an essential part of the poem's perspective: the hero often appears in the capacity of an ἱκέτης, while at the same time the violation of the principle is one of the main defects in the behaviour of the suitors. Along with the emphasis on ἱκεσία, and in line with its less heroic viewpoint, the poem finds the opportunity quite often to underline the importance of a proper behaviour towards beggars, πτωχοί, people who, for one reason or another are found on the verge of non-existence.<sup>12</sup> Again, this forms a point of criticism against the suitors, further enhancing the impression of their impropriety.

Ξενία, on the other hand, is especially relevant to the plot of both poems: in the *Iliad* this is the principle that Paris violated by seducing and abducting Helen (Γ 351-54, Ν 620-25). The result of Paris' disregard for the laws of ξενία, the Trojan war itself, is sufficient proof of the importance the institution had in social life. In its noblest form ξενία appears in the Diomedes-Glaucus episode (Ζ 212-236); in its basest, in Paris' behaviour towards Menelaus. In the *Odyssey*, as already noted, the suitors' insolent conduct in Odysseus' house disregards both their rights and their obligations as ξεῖνοι, and this neglect of the socially accepted norm inevitably results in their destruction. The contrast to this behaviour is created by the reference to Eumaeus' way of observing the rules of ξενία, while another couple that causes a similar antithesis and tension is Polyphemus and the Phaeacians.

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<sup>11</sup> Gould (1973:80) observes that of the thirty-five references to supplication in the poems, ten are obviously made to an unsuccessful supplication; however, he opposes the view expressed by Dodds (1951:32) that in the *Iliad* suppliants are never spared (80, n 38). As will become clear later on, Zeus's role as ἱκετήσιος is suppressed in the poem; see Dodds (ibid.).

<sup>12</sup> See Adkins (1960b) 24f.

“ὄρκος, oath-taking, is equally important for the code and is also protected by Zeus. According to Burkert, this is ‘the one place where religion, morality and law definitely met’.<sup>13</sup> An oath in the Homeric world may concern anything; it can refer to the Greeks’ obligation to help the Atreidai (B 186-188), or to the companions’ oath not to harm Helios’ cattle. Of interest is the case of Γ 268-301, when Greeks and Trojans take an oath just before the duel between Menelaus and Paris; the oath seems to take the form of an informal pact: if Menelaus wins, the Greeks will take back Helen and all the royal property that Paris took away with him; if Paris wins, Helen will stay with him, and the Greeks will leave; in this case the oath binds both sides to comply with the demands of this agreement. The importance of the principle lies with its effectiveness in an age of orality; as Burkert goes on to explain ‘oath is a phenomenon of language which owes its existence in the very insufficiency of language. The weakness of the word is the possibility - the likelihood - of lying, of fraud and trickery. The purpose of oath, sworn by responsible partners, has always been to exclude lying in all its forms... In other words, taking an oath means a radical “reduction of complexity”, in an effort to establish univocal meanings and create a world of sense that is dependable, with clear distinctions between true and false, right and wrong, friend and adversary, ally and foe’.<sup>14</sup>

The code is certainly applicable to all social strata, yet we seem to have the perspective of the nobility, of the upper class of the ἀγαθοί, on which both poems focus. The *Iliad* is exclusively concerned with this upper class, the only glimpse of the lower classes being taken during the Thersites episode (B 211-77), where we hear of the

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<sup>13</sup> Burkert (1996) 169.

<sup>14</sup> Burkert (1996) 169f; cf. Havelock (1978) 23.

ugly and hopeless warrior, the anti-hero who knows not how to behave or speak, being thus in sharp contrast with the great figures of the poem. The *Odyssey* finds the opportunity for a depiction of the lower social strata more often; either through Odysseus' false tales or through the presentation of his servants, faithful or not, we enter a world that is totally absent from the older poem.<sup>15</sup> Even so, the *Odyssey* is still largely concerned with the works and days of the upper class, its code of excellence and its noble status in society and history.

The ἀγαθοί are a group of people distinguished for their ἀρετή, which means their noble birth and wealth, and consequently their high social status and power - in one word, for their success. Beauty and wisdom are naturally ascribed to this upper class, as it often happens that social classes are seen in black and white.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, extreme bravery and martial prowess are unquestionable features of the nobles. Obviously, there is a degree of idealisation and a tinge of poetic exaggeration, as happens always in the case of heroic or epic poetry.<sup>17</sup> The characters of the poems belong to a different age from that of the poet and his audience, their feats are of

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<sup>15</sup> I am certainly referring at this point to the main plot of the poem; for references to the everyday life of the poet's own age are found in the similes, which offer the view of a world which is largely different from that of the heroes, and in the scenes depicted on the Shield of Achilles (Σ 483-608). For similes as referring to the poet's age see G. P. Shipp, *Studies in the Language of Homer* (Cambridge 1972, second edition).

<sup>16</sup> In this light, it is not surprising that Thersites is distinguished for his unpleasant looks (B 216-19). It is worth noting, however, that the *Odyssey* avoids such generalisations: Eumaeus, Philebus and Eurycleia, the hero's faithful servants, are seen in a most favourable way, and the different emphasis that each poem puts on the merits of the upper class is certainly worthy of consideration. The differences between the two poems will be discussed later on; here, it suffices to note that the *Odyssey* presents us with a more detailed and therefore more realistic image of society, even if this entails a possible departure from traditional standards.

<sup>17</sup> According to Hainsworth (1991:5f.), one of the essential elements of heroic poetry, from which epic poetry derives, is eulogy; 'for eulogy implies the hero whose successful struggles are celebrated, and none of the primary epics lacks a hero... Naturally they [i.e. the heroes] are supermen, and they may possess supernatural powers or supernatural weapons; but in what may be called his purest form the hero dispenses with such aid... The greatness of the deed may then be made to lie in its daring... or the greatness may be altogether the hero's, the deed itself being unexceptional, as when heroes who know they are doomed face death unflinchingly'. See Introduction, p. 13.



incomparable quality, thus justifying their claim to ἀρετή and consequently their claim to the realm of 'heroes'.

Still, however fictitious this reality or poetic the embellishment of the heroes' true nature, there seems to exist some nucleus of truth behind such qualities as bravery and prowess; for they must have been historically founded in the fact that in times of war and strife it was the wealthy and noble, with their martial education and material support, who could mainly defend their people and their rights. Quite often in the text we hear of a leader's responsibility for his subjects (M 310-321, Ξ 86-87, Σ 101-106, 128-129), which responsibility is both an obligation and a matter of τιμή. The nobles enjoy the privileges of their status at the cost of their fighting and defending their subjects - or at least that is what they should do. Hainsworth, commenting on Sarpedon's words at M 310-321, where Sarpedon stresses the obligation he has towards his people, finds that 'these famous verses constitute the clearest statement in the Iliad of the imperatives that govern heroic life and their justification. It is, as Sarpedon puts it, a kind of social contract; valour in exchange for honour...Honour comes first, for only the founders of the dynasties gained their throne by first showing valour (like Bellerophon, 6.171-195); their successors inherited their status, and might, as here, have to remind themselves of that obligation that it entailed'.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Hainsworth (1993) ad loc. It is worth noticing that by the time of the poet's age the justification of the nobles' high status and their subsequent τιμή no longer exist; the upper class of the eighth century has inherited both wealth and power, and what was originally an impetus for more power and success, and thereupon more security, has now become a moral obligation. More important, one should bear in mind that although the poems supposedly reflect a distant and glorious past, they are intended for an audience which interpreted the plot most probably according to its own contemporary perception; the heroic principles must have been accommodated in some way to the ideas of the emerging πόλις. Besides, as Havelock rightly observes, the poet himself is based on assumptions about the past and archaisms rather than on reminiscence and certain knowledge, which often accounts for the co-existence of incompatible elements in the poems.

'Αρετή and ἀγαθός, the terms used in later Greek to denote internal, moral qualities, are applied in Homer exclusively to external merit and success.<sup>19</sup> The ἀρετή of a man is certainly different from that of a woman, for each one has to prove effective and successful in different fields of social life, a point which makes clear the rather flexible meaning of the concept implied. Moreover, it would appear that one's ἀρετή is not an unquestionable or unchanging characteristic of his, but it may be easily diminished, and under this constant threat the preoccupation and obsession with success and material gain by competitive means is expected and justified. Τιμή, which seems to refer to the reflection of one's status onto society, becomes the most crucial element of one's identity and consequently the point on which all actions seem to focus. In this light, the heroes' preoccupation with public opinion, δήμου φάτις, and the extremely important role of αἰδώς in Homeric thought, seem to make sense.

Competition is a very important element in the life of the ἀγαθός, explained by Adkins on the grounds of the Homeric world's organisation around the οἶκος:<sup>20</sup> the conditions of life in a society structured in separate οἴκοι make it necessary that material success be especially valued; 'time is a necessary condition of life in Homer, in the most literal sense of the words';<sup>21</sup> the apparent obsession of the Homeric heroes with their social and financial status is only the result of a world which lacks the social or political organisation that would provide stability, a world of constant anxiety and insecurity.

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<sup>19</sup> Adkins (1960a: *passim*) believes that the terms retain some of their original meaning in later ages as well. The etymology of both words remains up to now obscure and not particularly helpful. A relation between ἀρετή and Ares, the god of war, even if not accurate, seems to suggest, however, the connotations of the word and the way it was perceived by the Greeks. As Palmer (1950:150) observes 'A word has two aspects: sound and meaning', and etymology based on phonetic rather than semantic resemblance between words was often the case among ancient Greeks, cf. Pl. *Phaed.* 99e.

<sup>20</sup> Adkins (1960b) 23.

<sup>21</sup> Adkins (1960b) 25.

Competition is necessary for the individual, and through him for his οἶκος, if they are to survive.<sup>22</sup>

This observation has been reduced by Adkins into a rather simplistic scheme that can supposedly explain the reason why we cannot, and therefore should not, talk of moral responsibility in the Homeric world. If competition is necessary for survival in the Homeric world, and if, consequently, it is always the stimulus for action, it is inevitable that the quieter values of Homeric ethics are not similarly appreciated or acknowledged. The preoccupation of the heroes with their personal ἀρετή and τιμή appears to diminish the importance of internal values, which do not always prove as effective with regard to the establishment of one's status. Reciprocity and the principle of *do ut des* are decisive for the relationship between individuals: τιμή demands τιμή in return, and an offence leads to a counter-offence, not out of a concern for justice, but out of a concern for one's status, which is thus confirmed and acknowledged.<sup>23</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that results are often more important than intentions, for it is on results that one's τιμή and status can be based. This line of thought results in the rather sharp distinction between competitive and co-operative values, a polarity which corresponds to the Homeric reality only partly. This is also the point at which philosophy's distinction between different types of motivation becomes relevant, and

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<sup>22</sup> This organisation corresponds to the world of the heroes rather than to that of the poet's age; however intuitive the poet and his audience, it has to be accepted that the narration must have been seen, to a great extent, in the light of the conditions of more recent times, since a work of literature is often accommodated to the audience's own perception of life; see p. 31, n. 18. Even so, the following discussion on ἀρετή and τιμή will not be affected; still, it is worth noting that, as soon as the πόλις emerges, the demands on the individual must have been more, and more intense, slightly modifying the way in which ἀρετή and τιμή were perceived.

<sup>23</sup> When Achilles re-enters the war, after Patroclus' death, his decision resulted from an impulse almost, his need to take revenge and alleviate in this way his pain and his sense of responsibility; the quarrel with Agamemnon seems now trivial, almost nonsensical, yet the reconciliation has to be conducted and the offering of gifts is a necessary part of it. For the τιμή both of Achilles and Agamemnon is affected after all by this apparently formal act.

Homeric ethics appear to lack the qualifications that would allow us to talk of morality

- and the point at which our intellectual memory proves dysfunctional and misleading.

Before I proceed, let me repeat that, as long as an action presupposes a distinction between right and wrong, I would regard it as a moral action, indicative of the moral function of human consciousness; the fact that the heroes are presented as capable of deciding a course of action and behaving accordingly is, I believe, sufficient proof of their being moral agents; for the moral function of our consciousness is after all the capacity to evaluate a situation and act upon a distinction between right and wrong.<sup>24</sup> When seen against the code of ethics of Homeric society, such an action can be moral or immoral, it can, that is, be in accord with the code or it can violate it. A further distinction may be drawn between a mistake and a moral error, although this is a very fine distinction indeed, relating to the motivation of an act and the degree of consciousness when perpetrating a violation; the problem in this case is that mistake and moral error can actually be fused, since motivation is not always easy to define even in oneself.

Adkins's distinction obviously presupposes an entirely different perception of morality, which demands that morality is not only a matter of distinguishing right from wrong according to the principles of a particular code of ethics, but rather a matter of acting in accord with these principles out of a particular type of motivation; an act which is believed to comply with the values and principles of a society can be termed moral only as long as it is motivated by a pure and disinterested concern for morality

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<sup>24</sup> Obviously, I would not agree with Snell's conclusions that Homeric man lacks self-consciousness when making decisions; apart from the fact that Snell's approach to the Greek language seems unfair, if not absurd, it is the assumption that a world which is innocent of an advanced philosophical terminology should also be ignorant of what I would regard as essential qualities of human behaviour, that is most puzzling and frustrating. See Lesky (1961), Lloyd-Jones (1983) 9f., Gaskin (1990), Williams (1994) 21ff.

*per se*, and not if caused by a self-interested calculation of a beneficent result, by prudence, fear, or shame.<sup>25</sup> Not surprisingly, Adkins finds no elements in the code of Homeric values that would support such a morality, for it can certainly not be denied that any conceptualised or internalised idea of an abstract notion of morality is simply absent from the poems.

I would certainly not regard as illegitimate an approach which aims at underlining the differences between two, or more, discrete ideological systems; quite the contrary, they are of great importance and help in our understanding of the fine nuances of concepts which account for the distinct ways in which each society evolves and the mechanisms, social, political or religious, that it develops. However, Adkins's conclusions go too far: for him, excessive competition, and along with it excessive concern for public opinion, δῆμου φάτις, create a nexus of values that do not allow the development of the idea of disinterested action, and consequently the idea of moral responsibility; admitting that Homeric society does not share our own perception of morality, or that it is not aware of a notion of transcendental morality which would be more important than success, is one thing, denying to it morality altogether and the ability to perceive the idea of moral responsibility is another; the generalisation seems too crude indeed, and too unfair both to the Homeric world and to the Homeric poems. More important, it would seem that the differences are not after all so sharp as it seems at first sight; for the ideas which supposedly prevent the development of moral thought,

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<sup>25</sup> Gagarin (1987:288) defines morality as the 'disinterested concern for others', a definition which is obviously the result of more recent philosophical speculation and can hardly have an application in the Homeric poems; not surprisingly, he finds only one example of moral behaviour in the poems, the attitude of the Phaeacians towards Odysseus (*ibid.*); he then proceeds to distinguish offences in the Homeric world into legal, religious and moral: moral offences, as well as moral behaviour, are possible only in relations which are not at all defined by self-interest, that is relations towards guests, suppliants and beggars (290f.). By thus stressing the importance of disinterested motivation, Gagarin fails to see that self-interest does not necessarily imply extreme and utter selfishness, even if this is the way we usually perceive the term; all actions can be reduced to some motive of self-interest in one way or another, even the concern for pure morality; see p.26, n. 7.

such as competitiveness or shame, and the subsequent concern for results, are indeed ideas that imply more than a vain obsession with success and good repute.

No one can deny the importance of competition and success in the world of the Homeric poems; nor can it be doubted that moral qualities of any kind are not sufficient a qualification for a hero to attain success or status. Ἄρετή denotes the external qualities of the upper class, and is therefore evocative of success and status; competitive excellences are necessary if the established order of social stratification is to be perpetuated, and in this way ἄρετή does not always or strictly depend on adherence to this code, which is after all relevant to all social strata.<sup>26</sup> This entails that morality is not the basis of the upper class - at least not necessarily, and certainly not at all surprisingly. If the ἀγαθοί enjoy the privilege of great τιμή, they do so because of their effectiveness in society, as this becomes evident in the results of their actions. Morality or compliance with the code may prove beneficial for their status, but it may also be in conflict with the demands of ἄρετή, in which case the heroes usually opt for the latter.<sup>27</sup> Accordingly, their status is not in the least affected by their occasional moral inadequacy: as in most societies, the upper class retains its status irrespectively of its merit in moral terms. It would appear, therefore, that Homeric ethics do not necessarily owe their importance to their effectiveness in competitive terms.

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<sup>26</sup> The support for this statement certainly exists only in the *Odyssey*, where Eumaeus and Eurycleia are examples of the ethics of the lower classes, which prove after all to be similar, in principle at least, to that of the upper classes. One could also think of Odysseus during the adventures, in which case he is not the glorious king of Ithaca, but merely a nameless wanderer, a suppliant with no τιμή. Even more important, however, appears to be the support provided by Hesiod, who defends this very morality, distinguishing it from the class of the ἀγαθοί.

<sup>27</sup> Thus, Agamemnon refuses to give Chryseis back to her father, disregarding his position both as a priest and as a suppliant, for the sake of his own ἄρετή and τιμή.

At the same time, the poems lack a transparent moral terminology that would easily justify a discussion on Homeric morality; one feels at a loss, when looking for the terms or the expressions that would seem to support the idea. However, the absence of terms that can be readily recognised as moral does not necessarily entail a respective absence of the notions; and as I have already noted (26), I would regard that evaluation of a situation on a moral basis, and subsequent determination, are essential mechanisms of human behaviour that cannot be denied to Homeric society on the grounds of its non-elaborate philosophical thought and language. Adkins's lexical approach of the texts has met with the scepticism and criticism of scholars, who have tried to propose instead a less inflexible and uncompromising interpretation that would rely on a more overall examination of the Homeric terms that are evocative of moral evaluation or appreciation.<sup>28</sup> Considering that, I will avoid discussing Adkins's theses *in extenso*; what I would rather do here is examine briefly three points which, whether or not seen in relation to Adkins, are certainly important for our appreciation of the Homeric mode of thinking about morality: the ideas of τιμή and αἰδώς, and the distinction between intentions and results.

First of all τιμή. As noted (32), τιμή is the projection of one's ἀρετή onto society; in other words, one's τιμή is proportionate to one's own ἀρετή and competing for ἀρετή means competing for τιμή.<sup>29</sup> Now, Adkins sees the term in the light of the highly competitive character of Homeric society; he first of all observes that the most

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<sup>28</sup> See Long (1970) and Dover (1983), and in most recent literature Cairns (1993a) 50ff, (1993b) and Williams (1994).

<sup>29</sup> Not all members of Homeric society have the same degree of τιμή; the more powerful seem to have more τιμή than the less so, and this is certainly an element that seems to support Adkins's thesis that τιμή should be seen basically in terms of material status. The gods are believed to have more τιμή than anyone else, as well as more ἀρετή and more βίη (see I 498) and this would lead us to the assumption that τιμή is after all the degree of honour that one enjoys as the expected consequence of one's position in society, in fact in any society. Power leads to honour, the two being inextricably linked. Adkins's emphasis on one only aspect of τιμή inevitably makes him disregard the whole for the sake of the part.

powerful term of commendation in Homeric society is ἀρετή, and along with it words which are found mostly in competitive contexts, such as ἀγαθός, ἔσθλος and χρηστός, ἀμείνων and βελτίων, ἄμεινος and βέλτιστος;<sup>30</sup> the most powerful word of disapproval on the other hand is believed to be αἰσχρόν, a word which 'is never used to decry injustice in Homer'.<sup>31</sup> Having set these axiomatic principles, Adkins sees τιμή mainly in its competitive and material aspect: 'Let us take ... the man who has an *oikos* - house, land, flocks, goods, chattels and dependants. Since Homeric man does not think abstractly, these things *are* his *time*. He has not these things and a position in society: these things are his position in society; and the fact that the Homeric hero must defend them for himself readily explains the emotive charge which the word *time* possesses for him'.<sup>32</sup>

Seen against Adkins's view, Lloyd-Jones' interpretation seems indeed more sober; τιμή is now 'honour' and as such it is more important than the material gain or loss that an offence may entail; 'concern over property, even human property, would hardly have troubled the antagonists so much were it not that in their society one's share in booty reflected one's degree of *time*. Their [Agamemnon's and Achilles'] quarrel is over *time* and only secondarily over property'.<sup>33</sup> Somehow, it appears that in this way τιμή is not totally identified with ἀρετή, although it is still closely related to it; the fine difference between the two views seems to lie with the fact that Lloyd-Jones' approach seems to make rather clear that an offence relates to one's τιμή more than to

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<sup>30</sup> Adkins (1960a) 30.

<sup>31</sup> Adkins (1960b) 31. As Cairns (1993a:59) observes, the word appears only three times in the *Iliad*, in all three of them referring to the 'return from a military enterprise with nothing to show for it', a characteristic example of the 'quasi-aesthetic concept of appropriateness' of Homeric thought (54); see Long (1970); Adkins's assumption for the importance of the term, then, seems to rely on the prior thesis of competitiveness, rather than on the actual evidence of the poems. With regard to this 'quasi-aesthetic concept', see Cairns (1993a), who has shown that it can be indicative of moral evaluation and action, despite its apparent reference to a superficial sanction. See also Dover (1983) 46.

<sup>32</sup> Adkins (1960b) 31f.

<sup>33</sup> Lloyd-Jones (1983) 11.



one's ἀρετή, and this entails that an offence is not seen only in its material or financial dimension, not even only in its social dimension, but rather as an essentially moral issue that corresponds to the violation of limits.

Τιμή, then, is not merely the expression of a hero's rather selfish need to establish and protect the limits of his own existence; instead, emphasis should be put on the fact that by acknowledging the τιμή of another, a hero acknowledges both his own limits and the limits of the other person.<sup>34</sup> This is certainly a moral issue, both because it demands respect for the limits of another's vital field of existence, and because it demands adherence to the code of ethics as defined by the particular society. If society deems it right that its members should respect one another's ἀρετή and τιμή, that one's personal status, that is, should be largely defined by one's own wealth, by no means should this be taken to entail that relations of φιλότις are exclusively conditioned by considerations of self-interest and gain, while the violation of this principle is not only a slight to one's status, but an act of impropriety, a lack of concern for righteousness as defined and prescribed by society itself. The fact that this essentially moral principle is not referred to as such in the text seems to be of little importance after all, while the fact that it is often diminished into a vain obsession has to do only with the masterful characterisation that the poet is capable of providing.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> See Long (1970) 137; Cairns (1993a) 13-14, 87ff., (1993b) 161. Τιμή, therefore, should be seen as the province, more or less, of an individual, his vital field, which is defined by his position and status in society; this is an idea closely related to the concept of moira, for which see pp. 73-74; cf. also O 185ff, where Poseidon talks of the apportionment of power among the gods: ἕκαστος δ' ἔμμορε τιμῆς (189) corresponds to ἰσόμορον καὶ ὁμῆ πεπρωμένον αἴση (209).

<sup>35</sup> The fact that Agamemnon seems to be concerned with his own personal aims or interests more than with those of his subjects or companions is in total harmony with the characterisation provided by the poet. This is certainly not the attitude of Sarpedon or Hector, for example. There is a plurality of characters, and consequently a plurality of behavioural responses to similar situations, and this is what makes conflict possible after all. See Dover (1983); Cairns (1993a:71-83) on the way in which the heroes' different degree of sensitivity towards the code of ethics operates in the *Iliad*, for as he rightly observes (49), 'If *aidōs* is an emotion, then its occurrence depends on the disposition of the individual and on the particular conditions which have contributed to the development of his or her character, and so we need not be surprised if it is not effective in every individual or on each and every occasion'.

All violations in the poems are referred to in terms of τιμή, or rather of ἀτιμία; accordingly, adherence to the code is also seen in terms of τιμή. When behaving properly to guests or suppliants, one is supposed to reaffirm one's own τιμή and acknowledge at the same time the τιμή of another. Violating the code entails ἀτιμία for the patient, but not for the agent; however, suffering ἀτιμία makes one react with τίσις, the word interpreted most commonly as revenge, but implying actually any form of reciprocity.<sup>36</sup> The reciprocal quality of Homeric ethics may seem indeed superficial, but it corresponds after all to a rudimentary principle of morality and even justice itself. The principle of *do ut des* is necessary in order that one's offended τιμή be restored, but this is ultimately a presupposition for social order to be maintained. The principle could have negative connotations if seen in the context of a system of pure morality, yet, if one could avoid such lapses into a more recent mode of thinking, it would become clear that there is an essentially moral principle underlying the idea. This is the very principle upon which the human way of perceiving justice seems to be based, even if in more modern legal systems it is after all concealed by a sequence of thought that is supposedly based on a more advanced perception of morality. The agent who acknowledges one's τιμή acknowledges the limits both of his own and of the other person's vital field; accordingly the violation of this principle is the violation of limits, and such an action causes reaction in a most natural way. Morality is not exactly goodness, nor is it certainly love; it is not an emotion, although it may ultimately be conditioned by emotions.

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<sup>36</sup> For τίσις see A 37-43, B 258-90, Γ 27-29, Z 51-65, Λ 138-42, Φ 133-35.

Among the nobles there arise relations of mutual recognition of τιμή, or relations of φιλότις, which ensure both personal status and social stability. Guest-friendship, ξενία, is an expression of this very mutuality: apart from a good disposition towards guests, and thus the establishment of an ever-lasting friendship, the principle also implies a reciprocal relation, sealed by the exchange of gifts, which supports the ἀρετή and τιμή of both parties. Through this relation of rights and obligations, a bond is perpetuated for generations, which aims at the security of one's οἶκος. The power of this idea was such that it 'must often have compelled one chieftain to take up arms in another's quarrel'.<sup>37</sup> It is in this sense that the Greeks decide to fight against the Trojans: by doing so, they do not simply establish their own claim to ἀρετή and τιμή, but they acknowledge at the same time the ἀρετή and τιμή of Menelaus and Agamemnon (A 158-160).

More important, ἀτιμία, failure, that is, to properly acknowledge and value one's τιμή may have the least desirable results. Both poems actually evolve around such a violation. In the *Iliad* the ἀτιμία of Agamemnon towards Achilles proves disastrous for Greeks and Trojans alike, while at the same time the motif permeates the poem and is always and insistently on our mind because of the ἀτιμία of Paris towards Menelaus, a matter that after nine years is still not settled; a third occurrence of the motif opens the poem in a remarkable way: the ἀτιμία of Agamemnon towards Chryses, which leads to the conflict between Agamemnon and Achilles both as a mechanism of structure and as an element of the plot. What Menelaus, Achilles and Chryses have suffered is a violation of their τιμή, which was not properly appreciated,

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<sup>37</sup> Kirk (1985) on A 154-56.

and which they now demand to have re-established.<sup>38</sup> The *Odyssey* also presents us with a case of ἀτιμία: the suitors' excessive behaviour indicates their failure to acknowledge Odysseus' τιμή, for even if they act on the supposition of the hero's death, their conduct is offensive towards the whole οἶκος, violating the very important principle of ξενία; their slaughter, excessive though it is in its turn, further underlines the importance that the proper recognition of τιμή has for the Homeric world.

It would appear that an interpretation of τιμή as the obsession with 'honour' and prestige rather than with material gain and loss seems to correspond more accurately to the complex world of emotions of the heroes, forming thus the material upon which the conflict necessary for the plot can be based. True, financial gain and loss can prove important enough to cause an expedition to Troy, or at any rate a quarrel among even the closest of friends; however, this is not a focal point for the poet. Achilles is not angry for the loss of Briseis herself, even if this is certainly a cause of pain for him; his anger originates in his amazement almost at having been thus insulted; it is his self-esteem and his evaluation of himself which cause his excessively self-assertive response, just as is the case with Agamemnon's excessive pride. As for Menelaus, the poet certainly suppresses the economic aspect of the war by using beautiful Helen as the cause and the end of the expedition: the king of Sparta contends for his queen, and only secondarily for the treasures that Paris took away with him. In a similar fashion Odysseus contends for his house and his family, and it would be absurd to say that he

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<sup>38</sup> It is interesting that once the order is reversed, and Achilles' τιμή is violated, the moment comes for the hero to question the stability and credibility of the traditional code of behaviour (l 316-322). This can be seen as the expected reaction of a man who insists on his anger rather stubbornly, but it also forms an essential point in the development of Achilles' character: when the hero re-enters the war, he is not incited by a concern for his status; instead it is the pain at Patroclus' loss and the consequent wish for revenge, as well as a sense of responsibility, that make inertia insufferable.

kills the suitors 'for the sake of his *arete*, because it would be *aischron* not to do so',<sup>39</sup> - with αἰσχρόν implying a competitive failure.

The support for such an interpretation of τιμή and, consequently, of the poems themselves, can be found in the use of ὕβρις and αἰδώς, or rather ἀναιδείη, which are applied in order to describe the offences relevant to the plots. Now, Agamemnon's ἀτιμία towards Achilles is referred to as ὕβρις only three times in the poem (A 203, 214; I 368), and the word is used once again in the *Iliad* in relation to the Trojans' offence towards Menelaus (N 633); in the *Odyssey*, by contrast, ὕβρις is a regular accusation against the suitors, underlining, along with ἀτασθαλίη, the insolence of their behaviour. The limited use of the term in the *Iliad* is certainly worthy of note, but it has to do with the poem's complex issue of right and wrong, and will be discussed in the next chapter; here, it suffices to note that the term is used by the wronged party of a dispute,<sup>40</sup> it relates, that is, to a subjective perception of a situation, not in the sense that this is a mistaken perception, but rather in the sense that the wrongdoer does not necessarily perceive the situation in a similar fashion. As MacDowell notes, ὕβρις 'is an evaluative word, not an objective one'.<sup>41</sup>

Since an evaluative word, ὕβρις has obviously to do with behaviour and moral responsibility; the reason why the offended heroes retaliate, and indeed they are justified to a large extent in their excessive reaction is the very fact that the moral

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<sup>39</sup> Adkins (1960a) 238; *contra* Dover (1983) 45.

<sup>40</sup> A 214 belongs to Athena, yet it is obviously the view of someone who subscribes to Achilles' reaction.

<sup>41</sup> MacDowell (1976) 21.

responsibility for the dispute itself lies with their opponents.<sup>42</sup> There has indeed been much discussion on ὕβρις,<sup>43</sup> into which I would sooner not become involved; minor differences apart, all accounts seem to agree that ὕβρις refers to excessive behaviour. Another characteristic that I would regard as important is the relation of ὕβρις to τιμή, or rather to ἀτιμία, since excessive behaviour leads to disregard of another's claim to τιμή.<sup>44</sup> It is exactly in this light that we should understand the conflicts that form the nucleus of each poem, and it is certainly in this way that τιμή as 'honour' seems to make sense. The issues raised are moral, since they refer to the violation of proper limits; more important, the issues are seen by the heroes themselves as moral.

True, one could object and say that Achilles' subjective perception of Agamemnon's behaviour does not justify such an interpretation; if nothing else, it is only an isolated case, which is in conflict, moreover, with the attitude of the other heroes, who express no negative moral judgement against Agamemnon during the quarrel;<sup>45</sup> besides, as Adkins notes, '*Qua* more powerful chieftain...he [Agamemnon] has a claim to take Briseis if he will; *qua* leader of the Greeks, he must maintain himself as an *agathos*....The one is permitted, the other is demanded, by this

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<sup>42</sup> There are certainly differences in the motivation of Agamemnon, Paris and the suitors: Agamemnon and Paris do not seem to have the intention to slight a particular hero, but are rather driven by their passions and egotism; Paris is frustratingly indifferent to the whole situation, while Agamemnon, on the other hand, easily lapses into a personal attack against Achilles, his arrogance being directed in this way towards a specific victim. The suitors' case is different: they seem to be consciously disregarding all the principles of the Homeric code for the sake of their own interest. Whether or not one is consciously or intentionally offending or wronging another is of no importance not because the notion of moral responsibility is absent from the Homeric world, but because in real life such a distinction is of no great importance; see Williams (1994:63ff) on the difference between moral and legal responsibility. Besides, even if we accept that Agamemnon actually made a mistake, which he later tries to redress, the mistake lies in his miscalculation of the result that the quarrel would have on the war, and not in his attitude as such towards Achilles; being under the influence of passion, he seems less 'guilty' than the suitors, but he is actually deeply responsible for the dispute and this is the view expressed by other heroes too; for the importance of self-control against excess see I 255-56, Σ 107-10.

<sup>43</sup> See MacDowell (1976), Fisher (1976) and (1979), Cairns (1996).

<sup>44</sup> Greene (1944) 22; Fisher (1976) 183; Cairns (1996) 6ff. See Aristot. *Rhet.* 1378b32: ὕβρεως δὲ ἀτιμία.

<sup>45</sup> Ὑβρις appears three times in the poem in relation to Agamemnon, exactly as many as αἰσχρόν, Adkins's most powerful term of disapproval, see p. 38, n.32.

competitive system of values'.<sup>46</sup> Agamemnon's legitimate claim, according to the Homeric code, does raise a complex issue relating to a conflict of forces or demands within the code on the one hand, and to the hero's character on the other, and it will have to be postponed for the moment, for it pertains to the whole atmosphere or perspective of the poem. I will briefly discuss, however, the apparent silence of the other Greeks, for it will take us to the most interesting role of αἰδώς in Homeric thought.<sup>47</sup>

First of all, quarrels or affronts can be quite common among heroes;<sup>48</sup> as is often the case in real life as well, the disinterested observers do not necessarily take sides with one or the other party; most often they simply attempt to bring over a reconciliation rather than put a stress on moral responsibility, since a statement of this nature would prove disastrous; it usually happens that both parties are checked, even if only mildly, and both parties are equally supported. The quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles is certainly exceptional, for the mere reason that Achilles enjoys a uniquely privileged relation to Zeus, which leads to the unpleasant consequence of defeat and the fear of an imminent disaster. It would seem inevitable that the dimension of the quarrel be sensed only *post eventum*, not because the result of Agamemnon's behaviour is necessarily more important than his intentions, but because the result of Achilles' wrath begs for a reconsideration of the whole issue. For the audience, who already know the disaster that is to follow, the unfolding of the quarrel

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<sup>46</sup> Adkins (1960a) 51.

<sup>47</sup> I focus on the *Iliad* at this point, because moral issues are definitely clearer in the *Odyssey*; however, the principles are applicable to both poems.

<sup>48</sup> A typical example is Ψ 473-98, the quarrel between the lesser Aias and Idomeneus, in which case Achilles intervenes and prevents the dispute; here Achilles is a third, disinterested party, talking of a νέμεσις that the heroes themselves would feel, were some one else involved in a dispute, and he obviously avoids siding with one or the other hero.

creates a suffocating atmosphere evocative of tragedy, which offers in this way a highly perceptive, almost sophisticated, view of human life.

A quarrel with another Greek leader can certainly not be a threat to Agamemnon's ἀρετή or τιμή; losing the war, on the other hand, is obviously a threat, since it entails a diminution of power. It would be absurd to believe that the two could ever have the same impact on such an external quality as status or prestige. However, this does not prevent the quarrel from raising an essentially moral issue. Agamemnon violates the limits of Achilles' τιμή; by taking Briseis away he disregards Achilles' claim on her, which implies his virtually underrating Achilles' value. As noted (43) Achilles himself talks of Agamemnon's behaviour in terms of ὕβρις: Agamemnon may not have the intention to offend Achilles in particular, yet his attitude is offensive after all, and it inevitably stirs up Achilles' passionate reaction; Achilles also speaks of ἀναιδείη (A 149, 158, cf. I 372-73), referring to Agamemnon's lack of respect for the code of ethics itself which demands that he should accord Achilles his proper τιμή. Achilles feels that he has been wronged, the whole plot is evolving around his protest against Agamemnon's improper conduct; he violates Agamemnon's τιμή in his turn, in a wish to react and reaffirm his own status, and although this reaction is justifiable to a certain extent, it is at the same time checked by the code of ethics: Achilles owes due respect to Agamemnon who is φέρτερος, ἐπεὶ πλεόνεσσιν ἀνάσσει (A 281).

True, Achilles' protest stems from his sensitivity towards his own personal τιμή, and not from a concern for Agamemnon's improper or immoral behaviour as such, but it is also true that, when being wronged, one hardly ever shows concern for the wrongdoer's intentions, and if this should happen, it happens only after one's anger has been assuaged. At the same time, the Greeks do not have a reason why they should



interfere with what is still at this point a personal dispute between Agamemnon and Achilles, until the moment when the consequences fall upon them too. Nestor, being certainly more discerning and perceptive, can anticipate the danger, and being also older and more respectful, can intervene in an attempt to avoid the anticipated outcome; but no one else has the right or even perhaps the wish to openly pronounce a judgement. If Nestor seems at this point to be talking in prudential rather than in moral terms, this is not because no moral issue is raised, but rather because at such crucial moments prudence is more effective. No other hero exhibits Achilles' self-assertiveness or confidence against Agamemnon that would justify a moral appreciation of the latter's character.<sup>49</sup>

At I 523, however, Phoenix tries to persuade Achilles to help the Greeks; until now, he says, it was not *νεμεσσητόν* that he should be angry with Agamemnon; *νέμεσις* is indeed the response that improper behaviour causes to a distanced observer who is not affected by this behaviour, yet disapproves of it on the grounds of its violation of accepted norms.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, by following the occurrences of *νέμεσις*, we seem to obtain a view of the principles that define behavioural norms among members of Homeric society. Thus, we hear at T 182 that it is not *νεμεσσητόν* for a king to make amends to some one whom he has first insulted; and we hear at Ψ 494 that one feels *νέμεσις* when witnessing a quarrel.

All three instances of *νέμεσις* just quoted are important for our understanding of the moral issue that the dispute between Agamemnon and Achilles raises: quarrels are

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<sup>49</sup> When Diomedes, who may be seen as a more prudent counterpart of Achilles (Griffin (1995) 27), is confronted by Agamemnon (Δ 370-400), the hero reacts with *αἰδώς* (402), keeping silent, and when his companion Sthenelus reacts in his place, the hero checks him by saying that he feels no *νέμεσις* for Agamemnon; for after all it will be to him that the outcome of the war will be ascribed (412-18).

<sup>50</sup> See Cairns (1993a) 51-54; (1993b) 158.

disapproved of, for they can certainly lead to ὕβρις, excessive behaviour that violates the limits of another's τιμή, and the 'attempt to increase one's honour at the expense of another member of the group is occasion for νέμεσις'.<sup>51</sup> Achilles' reaction, nonetheless, does not cause νέμεσις, for he is defending his offended τιμή, and although his own behaviour may be equally excessive as Agamemnon's, the very fact that he did not initiate the quarrel operates as an extenuating argument for his case. Agamemnon's responsibility, on the other hand, is made clear by Odysseus' reference at T 182: he was the first to transgress the limits of Achilles' τιμή.

Νέμεσις reflects the opinion of a disinterested and detached public, and it refers rather clearly to moral evaluation of one's behaviour; indignation is the expected reaction of this public when one exceeds one's own limits and transgresses, as a consequence, the limits of another. This is a matter that is closely linked, as noted above, with the idea of τιμή as 'honour' or the vital field of existence of an individual: my τιμή or honour circumscribes the freedom of another's actions, and vice versa; reciprocity is essential for the survival not merely of the individual, but of the social group as well. Competitiveness is legitimate, or rather necessary, but it need not mean amorality, nor certainly immorality.

Αἰδώς is the counterpart of νέμεσις as the emotion that 'foresees and seeks to forestall *nemesis*'.<sup>52</sup> If νέμεσις operates on the individual from the outside, αἰδώς is the mechanism that operates internally towards the same end: the inhibition and prevention of improper behaviour. The public is still a point of reference; αἰδώς, however, further implies self-criticism. As already noted (35), the sanction provided by shame is often

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<sup>51</sup> Cairns (1993a) 161.

<sup>52</sup> Cairns (1993a) 52. See also Greene (1944) 19: Αἰδώς and Νέμεσις are two forms of Θέμις.

believed to be an impediment to the development of moral thought; when one acts by taking into consideration the opinion of a public, the act is motivated by a concern for self-interest, and it cannot, therefore, be regarded as a proper moral act. Such a view obviously disregards essential characteristics both of shame in particular and of human behaviour in general.

Before I proceed with αἰδώς, it has to be noted that the argument that a self-interested moral behaviour forms actually an oxymoron rests on a very theoretical presupposition that would demand the elimination of the self. But the self cannot be eliminated; it can only be limited within its proper confines. No act, however disinterested at first sight, can avoid the involvement of the self. For it is through the entity that we call our 'self' that we perceive life, mentally, emotionally and physically. Moreover, self-interest can indeed refer to selfishness and self-absorption, but it can also refer to the elementary wish for survival, literally and metaphorically. How one perceives one's own self and how one conditions one's own behaviour on the basis of this perception is after all a personal matter, determined by denominators such as one's disposition or character, culture and education, reason and will power.<sup>53</sup>

This being said, it has to be noted that αἰδώς should not necessarily be taken to imply self-interested motivation; nor should it be seen only as an external sanction of human behaviour. Once these two points be accepted, αἰδώς appears to assume a totally different function in Homeric society, a function which allows the possibility of internalised moral behaviour and therefore a developed sense of morality.

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<sup>53</sup> For the importance of culture or education in one's character see Aristot. *Rhet.* 1370a6: καὶ γὰρ τὸ εἰθισμένον ὡσπερ πεφυκὸς ἤδη γίγνεται ὅμοιον γὰρ τοι τὸ ἔθος τῇ φύσει; cf. *Rhet.* 1354a7; *Pol.* 1332a40.

Doubtless, particularly misleading for the appreciation of the role of αἰδώς has been Dodds' classification of Homeric society among the so-called 'shame-cultures', as opposed to 'guilt-cultures'.<sup>54</sup> His statement that 'Homeric man's highest good is not the enjoyment of a quiet conscience, but the enjoyment of *timê*, public esteem ... And the strongest moral force which Homeric man knows is not the fear of god, but respect for public opinion, *aidôs*',<sup>55</sup> does make a point, since we can hardly talk of conscience as such in the Homeric poems, yet it also seems to put too great a stress on the distinction between shame and guilt. As will become clear when examining the poems themselves, the gods correspond to a peculiar form of justice which is closer to the order of nature and life than to an idea of good as opposed to evil that would indeed support man's fear of their punishment; with divine sanctions being weak, αἰδώς does seem to become more important and powerful a sanction, yet its effectiveness should not be taken to result merely from the 'pressure of social conformity';<sup>56</sup> for αἰδώς, or 'concern for honour, even when it is acute, betokens no simple reliance on external sanctions alone', and it actually denotes that 'one is brought to a negative evaluation of oneself in respect of some ideal, and the catalyst may come from within as well as from without'.<sup>57</sup>

That αἰδώς is more than a vain obsession with or fear of criticism and disapproval has been successfully illustrated by Cairns (1993a); since shame is an emotion, it has a cognitive aspect which entails evaluation; thus, the role it has in Homeric society is that of a principle 'which renders one sensitive to the general values

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<sup>54</sup> Dodds (1951) 17-18, 26 n. 106, 28ff. For a discussion of Dodds' thesis, as well as of the distinction between shame and guilt, see Cairns (1993a) 27ff., 48ff.

<sup>55</sup> Dodds (1951) 17f.

<sup>56</sup> Dodds (1981) 18.

<sup>57</sup> Cairns (1993a) 43, 18.

of society and which inhibits departure from them'.<sup>58</sup> When it comes to relations among two or more members of Homeric society, αἰδώς and its counterpart νέμεσις become the principles that prescribe one's action or non-action, thus underlining the heroes' deep sense of self-consciousness; more important, they are the principles which prevent the violation of another's τιμή, which demand in fact that the τιμή of each individual be properly acknowledged and honoured, thus assuming a particularly moral meaning.<sup>59</sup>

It would appear, then, that αἰδώς does not refer simply to one's concern for fame or good name, but it can, or rather it should also be seen as a mechanism, social as well as notional or emotional, which can indeed operate internally as a sanction that can determine one's decisions on the basis of a distinction between right and wrong. When one's behaviour is disapproved of, an essential appreciation of right and wrong is presupposed, even if subconsciously; the person criticised accordingly appreciates his own behaviour, always, no doubt, proportionately to his sensitivity towards the code of ethics. The idea that other people form of an agent is not an arbitrary and haphazard judgement void of significance and expressed for the sake of criticism itself - allowances always made for exceptions; approval of one's behaviour is based on the acknowledgement that the agent has acted properly or morally according to the established norms of a society, both for the one who approves and for the one who is approved of. Shame entails more than a shallow obsession with good reputation, for the painful truth is that what we are is often defined by what other people think of us, this being a reality

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<sup>58</sup> Cairns (1993a) 154; for the prospective, inhibitory use of shame in Homer see 48ff.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Cairns (1993b) 163: 'If I can point out that any impartial individual would feel νέμεσις at a certain course of action, if I can argue that you too would feel νέμεσις were another to act as you do, if I can feel νέμεσις at my own conduct or reject conduct because it is of the sort at which I should feel νέμεσις, then I acknowledge that individuals can endorse, appropriate, and internalise the values of their society, and so it is wrong to suggest that Homeric man simply conforms to external standards out of fear of punishment or disgrace'.

which we do not have the sobriety or the courage to accept, while what we think of ourselves may prove to be no more than an illusion. Our individual and unique perception of the world is certainly not always in accord with the reality that exists beyond the limits of our existence, and the opinion of other people may often oblige us to confront an inconsistency. Applied to the issue of morality, disapproval of one's behaviour may illuminate the existence of defects of which the agent himself is not aware or which he is not willing to acknowledge. One's response to such criticism is, as noted, proportionate to one's sensitivity towards morality, and shame can become 'a matter of the self's judging the self in terms of some ideal that is one's own'.<sup>60</sup>

Dodds' aforementioned statement is followed by the example of Hector: Hector, we are told, 'goes with open eyes to his death' for he feels shame before the Trojans;<sup>61</sup> in other words, the hero's decision to die is conditioned by the fear of criticism. The same fear is supposed to underlie Hector's decision to leave his wife and his son and fight for his people (Z 441-46). But, as Hooker observes, neither utterance is 'typical of the way that the heroes in general reason or behave', and this is exactly where the interest lies, in the lines' ability to 'illuminate Hector's own character and his role in the *Iliad*'.<sup>62</sup> Hector is most probably the most integral character of the *Iliad*, and this impression is largely the result of his sensitivity to propriety; his is not the boring, superficial propriety of someone who follows blindly the rules of society out of fear of disgrace; rather, this fear is part of his very mode of thinking in the sense that what may become the object of criticism is essentially wrong, and it should therefore be avoided. No other hero responds to αἰδώς in the same manner, unless we look at

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<sup>60</sup> Cairns (1993a) 16.

<sup>61</sup> Dodds (1951) 18.

<sup>62</sup> In McAuslan, Walcot (1998) 15; cf. Cairns (1993a) 79-83.

young Telemachus in the *Odyssey*, and it is this response which contributes to his character; the poet's characterisation proves again remarkable.

Αἰδώς and νέμεσις, then, as well as ὕβρις, may be said to be terms which allow us a view of the Homeric concept of morality. Excess is condemned, since it results in the violation of morality itself, and public opinion can operate internally as the sanction that conditions one's behaviour, not necessarily implying a self-interested concern for status, financial or social, but often denoting a conscious distinction between right and wrong, which is the basis of moral behaviour and responsibility. The terms are used in both poems when the heroes' action has to be seen in its moral dimension; ἀναιδείη and νέμεσις are relevant both to Agamemnon and the suitors, for these are the terms that evoke the principles that have proven inoperative in their case; and these are certainly the principles that demand moral behaviour.

A question remains: if moral behaviour is indeed possible in Homeric society, and if such ideas as shame and public opinion or disapproval are capable of functioning as internal sanctions of such a behaviour, why is it that no distinction is ever drawn between mistake and moral error, and that consequently results seem always more important than intentions? The question obviously relates to another anachronism which results in misleading associations and conclusions, since it demands that we appreciate and interpret Homeric thought on the criteria of an entirely different system of thought.

The intentions or the motivation behind an act are indeed very important, although it is worth considering whether this is not so much the case when an act that should be regarded as immoral has been caused by a moral motivation, but rather when a moral act

has been caused by what is regarded as an immoral, or occasionally a non-moral, motivation. I would believe that the idea of a pure morality basically implies, or aims at, a person who acts morally because of an inner disposition towards morality, and this is perhaps the legitimate *ideal* of any man who has ever thought on good and evil. But as I said, this is an ideal which aims at 'creating' agents of moral acts, and not at justifying immoral acts.<sup>63</sup> It would appear, then, that in the field of morality, as in all fields of human action, results are always more important; in actual life good intentions can never, and should never function as a justification of an act that implies failure, moral or not. Morality is basically a social matter, even if it finally receives a metaphysical or theological dimension.

The idea that Homeric society is preoccupied with results rather than intentions is closely related to the interpretation of τιμή and αἰδώς; if the terms should be seen as indicative of one's obsessive pursuit of status, it is inevitable that one's actions should be interpreted accordingly as being appreciated on the basis of results. I hope that it has become rather clear by now that neither term should be seen only in the light of competitiveness. If internally motivated behaviour is possible, one's intentions are indeed of interest, since it is the intentions that define this behaviour. When Achilles accuses Agamemnon of ἀναιδείη (A 149, 158), he talks of his excessively self-interested

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<sup>63</sup>I have to confess that my knowledge of Kant's philosophy is indirect, and therefore my interpretation of its principles may actually be mistaken; however, as far as I can see, the point of stressing the intentions of an act is to ensure that a moral act is not caused by immoral or non-moral motivation, and consequently that moral behaviour is not a chance event; as Williams says (1993: 68), theories such as that of Kant or even that of Hume, emphasise the importance of motivation because 'the man who has a moral motivation for doing things of the non-self-regarding sort, has a disposition or general motive for doing things of that sort; whereas the self-interested man has no such steady motive, for it will always be only luck if what benefits others happens to coincide with what, by the limited criteria of self-interest, happens to benefit him'. Obviously, what we have here is a desirable result and a way to accomplish it; a moral act is better ensured to happen when the agent is inclined to act morally. But does this principle also imply that an immoral act which is the result of moral intentions should be regarded moral on the grounds of these intentions? Or should we believe that moral intentions inevitably lead to moral results? For it seems that the theory should, at least, aim at providing the principles of constructing the best possible society in terms of morality, and not the justification, as I said, for acts that fail to meet the desired end.



motivation which prevents him from acknowledging the τιμή of another; and when the Greek embassy comes to Achilles to announce Agamemnon's regret, the hero replies in the most remarkable way: ἐχθρὸς γάρ μοι κείνος ὁμῶς Ἄϊδαο πύλῃσιν | ὅς χ' ἕτερον μὲν κεύθη ἐνὶ φρεσίν, ἄλλο δὲ εἶπη (I 312-13).

The fact that results are indeed of great importance does not necessarily entail the unimportance of intentions. The very plot of the poems seem to prove exactly the opposite. In both poems we have the violation of a so-called co-operative principle: in both poems the breach of established limits for the sake of one's own success may certainly not affect one's status in society, yet it proves disastrous for society itself and is therefore not approved of. If we should insist on the distinction between competitive and co-operative values, we could say that ξενία is an essentially co-operative principle, which has, however, consequences on the competitive level. It is a social mechanism that prevents the violation of the limits that exist in a society: both guest and host are obliged to observe these limits on which their relation actually relies. The result is both social stability, as aimed at by morality, and social status for the individual - both the guest and the host.

The poet, innocent of the distinction between values, is certainly not concerned to put the emphasis on one or the other aspect of the violation. The two co-exist, being of equal importance. If we should forget for a moment the discussions on competition and co-operation, we would see perhaps the poet's own view more clearly, and we would perceive the poems for what they really are: the narration of a sequence of events which seem to underline man's helplessness before life and before the consequences of his own actions and decisions in which he becomes entangled, his inability to grasp the meaning of that slight single moment when right and wrong

become fused.<sup>64</sup> Each poem presents us with a conflict between right and wrong, the difference being that, while in the *Odyssey* this is the typical conflict between the good and the bad characters, in the *Iliad* the situation is more complex than that: on the one hand, the typical conflict exists here as well, but is reflected in a less sharp distinction between heroes who are portrayed positively and heroes who are portrayed rather negatively, without, however, necessarily creating a tension between good and bad characters: Agamemnon and Paris do indeed retain their claim to ἀρετή, but it cannot be doubted at the same time that the whole plot is thus constructed as to highlight the negative elements of their character that lead to the conflict in the first place;<sup>65</sup> the poet is not interested to prove that their ἀρετή remains intact, but rather to give a stimulus and create the necessary tension for the plot. On the other hand, there is in the poem an internal conflict, which is much more powerful and compelling, representing the ambivalent wishes of one single hero; this being the case especially with regard to Achilles, it enhances the tragic atmosphere of the poem.

If we wish to perceive the poems in this light, we have to accept the way in which right and wrong are perceived by the poet, his heroes and his audience, and not to seek our idea of right and wrong instead. Even if it is true that competitive failure is an important slight on one's τιμή and ἀρετή, we have to remember that the negative connotations that such an idea bears for us simply did not exist at the time: criticism of such a failure could imply more than a plain diminution of one's status. More important, we have to consider that, even in this highly competitive society, there is a

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<sup>64</sup> The possibility of a conflict between such demands is obvious especially in the *Iliad*, for in the *Odyssey* right and wrong are very clearly defined and opposed to each other. This is one of the crucial differences between the two poems, and the basis of the assumption that there is a development as regards morality from the older to the more recent poem.

<sup>65</sup> See Dover (1983) 39; Garvie (1994) on ζ 187-90.

limit to one's pursuit of one's own personal interest, and the limit is defined by the very idea of τιμή.

Doubtless, the Homeric world is innocent of a sophisticated philosophical system and language, but this is after all a matter related to the history of philosophy and not to human behaviour as such. If morality corresponds to an essential function of human consciousness, it would be absurd to insist that Homeric man is ignorant of such a function. The Homeric world is a real world despite its tendency to exaggeration, and its characters are real characters living, fighting, coming into conflict with one another, but also respecting one another, and thus proving themselves capable of making choices. The absence of an elaborate philosophical system that would explore the possibilities and the potential of human morality does not entail that morality in its essentials is impossible. And the issue is whether human behaviour as described in the poems can be seen as conditioned by a distinction between right and wrong, which is an essentially moral distinction.

*'A Peculiar Concept of Justice'*

In 1912, in his book *From Religion to Philosophy*, F. M. Cornford talked of the important relationship between the ideas of Destiny and Law. Cornford begins by setting the question of the origins of Milesian philosophy: the principles of the pre-Socratics, such as Thales' water or Anaximander's indefinite, are certainly not ideas based on or deduced from plain everyday experience; therefore, Cornford believes, there must be an ideological background on which the philosophers draw, and this background is that of early religion. Philosophy is then interpreted as the rationalisation of the already existing ideas on life and nature which were part of religious thought, and were expressed up to that point in the less abstract or theoretic form of mythology.<sup>1</sup>

Looking for the relation between early Greek religion and early Greek philosophy, Cornford notices that the vocabulary and imagery that philosophy uses are basically those of religion, which are now adapted to a different purpose. Ideas such as *δίκη*, *τὸ χρεών*, *μοῖρα*, are all used by the Milesians in descriptions of nature's workings, providing what seems to be a totally different approach to life. But, Cornford insists, the difference is only superficial: if *μοῖρα* and *δίκη* feature in philosophy as

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<sup>1</sup> The pre-Socratics owe much of their ideas to Near Eastern thought, but this does not actually affect the argument about the relation between religion and philosophy, even though it obviously transposes it to a different level.

indicative of a natural order, this is not a new idea born out of the philosophers' enlightened thought, but in fact it is the basis on which religion itself was formed.

Cornford seems today to have gone too far. According to him, μοῖρα has originally a spatial meaning; it denotes the division or departmentalisation of a tribe, an idea which once related to that of taboo assumes a definite moral nuance: there are limits which should not be transgressed. This idea is then believed to have been projected onto nature as a whole, whereby each element is seen as having its own proper limits; order is maintained when limits are observed, when taboo is not violated. In this scheme, the notions of δίκη, νόμος and νέμεσις, or ὄρκος, are along with that of μοῖρα evocative of this basic idea of departmentalisation in nature and society. Μοῖρα is what ought to be if order should be observed. When the word comes to denote fate, it does not imply a blind and inescapable necessity, but instead a moral order which can, but should not, be violated. Relying on comparative anthropological data, Cornford often reaches conclusions that might seem arbitrary or at least dangerous, provoking scepticism and reservation. I will not deal here with the details of his argumentation, avoiding thus a field that is beyond both my discipline and the scope of this thesis. Nonetheless, his conclusions on the moral quality of μοῖρα and the relation between Destiny and Law are worth considering.

Some forty years later, L. R. Palmer (1950) examined the semantic relationship between the above mentioned terms, taking the discussion even further by setting the question of a possible Indo-European origin of this idea of departmentalisation. Setting out from καιρός, which means 'measure, opportune moment', Palmer noticed that the word often appears to have a moral sense; meaning also the 'mark', it can be used to denote that one has gone beyond a certain 'mark' or 'boundary', that is beyond a

certain 'limit'. Observing that the word is often combined with δίκη, he goes on to examine the possible semantic affinity between words that constitute the basic moral vocabulary of Greek, thus reflecting the Greek *Weltanschauung*. Δίκη, μοῖρα and αἴσα, ὄρος, νόμος, δαίμων are all related to each other: they are 'boundary words', which follow the same more or less semantic development from the meaning 'mark, indication' towards that of 'boundary, limit' and finally that of 'lot, fate'. For these 'boundary words', he offers the following scheme of semantic ramifications:<sup>2</sup>

#### Mark

indication; point out, say

characteristic

aim, goal, winning post; throw

#### Boundary mark

(of space) limit; measure; territory

(of time) opportune moment, appointed time, season, year

(metaphorical) dividing line, decision, judgement

#### Outline

shape, form, mode, manner

The idea to be detected, then, in words such as μοῖρα, αἴσα, δίκη and καιρός is that of limitation, as experienced originally in nature itself: all forms of life obey this principle according to which they are confined each within the boundaries of its own nature, and this subsequent order is seen not only as natural and inescapable, but also as moral, in the sense that it is consistent with itself. Thus, setting off as terms that

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<sup>2</sup> Palmer (1950) 153.

denote natural limits, μοῖρα, αἴσα and δίκη soon attain a moral significance and expand their application from the outer to the inner experience of man. Similarly, ὑπερβασία, a word used to denote impropriety, is simply the transgression of the established limits. What Cornford had observed when examining the relationship of early Greek religion and philosophy, Palmer now attempts to prove on the grounds of etymology.

What is of interest for the present thesis is, first, the fact that there exists some relationship between μοῖρα and δίκη, and second that this relationship stems from their moral connotations and their reference to this 'peculiar concept of justice'.<sup>3</sup> The fact that the idea of measure was an essential part of Greek thought is certainly beyond doubt; one can remember sayings such as μηδὲν ἄγαν or πᾶν μέτρον ἄριστον.<sup>4</sup> What will be examined here is how this idea is related to the concept of fate, and how it is further evoked by δίκη. In what follows I will discuss the general characteristics of the ideas of fate and justice in an attempt to explore the relation to the semantic field of μοῖρα and δίκη in the Homeric poems, focusing on the elements that are present in both poems, the differences being left for when the poems themselves will be examined. Hopefully, it will become clear that the words form indeed an important part of Homeric thought, not simply with regard to fate and justice, but also with regard to morality and to the Homeric concept of the divine and its relation to man.

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<sup>3</sup> See p. 10, n.5.

<sup>4</sup> Greene (1944) 20 sees this idea as resulting from the 'instinctive feeling of a barrier' between man and god, which should also be related to the idea of divine φθόνος; this is the 'reply of *Themis* to *Moirai*, of *Nomos* to *Physis*; it is the attempt, by shrewdness and self-discipline, to circumvent the innate dangers of life'.

## 2.1 *Fate and Moira*<sup>5</sup>

A belief in fate seems to imply that there are certain events in life which have been already determined and defined by an agent or power that is external to and independent of man, which events are inevitable in their accomplishment. What this non-human, and hence most probably divine, power has determined is therefore seen as what must be, and what must be, as a consequence, is seen as what will be - although, in reality the process is quite the reverse, that is, one is inclined to see what is or has been as part of a 'what must have been' that lies actually in the past. Such a concept can easily lapse into a fatalistic approach to life, but it can also be no more than an occasional resort when no other explanation can be provided for unwelcome and unpredictable changes in life - what under different circumstances would be interpreted as chance.

Fate and chance seem actually to be indicative of two fundamentally distinct outlooks on life, yet they are also remarkably close as regards their essential origin: they both seem to stem from the realisation of life's ultimate and utter unpredictability or irrationality; but whereas a belief in fate accepts that behind this unpredictable quality there must be a reasoning, albeit incomprehensible by the human capacities of intelligence and perception, the belief in chance apparently accepts no reasoning as such. Although chance does not necessarily come in conflict with a belief in the divine, nor does it entail its absence, still fate fits more easily in a system which provides an explanation for everything in life in terms of divine causation. As Burkert notes,

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<sup>5</sup> For the sake of clarity, it has to be noted that 'fate' is used to denote the concept in general, with no necessary relation being implied to the Homeric approach, for which 'moira' is used; 'moira', at the same time is used for all the terms which denote the Homeric idea of predetermination, while when a reference to particular terms is necessary, the Greek will be used.



religion attempts to 'make sense' out of chaos and thus reduce the complexity and anxiety that surround man,<sup>6</sup> and chance does not seem capable of providing the solace necessary for this.<sup>7</sup>

One could actually say that moira is nothing but chance itself, though invested with a moral and religious meaning. Moira may provide man with a reasoning behind life, yet it is not itself based on some reasoning. Rather, it represents the haphazard and irrational distribution of portions among men, which, however, is sufficiently effective as an explanation of man's inevitable confrontation with a 'world full of disconcerting events, scandal and trickery'.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the belief that the future has been already predetermined, an established course that lies ahead of man waiting for its accomplishment, could be seen as a latent human wish for control over life: admitting the existence of a reasoning in life, man seems to obtain strength from the illusion that if he knows of the future, he will be able to manipulate it according to his own personal wishes and plans.<sup>9</sup> Life and moira prove, however, more powerful than man in most cases, and certainly capricious and irrational.

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<sup>6</sup> Burkert (1996) 26. The idea that religion creates sense by 'reduction of complexity' was formulated by Niklas Luhmann in his *Funktion der Religion* (Frankfurt, 1977), for which see Burkert (ibid.).

<sup>7</sup> Τύχη becomes itself a goddess later on in Greek religion, a fact that Burkert (1985:185f.) attributes to the decline of the belief in the personal gods because of the way they were presented in poetry. 'Of the existence and actuality of the Homeric gods there can be no proof, but no man of intelligence can dispute the importance of phenomena and situations designated by abstract terms. *Tyche*, the lucky hit, enjoyed the swiftest rise to fame' (186).

<sup>8</sup> Burkert (1996) 178. Most interesting is the appearance of τύχη side by side with μοῖρα in Archilochus (16 West): πάντα τύχη καὶ μοῖρα, Περικλεες, ἀνδρὶ δίδωσι; along with the references to ἀναγκαία τύχη (e.g. Soph. *El.* 48, *Ajax* 485), the line seems to underline the fact that fate is basically a chance event, since it is not distributed on the basis of some reasoning nor certainly on the basis of merit, but rather haphazardly instead. See also Ψ 78-79, where Patroclus' death is presented by the hero himself almost as a chance event: ἀλλ' ἐμὲ μὲν κῆρ ἀμφέχανε στυγερή, ἣ περ λάχε γιγνόμενον περ.

<sup>9</sup> One can think of the importance that divination, oracles and prophecies have in religious systems; the future lies ahead waiting to be decoded. For a discussion on mediators, signs and divination as a means of turning chance events into a coherent system, see Burkert (1996) chapter 7.

In the Homeric poems chance never actually appears, the word τύχη is never employed as an explanation, and even events that would normally be seen as chance events, such as the breaking of a bow, missing one's target, or even one's death, are all interpreted either as the result of divine intervention or as moira.<sup>10</sup> Moira, on the other hand, has an all compelling status in the poems; along with the incessant divine action it is responsible for the impression of determination that is evoked. However, as will hopefully become clear in due course, the Homeric concept of fate as expressed by moira is far from implying an idea of determinism or fatalism; most frequently it is simply the explanation or the interpretation given to life *post eventum*. As Cornford remarks, 'the ordinance of Fate is not a mere blind and senseless barrier of impossibility'.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, even if Homeric fate should not after all be regarded as a blind and cruel power irrevocably determining human life in all of its aspects, its importance for Homeric thought, and along with that for the unfolding of the Homeric plots, remains an undoubted truth.

The terms which we have to examine are μοῖρα and αἴσα, along with their derivatives or cognates, such as μόρος and εἴμαρτο, μόρ(σ)ιμος (-ον), and αἴσιμος (-ον), αἴσιος, ἐναίσιμος, ἄμμορος, δύσμορος, while there are also words which are not linked to them at all etymologically, such as πεπρωμένος, πότμος, οἶτος and κήρ; the word θέσφατον, also evoking predetermination, is obviously related to the gods, and I would therefore prefer to distinguish it from the aforementioned terms. Neither μοῖρα and αἴσα nor their derivatives are limited to the sense of fate; there is instead a field of meaning which we will have to define in order that the implications of moira as fate be made clear.

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<sup>10</sup> For such instances of divine intervention see, for example, E 290-96, O 461-70, Ψ 382-87, χ 272-76.

<sup>11</sup> Cornford (1912) 13.

Even a most superficial reading of the poems shows that, of the above mentioned terms, μοῖρα has the most extensive application and the widest semantic field. This may indeed be the result of metrical necessity, for obviously the terms present a variety of metrical qualities.<sup>12</sup> It seems, though, equally possible that, by the time at least of our poems, the word was well-established in its use, being more powerful in its connotations than any other term; or it could simply be that αἴσα, the second most important term, being less transparent in its etymology, was not as effective as μοῖρα. For it often appears that despite their frequency the other terms are not always or totally interchangeable with μοῖρα: πότμος and οἶτος, for example, are definitely limited in their application and implications.<sup>13</sup>

Πότμος is etymologically related to the verb πίπτω, and it is therefore interpreted as 'that which befalls one', and consequently one's destiny; the reference is obviously made to an event that is imposed on man from without, and which appears to be no more than a chance event; the word comes finally to denote especially the unpleasant destiny of death.<sup>14</sup> Out of its thirteen occurrences in the *Iliad*, eleven are associated with death, most frequently in combination with the verb ἐφέπειν,<sup>15</sup> and only

<sup>12</sup> If we should confine ourselves to the nouns μοῖρα, αἴσα and μόρος, the different metrical potential of each word is evident: μόρος consists of two short syllables and may thus occupy a biceps position; μοῖρα and αἴσα, on the other hand, correspond with one long and one short syllable, thus falling into the princeps position; however, the fact that μοῖρα begins with a consonant and αἴσα with a vowel entails further differentiations between the two words. Thus, ὑπὲρ αἴσαν and ὑπέρμορον are more frequent than ὑπὲρ μοῖραν which is obviously more difficult to accommodate. For a similar metrical explanation of the distinction μόριμος and μόρσιμος, see Chantraine (1968) s.v. μείρομαι, 678. However, μοῖρα and κῆρα, although belonging to different cases, do have the same metrical qualities, which explains why they both occupy the fifth foot fairly often; see Lee (1961)196. For the terms 'princeps' and 'biceps' positions, see M. L. West, *Greek Metre*, Oxford 1982, 19.

<sup>13</sup> Dietrich (1965), noting the difference in the application of the words, both in quantitative and qualitative terms, and, more important, being supported by the evidence of popular cult practices and inscriptions, distinguishes μοῖρα as the only word related to actual popular belief, and infers that μοῖρα corresponded to an actual goddess. Dietrich's position will be discussed in more detail in due course.

<sup>14</sup> Chantraine (1968), s. v. πίπτω.

<sup>15</sup> B 359, Z 412, H 52, O 495, Y 337, Φ 588, X 39, all with some form of ἐφέπειν; Δ 396, Π 857= X 363, Σ 96.

twice, at Δ 170 and Λ 263, do we find the word with the verb ἀναπίμπλημι denoting instead one's life, the fulfilment of which entails once again death. In the *Odyssey* the word is used exclusively with the meaning of death, in more or less standard formulaic lines such as θανέειν καὶ πότμον ἐπισπεῖν ( δ 562, ε 308, μ 342, ξ 274, cf. Η 52).<sup>16</sup>

Of a similarly restricted application is οἶτος. Its etymology is controversial: according to Chantraine,<sup>17</sup> two different solutions have been proposed, the first relating the word to the verb εἶμι, in which case οἶτος could be seen as 'la marche de l' homme vers le terme de son destin', the second, and the less plausible as Chantraine believes, relating the word to the Avestan aêta- which has an original sense of 'part' and is related to αἶσα.<sup>18</sup> The word is used in expressions that recall the use of πότμος (Θ 34, cf. Λ 263; γ 134, cf. λ 372) or μόρος (Γ 417, ν 384, cf. Φ 133), and can refer to death (Γ 417, Ω 388, γ 134, ν 384), one's life (Θ 34= 354= 465), or one's lot or fate (Ι 563, α 350, θ 459, 578). Both πότμος and οἶτος are of a fairly limited application in the poems, hardly being able to illuminate the Homeric concept of fate; therefore, I would not regard them as essential to the following examination and they will be referred to hereafter only if necessary. What is worth bearing in mind, perhaps, is that both words have negative connotations in both poems, πότμος in particular being almost equivalent, as I said, to death. As we will presently see, both the reference to an unwelcome event and the relation to death are important characteristics of the concept as expressed by the more important terms μοῖρα and αἶσα too.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. also θάνατον καὶ πότμον ἐπισπεῖν (ω 31, also found in the *Iliad*, Β 359, Ο 495, Υ 337) and θάνον καὶ πότμον ἐπέσπον (λ 389= ω 22). The word is combined in a formulaic manner with different forms of the verb ἐφέπειν, occupying the two last feet of the line (the afore mentioned cases aside, see β 250, γ 16, δ 196, δ 714, λ 197, λ 372, χ 317= 416; at δ 339-40= ρ 130-31 ἐφέπειν has been replaced with ἐφιέναι; of all the occurrences of the word in the *Odyssey*, only κ 245 has πότμον in a different position.

<sup>17</sup> Chantraine (1968) s.v.

<sup>18</sup> Lee (1961:195) also relates οἶτος and αἶσα. A third view relates οἶτος to οἶσω; see Dietrich (1965) 338.

More interesting, perhaps, is the use of κήρ. Unlike πότμος and οἶτος, κήρ has a significant place in Greek literature, appearing even to have a divine status, either as Κήρ in the singular or in the plural as Κήρες,<sup>19</sup> and representing the spirits ‘that cut short the thread of man’s life’.<sup>20</sup> The etymology is once again obscure and controversial. Dietrich relates the verb to the verb κηραίνω, a verb of similar meaning to φθείρω, βλάπτω, seeing in κήρ a power of destruction and death;<sup>21</sup> since, however, κηραίνω would seem to derive from rather than precede κήρ,<sup>22</sup> Lee’s suggestion which relates the word to the verb κείρω, ‘cut, shear’, seems indeed much more plausible.<sup>23</sup> Such an etymological explanation would lead to the interpretation of κήρ originally as the portion cut for a person, that is his lot or fate. This is indeed the argument made by Lee, who further relates κήρ with μοῖρα and αἴσα: the three words are seen as ‘identical in meaning’ and ‘interchangeable in usage’;<sup>24</sup> nonetheless, κήρ is basically related only to death, any idea of predetermination concerning life in general being entirely absent from its semantic field. It can denote the very event of death, in which case it is paratactically combined with θάνατος or φόνος (e.g. Φ 66, π 169, Β 352),<sup>25</sup> or it can denote the fate or portion of death which is common to all men, and in this case

<sup>19</sup> Hes. *Theog.*, 211 and 217, where, along with Μοῖραι, they are the daughters of Night. In Homer κήρ appears as a personification only once, at Σ 535, along with Ἔρις, Strife, and Κυδοιμός, Uproar, in a rather metaphorical sense, one could say, in one of the scenes that Hephaestus forges on Achilles’ shield.

<sup>20</sup> Greene (1944) 16; cf. Burkert (1985) 180.

<sup>21</sup> Dietrich (1965) 242.

<sup>22</sup> The verb appears actually for the first time in Aesch. *Suppl.* 999. H. Friis Johansen and E. W. Whittle (*Aeschylus: The Suppliants*, vol. 3, 1980, ad loc.) relate to κήρ both the transitive (‘bring death to’) and the intransitive (‘be harassed in mind’) form of the verb.

<sup>23</sup> Lee (1961) 195; Lee refers the word to the root \*(s)qer, from which κείρω derives. The same etymology is accepted by Greene (1944) 17, n.40; Chantraine (1968: s.v.) avoids taking a position, accepting instead that the word remains obscure.

<sup>24</sup> Lee (1961) 196; see, however, Chantraine (1968: s.v. κήρ), who talks of Lee’s ‘combinaisons étymologiques déraisonnables’.

<sup>25</sup> One can see here an original hendiadys, to be explained on the grounds of κήρ’s primary meaning of fate. For a similar relation of μοῖρα with regard to death see p. 82.

θάνατος is used in the genitive as an attributive to κήρ (e.g. B 834= Λ 332, Θ 70= X 210, λ 171= λ 398).

This slight differentiation of meaning between the event and the fate of death will be presently noticed in the application of μοῖρα and αἴσα, and will be discussed there in more detail. The reason why κήρ is distinguished from the other two terms is its very limited semantic field, but, more important, its inability to evoke the idea of predetermination or fate with equal cogency. This is probably the explanation of the later development of each word: while μοῖρα and πέπρωτο retain their meaning of fate even down to modern Greek, κήρ soon became a spirit that brings destruction, not necessarily connected with fate.<sup>26</sup>

When it comes to the examination of μοῖρα, αἴσα, and πορεύιν, it is worth noting a significant etymological and semantic link between them: they all belong to Palmer's group of 'mark' or 'boundary words'. The importance of this observation, with regard to the examination of fate, lies basically in two points: first, it emphasises the importance of the idea of limitation for the concept denoted by moira; and second, it relates this concept with a notion of morality.

Roughly speaking, moira can be said to have three basic meanings: first of all it denotes a share; it then relates to fate, the idea that one's life and death have already been defined; and finally, it implies social propriety and moral behaviour, Palmer's

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<sup>26</sup> Αἴσα is associated with fate in Pindar, while it is also used in the lyric passages of tragedy down to Euripides; it seems though that it gradually lost this function, being limited thereafter to the use of αἴσιος, surviving in modern Greek in the sense of a happy end or a favourable omen.

'peculiar concept of justice'.<sup>27</sup> In what follows I will aim at establishing a common link between these apparently diverse meanings before explaining the use of the same terminology for all three. It would be very useful to this end to look for a possible original meaning and a plausible semantic development, that would hopefully explicate the peculiarities of the Homeric concept of fate and account for the diverse semantic applications of the relevant terminology. The lack of sufficient and substantial evidence is an obstacle, and therefore any argument will be put forth with the greatest reserve, being an assumption more than a final solution. The focus will be inevitably on μοῖρα, for this is the most powerful term and the one with the widest semantic field; the other terms will also be considered, but to a lesser degree and only when necessary.

Both μοῖρα and αἶσα are used to denote a share in a material sense. This well accords with the etymology of the words, and I would therefore believe this to be their original meaning.<sup>28</sup> Αἶσα, being the oldest of the relevant words,<sup>29</sup> is of an obscure derivation. Both Chantraine and Frisk relate the word to the Oscan *aeteis* -'partis',<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Dietrich (1965:194ff, 212) draws a much more detailed distinction between the meanings and applications of μοῖρα, according to which, for example, μοῖρα as death is divided in two sub-categories, μοῖρα as the agent of death, and μοῖρα as the event of death; these distinctions, however, pertain to his basic thesis that μοῖρα's original function was that of a goddess of death, who underwent a gradual development towards a less personified power until the word came to denote simply fate, both as death and as life. This thesis is discussed in more detail in pp. 88-91.

<sup>28</sup> Such an original meaning seems indeed self-evident, although Dietrich (1965:207-9, 223-24) insists that μοῖρα=share is a much later development of the word, especially as found in the Homeric poems (share of booty, share of meat etc); in this application he sees a rather technical use of the term, whose late character is obvious from its more frequent occurrence in the *Odyssey*. Even if one should accept that μοῖρα=share is indeed rather technically used in the poems, it cannot be disproved that this is the original meaning of the word, from which the meanings death, fate and propriety have finally evolved. Dietrich (1965:208, 228) also accepts that this meaning has a moral sense, yet, he fails to see its relation to fate because of his argument that Μοῖρα= a goddess of death.

<sup>29</sup> Along with Ἐρινύς, αἶσα is found in inscriptions in the Arcado-Cypriot dialect, which is believed to represent the oldest form of Greek language. See Dietrich (1965) 11 and 12, n. 1, Dodds (1951) 21, n.44. Dietrich seems to be inconsistent when he accepts that αἶσα 'was originally used to denote a share of sacrificial meat and retained this meaning for some time', a statement that apparently contradicts his conviction that the meaning 'share' is a later development (see previous note); still, he is talking at this point of αἶσα, which he differentiates from μοῖρα; it is μοῖρα for which he cannot see a relation to the meaning 'share'. Unfortunately, however interesting the distinction he draws between the terms, it results in an argumentation which is unnecessarily complicated and not always illuminating as regards μοῖρα and fate.

<sup>30</sup> Chantraine (1968) and Frisk (1960). s.v.

while there is also believed to exist a relation to the Lesbian ἴσασθαι, ἴσσης, according to Hesychius, who translates the word as meaning κληροῦσθαι.<sup>31</sup> Whatever the case, it is obvious that the word implies a portion or a share. Μοῖρα, on the other hand, stems from μείρομαι, ‘receive a portion’, and is, therefore, quite transparent as regards its original meaning of ‘share, portion’.<sup>32</sup> This primary sense of ‘share’ is attested in both poems (e.g. μοῖρα at O 195, γ 40, ρ 258, and αἶσα at, I 378, Σ 327, ε 40, τ 84). The words can refer to a portion of meat (υ 260) or land (Π 68), booty (λ 534) or night (K 252-53), or even to a portion of shame (υ 171) or hope (τ 84). We also find the perfect ἔμμορε of the deponent verb μείρομαι meaning that ‘one has got a share in a thing’ (A 278, O 189, ε 335, λ 338), and the adjective ἄμμορος which can be used for ‘one who has no share in a thing’ (Σ 489, ε 275);<sup>33</sup> we also have the adjective ἔμμορος, used only once, at θ 480, for the singers who enjoy a share of τιμή and αἰδώς, while the verb διαμοιράομαι also appears only once, again in the *Odyssey* (ξ 434), obviously meaning ‘divide, distribute’.

Most interesting is the use of moira to denote the apportionment and departmentalisation of power between the gods: according to Poseidon, all power is divided by three and distributed thereupon to the three sons of Kronos and Rhea, Poseidon himself, Hades and Zeus: Poseidon’s province is the sea, Hades’ the underworld, and Zeus’s the sky, while all three of them have power on earth and Olympus (O 187-193). The three gods are therefore considered ἰσόμοροι and ὁμηῆ πεπρωμένοι αἶση (209), each having an equal share of power, and this is why, when

<sup>31</sup> This is the etymology preferred by Greene (1944) 402, and Dietrich (1965) 11. For a combination of the two solutions by Bianchi (*ΔΙΟΣ ΑΙΣΑ, Destino, uomini e divinità nell' epos nelle teogonie e nel culto dei Greci*, Roma 1963), see Dietrich (1965) 339-40.

<sup>32</sup> The meaning of lot, which is frequently used for moira, further underlines the relation between moira and chance. Cf. the way that lots are drawn at H 175-189.

<sup>33</sup> The adjective is also used for someone who is miserable, for he has no part in fate, i.e. he has a bad fate, as happens at Ω 774.



Zeus demands Poseidon's obedience to his will, Poseidon revolts and states with obvious determination that Zeus should keep to his apportioned province, καὶ κρατερός περ ἔων μενέτω τριτάτη ἐνὶ μοίρῃ (195). This is the only case in which πεπρωμένος, the perfect passive participle of the aorist πορεῖν, 'furnish, offer', is used to imply an act of distribution rather than an idea of predetermination. The verb is further related, according to Palmer, to the root \*per that we find in the word πέρας, 'limit, boundary', thus denoting an idea of limitation not different from the one that μοῖρα and αἶσα seem to imply when referring to shares or portions.<sup>34</sup>

It is worth lingering for a moment on this scene. Burkert informs us that the casting of lots among three deities, and the distribution of cosmos among them, is a motif taken from the Akkadian epic of Atrahasis;<sup>35</sup> not being rooted in actual Greek cult, it is one of the few references to the gods' relation to cosmogony in Homer, which are the result of the 'neo-oriental' influence on Greece during the eighth century.<sup>36</sup> At the same time, however, the departmentalisation of power among the Olympians seems to be a consequence of the peculiar Greek polytheistic system: each god representing an entirely different power with a distinct field of action, the result is a sense of disorder, since 'there is obviously a no to every yes, an antithesis to every thesis';<sup>37</sup> departmentalisation of power entails that each god protects the limits of his or her own province, this being the only way of mitigating or camouflaging the multifarious quality of life itself.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Palmer (1950)165; cf. Chantraine (1968) and Frisk (1970) s. v. πορεῖν.

<sup>35</sup> Burkert (1992) 88-95.

<sup>36</sup> The other instances are Hera's reference to Oceanus and Tethys at Ξ 201-302 and Ξ 246, and the scene of Zeus's seduction by Hera in Ξ, especially their making love at 346-51. See also Burkert (1985) 132.

<sup>37</sup> Burkert (1985) 248.

<sup>38</sup> Burkert (1985) 218, 248; cf. Chantraine (1952) 66ff.

The idea that the gods have their own μοῖραι, to which apparently their individual τιμή corresponds, seems to evoke a sense of morality, with morality implying the existence of limits as discussed in the previous chapter (24-26). Moreover, the existence of well defined limits which, as Poseidon says, should not be violated, implies in its turn a sense of order. I will return to the gods when examining their relationship to morality and justice; here, it suffices to note the link between moira and order as an element that relates even to nature and cosmos and the gods who are their embodiment.

It does not come as a surprise, then, that moira is used to denote a sense of social propriety in the poems. This meaning is found basically in the expressions κατὰ μοῖραν and κατ' αἴσαν, which are often employed by the poet and his heroes, both mortal and immortal, in a formulaic manner to denote that someone has acted or has spoken appropriately.<sup>39</sup> Once only in each poem do we find ἐν μοίρῃ, at Τ 186 and at χ 54, while we also have the adverbial use of αἴσιμα at Ζ 62, and ἐναίσιμον at Ζ 519.<sup>40</sup> The opposite of κατὰ μοῖραν and κατ' αἴσαν is οὐδὲ κατὰ μοῖραν at Π 368, β 251= θ 97 and ι 352, and ὑπὲρ αἴσαν at Γ 59= Ζ 333; in the *Odyssey* παρὰ μοῖραν also occurs, but only once, at ξ 509. However, ὑπὲρ αἴσαν is not always used as the exact opposite of κατ' αἴσαν; along with ὑπὲρ μοῖραν and ὑπέρμορον (-α), it is used to imply a violation of fate - mainly a hypothetical or potential violation that is nevertheless avoided. The

<sup>39</sup> Κατὰ μοῖραν appears at Α 286= Ω 373≡ Κ 169≡ Ψ 626, Ι 59, Ο 206, η 227= θ 141= υ 48= υ 385= φ 278= χ 486, γ 331, γ 457= δ 783= θ 54= ι 245= ι 342= ι 309, δ 266= σ 170= υ 37, θ 496, κ 16= μ 35, ο 170= ο 203, π 385, ρ 580. Κατ' αἴσαν appears only in the *Iliad*, at Γ 59= Ζ 333, Κ 445, Ρ 716.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Ο 207. Of great interest are lines Β 212-14, where we have a series of three different ways of expressing this very idea of inappropriateness, which, although not belonging with the *moira* group, refer to Palmer's 'boundary words': the poet describes Thersites, the stereotype of the anti-hero in this great era, as ἀμετροεπής, a soldier who knew many ἄκοσμα ἔπεα and who vied with the kings οὐ κατὰ κόσμον. These comments, along with the following description of Thersites' rather unpleasant external appearance, serve as an explanation for his improper, as regards his social position, negative criticism of Agamemnon.

question of moira's transgression is a rather complicated one, and will be discussed in due course; at this point, it is worth noting the slight differentiation of the above expressions which seems to imply once more a diversity of meanings for moira.

The social nuance conveyed by the above expressions is beyond doubt. There is obviously no relation to any idea of fate or predetermination; as to the original meaning of share, one can certainly say that moira in these cases denotes the social share of τιμή that each hero possesses and that consequently the reference is made to the hero's behaving according to the demands of his social status. The departmentalisation takes place this time on a social level, and we may talk of an apportionment of τιμή among men: each person lives within the limits of his social share, and a proper behaviour entails observance of these limits.<sup>41</sup> This is particularly evident in the use of the adjectives ἐναΐσιμος and ἐξάσιος; along with αΐσιμος, they are also employed to denote propriety, and the prepositions ἐν and ἐκ fairly clearly denote someone who is within or beyond one's own αἶσα or share, that is, within or beyond one's own limits.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> So Adkins (1960) 21; Yamagata (1994) 107. Adkins (1972:1) actually claims that the idea of fate derives from such an original application to social shares of status, he fails, however, to see that this idea of departmentalisation is essentially moral in its connotations. Similarly, Burkert (1996:150) believes that 'the concepts of moira and aisa, constitutive of the Greek world picture' have to do with the sharing of food after hunting, 'one of the *universalia* of human civilizations... Recognition of equality and rank comes in from the start, as "parts" are distributed in due order'. The relation of recognition of social status to morality as a recognition of proper limits is worthy of note.

<sup>42</sup> Similarly, ὑπὲρ αἶσαν and the word ὑπερβασία refer to the transgression of limits. ὕβρις could also be related to the same idea, if seen as cognate to ὑπέρ. For the etymology of ὕβρις Chantraine (1968: s.v.) presents three different solutions as proposed by scholars: the first relates the word to ὑπέρ, a solution 'qui serait satisfaisant pour le sens, mais reste inadmissible' (this is the etymology that Greene (1944: 18, n.45) suggests); the second solution traces the word to ὕ-ὕ= ἐπί and the root of βρι-αρός, but is morphologically not plausible, according to Chantraine; finally, Chantraine presents the solution provided by Szemerényi (*JHS* 94 (1974) 154), according to whom the word is related to the Hittite-louvite \*hu(wa)ppar, 'outrage', and which is supposed to have been a loan word in Greek. See also Palmer (1950) 162-63 for the similar implications of the antithetical couples ἐνδικός-ἐκδικός, ἐννομός-ἐκνομός.

Both the prepositional phrases and the adjectives, then, are evocative of an order which results from the observance of the set limits. Thus, it would appear that besides referring to a hero's individual social share or status, moira denotes social order itself. When Nestor, for example, speaks κατὰ μοῖραν at A 286, he speaks in a manner that is appropriate to the situation as a whole if order is to be maintained, and not simply appropriate to his own social status or τιμή; the issue at stake is one of order and propriety on the side of Achilles and Agamemnon, not of Nestor. The unquestionable formulaic character of the prepositional phrases seems to account for the application of the idea even to cases in which no apparent link to social propriety or order can be traced. Thus, we hear at δ 782f. that the suitors tie the oars πάντα κατὰ μοῖραν (= θ 53f.), and at ι 308f. that Polyphemus milks the sheep πάντα κατὰ μοῖραν (= ι 244f.= ι 341f.).<sup>43</sup>

The two meanings, that of 'share' and that of 'order' or 'propriety', seem indeed combined in the idea of fate as expressed by moira. The concept does not refer simply to an established future or to a destiny; life's predetermined course is now interpreted as the result of an apportionment, thus further stressing the existence of individual portions and shares, and consequently of limits. One's share in life is individual and unique, defined by the particular conditions of one's own life and death. As Clay says,<sup>44</sup> moira is what differentiates one hero from another, and this differentiation may be said to span one's life from birth to death. The fact that fate is perceived as a share is perhaps the most important characteristic of the Homeric concept; life itself is departmentalised on the human level, and this seems to entail that

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<sup>43</sup> Note also that ἐναΐσιμος is also used for favourable omens at B 53, β159, β182; similar is the use of παρΐσιος at Δ 381. Rather peculiar is the use of μόρσιμος at π 392; the word is usually associated with death, but here it refers to a suitable suitor.

<sup>44</sup> Clay (1983) 157.

behind moira there is an order which is preserved whenever moira is fulfilled.<sup>45</sup> The idea of fate in general implies that life is not something one chooses and decides upon; rather, it is something which is defined by some external source. When this idea is further seen as a share or an allotted portion, a shift of emphasis is detected towards the fact that this share appears both to define and to be defined by one's own limits, in nature, in life, in society.

The idea that life can be departmentalised into shares could easily be seen as the result of plain experience. Each person is a separate unit, and as such each person has his own share in life and his own share in death. In a society, each person is again a separate social unit, with a separate share of τιμή, of the privileges of social life, of rights and obligations. Most important, when seen as part of nature and against divinity, mankind has its special share in natural order, culminating in the share of death. It is indeed extremely difficult to confirm that any one of the above meanings has a claim to priority, or to say with certainty whether man's perception of life evolves from the general towards the individual, from the macrocosmos of nature towards the microcosmos of human society, or vice versa;<sup>46</sup> our evidence is scant, and not at all substantial for such a task.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> By talking of order, I do not imply a plan; as will be mentioned presently, moira does not evoke any idea of destiny in the sense of a metaphysical plan or purpose to be fulfilled.

<sup>46</sup> Cornford (1912:15) believes that 'it is inconceivable that an abstraction generalised from the fates of individual men, and *inapplicable to the Gods*, should ever have been erected into a power superior to the Gods themselves. The notion of the individual lot or fate, [...] comes last, not first, in the order of development'. *Contra* Wiezsäcker, *Roscher M. L.*, s.v. 'Moira', 3084, as quoted by Cornford, *ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Attempts like Cornford's or Dietrich's to provide more tangible evidence in the support of their interpretation have proven vain. Cornford, based on comparative anthropological data, saw moira as the projection of the microcosmos of human society to the macrocosmos of nature: the social group is first divided into sub-groups among which relations suggested by the principle of taboo preserve order, and this idea is then transferred to nature and life; Adkins (1972) offers a variation of this view, but still sees the original use of moira in social terms; Dietrich (1965), as already noted, accepts the priority of death, but goes too far in believing that moira was actually a goddess.

If we return for a moment to Palmer and his group of 'boundary words', moira is seen to imply the existence of limits which prescribe and thereupon circumscribe one's actions; and this is basically an idea affiliated to that of morality: when limits cease to exist, there comes chaos - exactly as happens with morality. That this idea should be interpreted as moral can have a twofold explanation: first of all, the principle of limitation, as suggested by the belief in well-defined shares, is moral in the sense that it is consistent with itself; it imposes a law almost, and it does so indiscriminately and invariably, perpetuating and thus confirming itself; second, being thus consistent with itself, this principle suggests an order according to which the established limits cannot and therefore will not be violated.

Moira, then, implies an idea of morality and a sense of order. As Cornford rightly observes,<sup>48</sup> it is not simply what must be, but also what ought to be. We have already seen how divine power was apportioned between Zeus, Poseidon and Hades: the field of power and activity of each god is well defined and established, and any transgression of the set limits is a transgression of an order and the cause of indignation. It is the same idea of departmentalisation and the same implication of a moral order that moira as fate seems to evoke.

Still, this is merely the explanation given *post eventum*. When life proves too fast and difficult for man to comprehend, he ascribes it to moira, that is to an order of an inscrutable reasoning, which should not be violated, and which, as far as he knows, is not violated. This is the way in which moira is perceived when it refers to an already accomplished event of the past; it entails both inevitability and irreversibility, and it

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<sup>48</sup> Cornford (1912) 11.

denotes the final and ultimate point whence no return can ever exist. When seen, however, as the future, moira seems to be inviting and challenging man. It may be still looming as an inescapable order, yet it allows at the same time the possibility of violation. This is certainly a paradox of the very concept of fate: as a past, it appears to have been inevitable, but as a future, it is ambiguous, permitting a considerable amount of hope. To this ambivalence I will return when examining the use of the concept in the poems. At this point, I would like to discuss the implications that moira has when seen as a past, when used *post eventum* as an explanation for life, because it is basically in this aspect that the idea of order can be detected.

When seen from a distance, as I said, moira relates to an event that has been accomplished, and whose ultimate character entails that its consequences are inevitable for man.<sup>49</sup> Obviously, not all events of life are attributed to moira - not in the Homeric world. In neither of the poems do we find the belief that moira defines life, and consequently the plot, from beginning to end in every detail; rather, there are particular isolated events which are said to be fated. Nor is there any relationship whatever between these events; no plan of a metaphysical dimension seems to be fulfilled through moira. Despite its importance, moira has not yet become a cruel force that binds man to well-defined movements; most often, it is used in the capacity of an explanation. The heroes - for it is the heroes whom we need to listen in this case - are hardly ever concerned with moira as a predetermined future; they acknowledge its existence only in the end, once there is no other explanation to be given.

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<sup>49</sup> It is indeed possible that man could or should be regarded as responsible for this event, although the fact that for Homeric thought an event is determined both on the human and the divine level seems to entail that moira can be the result of human action, yet it is also imposed on man by external forces. The issue will be more relevant once we have seen how moira is interwoven in the plot of the poems, and a hint only at this point is, I believe, sufficient.

It is in this way that moira is related to a sense of order: it is the reasoning, the explanation as to *why* things happened as they have. This explanation does not correspond to an illustration of a rational sequence of causes and effects, whereby man is allowed to see the way in which external forces are supposed to affect the course of life. Moira simply removes from man the anxiety he feels against the chaos that surrounds him, against the vertiginous speed of life itself, by confirming that what happened was part of an order against which he could not have acted.

It is difficult to define with certainty or accuracy the characteristics that qualify an event so that it can be ascribed to fate. For the most part, we have to do with unwelcome events: an insurmountable and lamentable misfortune (Z 356-58, ε 206-7), or the destruction of a whole city (θ 511-13, cf. Π 707-9, Φ 517);<sup>50</sup> thus, μοῖρα is ὀλοή (Π 849, γ 238), δυσώνυμος (M 116), κακή (N 602, ι 52), χαλεπή (λ 292); αἴσα is also κακή (λ 61) and ἀργαλέη (X 61); and μόρος is κακός (Z 357, λ 618) and αἰνός (Σ 464, cf. ι 53).<sup>51</sup> It also seems that the reference is made to an unpredictable event, or at any rate an event whose consequences cannot be easily foreseen, and which lies, therefore, beyond human reasoning and control. Thus Agamemnon ascribes his ἄτη to μοῖρα (T 87-89), and Elpenor's soul similarly refers to ἄτη and αἴσα as the reasons behind the hero's death (λ 60-61). No other explanation can account for the apparent irrationality of these events; since they have happened, it must have been moira or fate that they should happen, and in this way life assumes the quality of a predetermined and therefore inevitable course.

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<sup>50</sup> Moira is of a positive quality in the case of Aeneas, who is fated to survive the war (Υ 302-8), and in the case of Odysseus who is fated to return to Ithaca, although at the same time moira also demands that he should be wandering at sea for ten years.

<sup>51</sup> Οἶτος is also called κακός (Θ 34= 354= 465, Γ 417, α 350, γ 134, ν 384), while κήρ is κακή (M 113, Π 687, β 316), ὀλοή (N 665, Σ 535), βαρεῖα (Φ 548), στυγερή (Ψ 78-79).



Besides referring to isolated events of life, moira is also used as a synonym almost of life itself. Thus we hear of Achilles' life which is brief and unpleasant (A 416-18); or we hear that Hector and Andromache were born to a common fate, ἰῆ αἴση (X 477f.). The idea of predetermination is still present, yet in these cases moira seems to be equivalent almost, at least notionally, to a chance event: it refers to the lot of an individual, the fate that was distributed to him haphazardly and on no rational basis. Life seen in its entirety and from a distance is explained retrospectively as one's individual share of life.<sup>52</sup> It is in this sense that the adjectives ἄμμορος (Ω 774), κάμμορος (β 351), δύσμορος (X 60, π 139), δυσάμμορος (X 485) and αἰνόμορος (X 481, ω 169) seem to be used; the reference is made to life as a whole, to one's unfavourable lot.<sup>53</sup> Rather peculiar is the use of moira at υ 75-76, where the reference is made to Zeus: ὁ γάρ τ' εὖ οἶδεν ἅπαντα, | μοῖράν τ' ἄμμορίην τε καταθνητῶν ἀνθρώπων; ἄμμορίη, an *hapax legomenon*, obviously refers to one's miserable lot, for the lines relate the sad story of Pandareus' daughters, with μοῖρα, which is used as an antonym, having in this case the unique meaning of a fortunate lot.<sup>54</sup>

The event which seems to capture the idea of moira most successfully is death. This is a use that is mostly prominent in the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey* obviously providing

<sup>52</sup> Αἴση comes close to meaning chance or luck also at E 209-11: Pandarus uses the same expression that Thetis uses for Achilles at A 418, κακῆ αἴση; were it not the case that Achilles' death is frequently mentioned as pre-determined, the expression could well seem to imply bad luck. Cf. τ 259-60.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. also the use of ἄποτμος (Ω 388, α 219, υ 140), and πανάποτμος (Ω 493). Μοιρηγενές at Γ 182 is an *hapax legomenon*. It is used for Agamemnon, who is also called ὀλβιοδαίμων, and the reference is obviously made to his good luck, his good fate. The compound refers to Agamemnon's social status as a king (Dietrich (1965) 211), or, in other words, to his noble birth (Chantraine (1965) s.v. μείρομαι, 679); Dietrich (ibid.), in the light of his basic thesis on Moira's original divine quality, sees the relation between μοῖρα and social status as a later development, not yet fully established in the poems. As will become clear later on, moira comprises of all the elements of one's life, social status being one of them, and I would avoid, therefore, both its identification with and its total distinction from τιμή.

<sup>54</sup> See Dietrich (1965) 230.

limited opportunities for such an application.<sup>55</sup> The reference can be made to one's individual death, which is fated to happen at a particular moment and under particular circumstances, as happens with Hector (Π 852-54) and Achilles (Ψ 80-81); or it can be made to the general and common human fate of mortality, the end that awaits all men indiscriminately, as is the case of β 100, referring to Laertes by means of the formula μοῖρ' ὀλοὴ καθέλῃσι πανηγέος θανάτοιο. There are indeed a considerable number of cases in which the relevant terminology refers to death as a simple event, seemingly without the implications and complications of the concept of fate. The word μόρος appears to bear simply the meaning of death in three out of its five occurrences in the *Iliad* (Σ 465, Φ133, Χ 280), and in five out of the eight occurrences in the *Odyssey* (α 166, ι 61, λ 409, π 421, υ 241).<sup>56</sup> The meaning is especially clear in the compound ὠκύμορος, used of one's premature or imminent death (Α 417, Α 505f., Σ 95, α 266).<sup>57</sup>

More interesting and illuminating are the cases of formulae which seem to bear only a faint reminiscence of an original idea of predetermination. Thus, πορφύρεος θάνατος καὶ μοῖρα κραταιή seems to be simply one of the many alternatives used by the poet for the sake of variety.<sup>58</sup> A random, but quite indicative example is Π 333-34:

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<sup>55</sup> True, this can be no more than the result of the poem's particular subject: death being a frequent, almost regular event of war, it is expected that the theme will recur; moreover, the fact that according to tradition, or history, Achilles and Hector died in this war, requires that their fate should entail death. Still, there seems to be a special link between μοῖρα and death, which will prove of particular help in our understanding of the word's peculiarities and function.

<sup>56</sup> The remaining cases are Ζ 356-58, when, as already noted, Helen attributes Paris' and her own bad fate to Zeus, Τ 421f., Achilles' reference to his own fated death, and λ 618-19, when Heracles parallels Odysseus' descent to Hades to his own. In the *Odyssey* we also have the expression ὑπὲρ μόρον three times (α 34, α 35, ε 436). At Ω 84-86 the word is ambiguous: Thetis, surrounded by the Nereids, is crying for her son, ἡ δ' ἐν μέσσησ' | κλαῖε μόρον οὐ παιδὸς ἀμύμονος, ὅς οἱ ἔμελλε | φθίσεσθ' ἐν Τροίῃ ἐριβώλακι, τηλόθι πάτρης, and now death is set in the context of Achilles' particular conditions of life, evoking in this manner the idea of a fated and well defined event.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. also Α 416, and the use of μινυυθάδιος at Α 352, used of Hector at Ο 612.

<sup>58</sup> Ε 82-83= Π 333-34= Υ 476-77; cf. also Δ 517, Μ 116-17, and the rather peculiar use of μόρσιμος by Apollo at Χ 13: οὐ μὲν με κτενέεις, ἐπεὶ οὐ τοι μόρσιμός εἰμι; there are also lines which seem ambivalent, implying both the event of death and the presence of fate, such as Ν 610-3, Ρ 478= 672= Χ436. It would appear that the more details are given on one's death, the closer the word comes to the meaning of fate.

we are in the middle of the battle that takes place after Patroclus has entered the war; he has brought great havoc among the Trojans, while the Greeks, with their confidence being suddenly recovered, rush against their opponents and a series of encounters and deaths is narrated; at Π 330ff a brief scene begins: the lesser Aias kills Kleoboulos, and the poet describes the latter's death: τὸν δὲ κατ' ὅσσε | ἔλλαβε πορφύρεος θάνατος καὶ μοῖρα κραταιή; the formula seems to be used quite habitually or conventionally, with no apparent implication of fate or destiny; Kleoboulos' death is one of the many similar incidents that the poet has to relate one after the other, always careful to avoid monotony.

However, the lines seem to evoke a notion of fate very subtly, and this is made evident once we juxtapose them with a case where the idea of predetermination is powerfully employed by the poet, forming an essential part of the plot itself. At Π 852-54 the dying Patroclus foresees Hector's death: οὐ θην οὐδ' αὐτὸς δηρὸν βέη, ἀλλὰ τοι ἤδη | ἄγχι παρέστηκεν θάνατος καὶ μοῖρα κραταιή, | χερσὶ δαμέντ' Ἀχιλλῆος ἀμύμονος Αἰακίδαο; the whole construction of the lines, with their reference to a prospective event, and with the narration being enriched with particulars as to the time and conditions of the hero's death, confers a certain dynamism to the formula, which now becomes definitely more evocative of the inevitable necessity of an event that seems to have been predetermined in all its detail.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Cf. also Φ 110-12, as opposed to Π 333-34. Another example indicative of this flexibility is that of the formula μοῖρα πέδησεν: at X 5-6 the poet explains that Ἔκτορα δ' αὐτοῦ μείναι ὀλοὴ μοῖρα πέδησεν | Ἰλίου προπάρειθε πύλων τε Σκαιάων; but when the same formula is used at Δ 517 of Dioreus, no further comment is made on μοῖρα this time, for the reference is obviously made to the fate of death and not to Dioreus' particular or individual fate. The details that the poet adds at X 5-6, along with the fact that Hector's death has been foreshadowed on different occasions by the poet and the gods, create a more intense sense of predetermination. Similarly ambivalent seems to be the formula θάνατος καὶ μοῖρα κιχάνει, used of Patroclus at P 478 and 672 in an almost habitual way that seems to denote the plain fact of the hero's death; the same could be said of X 436 as well, where Hecabe talks of her son's death; when, though, Hector himself is faced with the event of his death and realises that νῦν αὐτὲ με μοῖρα κιχάνει at X 303, the connotations of fate seem to be more powerful, exactly because of what has already preceded the scene.

The decisive part that the poet's own construction of the narration plays in our perception of moira is evident, especially since we witness the application of the same formula in different contexts. The poet appears to be manipulating both the formula itself and the idea of moira according to the idea he wishes to express, and his technique of anticipation is masterfully employed in order to prepare us gradually for a climax which, once reached, appears to have been inevitable. It is the whole of the plot, it would seem, that sharpens our perception and reception of the narrated events, the heroes' premonitions, the gods' predictions and the poet's own ability to construct a compelling story. When moira is finally used, it seems to assume its explicit reference to fate from the very narration, thus putting even further emphasis on its inevitable and final essence.

The difference between the two applications is, in my opinion, obvious. The formulaic character of Π 333-34 seems to explain why the idea of inevitability or predetermination is hardly sensed at all.<sup>60</sup> Still, it would be misleading to interpret moira in such cases merely as an equivalent of death, void of any further implications or connotations. If this seemingly static formula should be seen as an hendiadys, it would become clear that the reference is made to death as the fate of mankind itself. More than an event of life, death is the very μοῖρα κραταιή that comes over Kleoboulos and Hector, the predetermined, well-established, and therefore inevitable end of man. Whether this fate of death is defined in more detail as well or not is of minor significance, for in either case it is equally powerful and compelling in its accomplishment.

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<sup>60</sup> Note also the use of αἴσιμον ἦεν for animals at O 273-74 and for the gods at Φ 495.

The idea that death is man's fate is even more evident in the use of αἴσα at Π 441 = X 179. Zeus has been pondering whether he should save Sarpedon and Hector respectively; the reply comes in the first case from Hera, in the second from Athena: Zeus cannot set free from death ἄνδρα θνητὸν ἔόντα, πάλαι πεπρωμένον αἴση. The line sounds like a definition almost of human essence, and it is obvious that in this case αἴσα is not merely death as an event that takes place during life, nor does it refer to Sarpedon's or Hector's individual moirai; rather, it is the common fate of death that is certainly not defined as far as the details of its accomplishment are concerned, yet it is inevitable as well as predetermined, an event that man can neither control nor avert. The idea that is obviously projected is that of human mortality, a predictable, and therefore pre-ordained event, yet inescapable and beyond control; what is fated is that man should die; when and how is not mentioned, nor is it of any importance.<sup>61</sup>

Of interest is also the use of μοῖρα at Z 488-89. This time it is Hector who is talking, trying to soothe Andromache: no one is going to kill him, if this is not fated to happen; μοῖραν δ' οὐ τίνα φημι πεφυγμένον ἔμμεναι ἀνδρῶν, | οὐ κακόν, οὐδὲ μὲν ἔσθλόν, ἐπὴν τὰ πρῶτα γένηται. Doubtless, the lines imply one's individual share or fate, rather than simply death; what Hector means is that if moira demands his death after all, there is nothing he can do to avert it; no one ever can. However, one can detect some ambiguity, created especially by line 489, stressing as it does the universality of moira and creating a circular movement with its reference to man's birth. This ambiguity certainly derives from the ambivalence of the term μοῖρα itself:

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<sup>61</sup> The lines are certainly more complicated than it is suggested at this point, especially since the question of the gods' relation to moira is raised. The issue is discussed in more detail in pp. 138-40.

man cannot escape death, once he is born, and he cannot escape fate, for they are the same thing; death is man's fate.<sup>62</sup>

Death is certainly more than a plain and ordinary event of life which appears occasionally to be lacking an explanation. Death is the only reality that man can never doubt or ignore, the only eventuality with the compelling force of a natural moral law that is imposed on man against his will, the predictable but nonetheless inevitable end that awaits all men, indiscriminate in its application, an inextricable quality of the very essence of human life. It is the persistent Leitmotif of life, the one necessity that man experiences repeatedly throughout his life, dying as he does more than one death, up until the moment he has to die himself, the grasp of time that creates Glaucus' beautiful simile: οἴη περ φύλλων γενεή, τοίη δὲ καὶ ἀνδρῶν. | φύλλα τὰ μὲν τ' ἄνεμος χαμάδις χέει, ἄλλα δέ θ' ὕλη | τηλεθόωσα φύει, ἔαρος δ' ἐπιγίγνεται ὥρη· | ὥς ἀνδρῶν γενεὴ ἢ μὲν φύει ἢ δ' ἀπολήγει (Z 146-49).

In human mortality some of the basic characteristics of an idea of fate seem to be concentrated: inevitability, inaccessibility and independence of human will and action. More important, though, is the fact that human mortality seems to confirm the association of moira with an idea of order.<sup>63</sup> Death evokes the order of nature itself; natural order implies balance and stability which are guaranteed by regularity and by the eternal law of action and reaction, seen in antithetical couples such as day and

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<sup>62</sup> That ambiguity is one of the very means of poetry need not be discussed. Another example that seems to involve more than one meaning is that of I 318-20: ἴση μοῖρα μένοντι, καὶ εἰ μάλα τις πολεμίζοι· | ἐν δὲ ἰῆ τιμῇ ἡμὲν κακός ἦδὲ καὶ ἐσθλός· | κάτθαν' ὁμῶς ὃ τ' ἀεργός ἀνὴρ ὃ τε πολλὰ ἐοργῶς. The fact that here, as in Z 489, κακός and ἐσθλός are ranked together, subordinate as they are to an ἴση μοῖρα, should perhaps be considered as further suggesting an interpretation of μοῖρα as death.

<sup>63</sup> True, references to an idea of order seem to suggest a philosophical thought that is alien to the poet; obviously, the idea conveyed by moira, and words such as nemesis or erinyes, is an acknowledgement of what is basically sensed through the very experience of life and nature, and not the result of philosophical analysis.

night, spring/fecundity and winter/aridity - a succession whose regularity appears to have a reassuring effect upon us. This is an order in the sense that it is invariably perpetuated, obedient to its own laws of equilibrium, and hence rational, but more important, a moral order, in the sense that it is consistent with itself. But it is an order that exists independently of man's will or action; in fact, man is part of this order, and his very existence is subject to the same laws of regularity and perpetual balance.

The relation of death to such an idea seems clear: man's fated share is death; once born, man *has* to die; life and death are another expression of that very antithesis that creates a sense of balance in nature. It is obvious, I believe, how inevitability also becomes relevant: death implies regularity, and inevitability is part of this regularity. Death may be seen not simply as one of the many events in one's life, but rather as an indication and confirmation at the same time of a moral natural order. Being the most important restraint or lot that man experiences, and at the same time the only limit that cannot be exceeded or violated, it appears as part of a greater order that permeates nature and ensures its balance, thus elucidating the moral quality of this Greek concept.

Death is universal, and as such it enables moira or fate to be applicable to all men invariably and to emerge thereupon as an essential principle of life itself. Moreover, death is a final and irrevocable event that cannot be changed once it has happened. If fate defines the end of a progressive movement of life, whence no return can ever exist, it has to be admitted that no other event in life apart from death has the power to evoke this idea of an irreversible course. More important, death is the only eventuality that falls outside the jurisdiction of the gods; human mortality implies an order that exists independently of the gods' will and activity, for the simple reason that it is older than the gods who, despite their immortality, are themselves not without

beginning. The Homeric gods are neither responsible for nor particularly concerned with the fact that man has to die; Zeus may be wishing at some point to save Sarpedon and Hector, but these are isolated cases of heroes who are especially favoured and loved by the god. Hera's and Athena's words remind Zeus and the audience of the norm: man was doomed to death long ago - πάλαι.

It is very tempting indeed to see that the idea of an inevitable course as suggested by the belief in fate is actually prompted by the inevitable quality of human mortality, and that the limits of which man first becomes aware in his life are those of his mortal nature. Human mortality seems to provide man with the proof for the reality of an order, and to function as a reminder of the existing limits. However, the issue is much more complicated than it seems, and it relates not simply to the Homeric concept of moira, but to the concept of fate in general, which is extremely elusive and whose origin and course of development are therefore difficult to trace. Believing that it would prove unwise as well as fruitless to insist here on the matter, I would find it more appropriate to simply underline that the association of moira with death is indeed very powerful in the poems.<sup>64</sup> Whether this is due to an original relation or not, death remains the most important expression of the idea of an order that is inevitable as well as moral, indicative both of fate's power and of man's limitation.

To recapitulate: moira entails more than mere predetermination. The basic terms used for the concept, μοῖρα, αἴσα and πέπρωτο, belong to a group of 'boundary' words, which suggest the existence of limits that should not be transgressed if order

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<sup>64</sup> It will become clear in the fourth chapter that moira as death is of a limited application in the *Odyssey*; this has to do with the particular subject of the poem; the idea retains its close relation to death, as is evident from the use of standard formulae, whenever this is necessary.



should be maintained. Referring originally to a share in a material sense, the words come to mean a distribution which both defines and preserves the order of well-established limits. When this idea of distributed portions is applied to human life, and moira becomes one's share in life and death, it seems to retain its basic reference to this same order, which demands the distinct differentiation between the human and the divine, and which provides the explanation to why things happen as they do, why man has to die, or why he has to die at a particular moment and under particular circumstances, why a disaster must fall on a people, or why a hero must be denied his return home for an entire ten years. Doubtless, the concept of fate suggests more than the existence of limits; and the terms are often used prospectively and in anticipation of an event to come, the emphasis appearing this time to be on the idea of predetermination. However, and as will hopefully become clear once the poems have been looked at in detail, moira is used most often as a *post eventum* explanation that 'makes sense' out of life's almost non-sensical flow, while it always remains of interest that the particular terminology should be used to designate this flow and to suggest that life is predefined, a series of events that have to happen.

One point should be made clear, before I conclude. It is obvious, I believe, that such an interpretation of the Homeric concept of moira or fate would appear to allow little, if any, space for the belief in a personal power of fate. Moira has been seen up to now as an event, or a series of events, which is perceived in its entirety only after it has been fulfilled, and not as a force, whose jurisdiction it is to define life in advance. It has to be admitted, however, that such an idea does exist in the poems; twice do we hear in the *Iliad* of the spinning woman, who is called Αἶσα at Υ 127 and Μοῖρα at Ω

209, while in the *Odyssey* we find αἶσα along with the so-called Κλωθεες at η 197;<sup>65</sup> more interesting still, we hear of Μοῖραι who are responsible for man's enduring heart at Ω 49, the only occurrence of the noun in the plural, which evokes groups of female deities such as the Charites, or the Muses.<sup>66</sup> Nonetheless, these are only isolated cases that cannot provide us with convincing evidence of moira's personal character. In both poems moira is mainly an event, and not an agent or a power imposing her will on man; the only agents that both the poet and his heroes seem to acknowledge are the gods. To quote Cornford, '[Moira] was not credited with foresight, purpose, design;...though we speak of her as a "personification", [she] has not the most important element of personality - individual purpose....she is not a deity who by an act of will designed and created that order [of the world]. She is a representation which states a truth about this disposition of Nature, and to the statement of that truth adds nothing except that the disposition is both necessary and just'.<sup>67</sup>

This is certainly not the view that Dietrich expounds in his book *Death, Fate and the Gods*. Instead, having observed the important link between μοῖρα and death, and being supported mainly by the evidence of post-Homeric popular cult practices and inscriptions, not only does he argue against a late personification and deification of μοῖρα, but he even claims that Μοῖρα was originally and primarily a goddess, another vegetation and fertility chthonic deity; this deity was quite early associated with death

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<sup>65</sup> Dodds (1951:20, n.29) prefers to see the plural as referring to the "portions" of different individuals'. Macleod (1983: on Ω 49) sees Moirai as a 'source of right order in the world; of interest is his remark that Apollo consciously uses Moirai here, for if he had used the gods instead, he could not arouse the gods' pity for Hector'.

<sup>66</sup> There are two further instances in which we have Μοῖρα, supposedly as a goddess, at Τ 87, where she appears along with Zeus and Erinyes in Agamemnon's famous apology to Achilles, and at Τ 410, where Achilles' horses foresee the hero's death, for which they are not responsible themselves, ἀλλὰ θεός τε μέγας καὶ Μοῖρα κραταιή. In neither case, however, does there exist any obvious reason for such a writing. See Dodds (1951) 7.

<sup>67</sup> Cornford (1912) 20-21. Cf. Burkert (1985:129) who sees moira not as a person, a god or a power, but as a fact: 'the word means portion, and proclaims that the world is apportioned, that boundaries are drawn in space and time. For man, the most important and most painful boundary is death'.

because of her chthonic nature, and was gradually related to other important aspects of life, such as birth and marriage. Still, always according to Dietrich, this goddess seems to have lost her personality in poetry, because of the advance of the more recent, and definitely literary, Olympian family; the gods were obviously more useful for the construction of a plot, thus taking over the functions for which Μοῖρα was responsible; even so, however, Μοῖρα retained her divine status in popular cult.

As already noted, a pre-Homeric personification or deification of μοῖρα does not seem implausible at all; the poems' tendency to use μοῖρα mainly in an impersonal fashion is certainly not sufficient proof for the contrary. Yet, such a conclusion could or should be accepted only on the condition of incontrovertible evidence that would be provided in its support - which is certainly not the case with Dietrich, who goes even further, as we saw, in arguing for an original divine status. However important the evidence he provides for the post-Homeric popular religion, the absence of any evidence for the pre-Homeric era makes his reasoning unintelligible and his conclusions controversial. One cannot help wondering, for example, why such an important deity should be entirely absent from the Mycenaean evidence of the Linear B tablets, especially since Dietrich acknowledges the connection of Μοῖρα with a number of deities that do indeed feature in the tablets, such as Artemis, Demeter, or more important Zeus. As Davison well observed, Dietrich's 'argument is...apt to give the impression of having been constructed "widdershins" or anti-clockwise', and 'his interpretation of his Greek texts seems derivative rather than original'.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Davison (1967) 89.

Leaving aside Dietrich's discussion of popular cult and religion, I would like to focus on his interpretation of μοῖρα in the Homeric texts themselves. Dietrich finds the evidence for the personal nature of μοῖρα in the numerous expressions in which the word is used as the subject of an active structure, such as μοῖρα πέδησεν or καθέλῃσι. Besides, the difference in application between the various terms employed for the idea of predetermination further underlines the unique importance of μοῖρα: αἴσα refers to a fate which is related simply to the particular plot of each poem, εἴμαρτο and πέπρωτο to a fate that comes as the expected consequence of causes that are presented in the poems, κῆρες, πότμος and οἴτος refer simply to death. Μοῖρα among them has a special status, exactly because of its being actually a goddess.<sup>69</sup>

It is indeed remarkable that Dietrich imposes on the text an idea that evidently does not exist on the grounds of external evidence which, as already noted, is not itself substantial enough. Nowhere in the poem does μοῖρα appear as a deity, nowhere is there an allusion made to the possibility of such a function, with the only exceptions noted above, which, however, are rather inconclusive and not of a powerful presence in the poems; the poet clearly disregards this function - whether consciously or not, is difficult to define. As for the argument that the activity of μοῖρα is given in graphic terms, her status as a divine agent being thus underlined, it often leads Dietrich to an impasse, for he has to concede that there are indeed cases in which his argument cannot actually apply: μοῖρα τέτυκται and μοῖρα κιχάνει are interpreted as instances where 'the concept of an active figure of Moira has been weakened', while for the formulaic line παρέστηκεν θάνατος καὶ μοῖρα κραταιή we read that 'the concept of Moira, the

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<sup>69</sup> Certainly, Dietrich's observations with regard to moira and its relation to the gods or to its function in the plot are both interesting and penetrating; it is the basis of his argument and the conclusions he reaches as a consequence that appear to go too far.

deity, has been all but lost. All that is conveyed by this phrase is that a hero's death is close at hand';<sup>70</sup> and when it comes to the explanation of the same active structure for κήρ, as found, for example at λ 171= 398, κήρ ἐδάμασσε τανηλεγέος θανάτοιο, he explains that κήρ has been modelled on μοῖρα, since 'how little the personal colour conveyed by this type of expression need be, can easily be seen from instances when weapons - spears, swords - are combined with this verb. E. g. *Il.*, xi. 478: τόν γε δαμάσσεται ὠκύς ὀιστός'.<sup>71</sup> At the same time, it is of wonder actually that μοῖρα should be ascribed an original active meaning, since the passive sense is so evident in the word: μοῖρα is obviously the result of division and distribution, what one receives as a share or lot, and not the agent who divides and distributes.<sup>72</sup>

Dietrich is forcing his thesis into the poems, certain essential aspects of moira being thus left with no sufficient explanation. He is frequently at a loss at finding the link between the obvious original meaning of 'share' and the idea of a goddess who distributes death, saying simply that 'the etymology of "lot", "share", which is perhaps correct, still it does not grant us a clear enough image of them [i.e. the Moirai], but it certainly explains the path of their further development'.<sup>73</sup> More important, he creates a polarity between Moira and the Olympians that is neither necessary nor accurate. For, as will be discussed later on, the truth is that moira and the gods are not actually in conflict with each other, and any tension that seems to exist is perceived by us more than by the poet or his audience. By thus disregarding the gods' importance for the

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<sup>70</sup> Dietrich (1965) 197.

<sup>71</sup> Dietrich (1965) 247, n. 2.

<sup>72</sup> Dietrich himself (1965:340) refers to a distinction between μοῖρα and μέρος, through which the passive sense of μοῖρα seems evident; he quotes Belardi (*Boll. Sem. Ist. Glott. Univ. Di Roma* I, 1, 107, n.2), according to whom 'alla vocale -e- era connessa la nozione di dinamicità, ad -o- del staticità o dell' azione obbiettivata'.

<sup>73</sup> Dietrich (1965) 90.

poems, he fails to see the fine balance between divine powers as against human weakness and frailty - an idea that is essential to Homeric thought.

## 2.2 *Justice and Δίκη*

Justice is related first of all to some sense of morality; in order to be just, I have to respect your vital sphere of action, to respect the limits of both my and your province; keeping myself within my limits prevents me from violating you, or intruding your limits; this is probably the meaning given to justice by Plato, when he defined the virtue of justice as 'doing one's own things', τὸ τὰ αὐτοῦ πράττειν;<sup>74</sup> also, if morality be seen as a code of behaviour suggested by a particular group, as ethics, justice is associated with propriety or righteousness and adherence to this code. But being just entails more than being moral, even if morality is often a necessary component of a just behaviour. Justice is further related to retribution, the ancient law of balance and equilibrium, in a sense, according to which an offended person has to react to the act of offence by demanding some form of retribution from the offender;<sup>75</sup> with a system, gradually developed and established, and finally being written down in the form of laws, which defines what is right and wrong, that is, what is permitted and what is forbidden in a particular society, and what should happen in the case of an offence, that is whether there should be a punishment, and if so, what this punishment should be; and finally, justice is connected with impartiality and fairness, especially in its connection to law, in which case it implies distribution of merit and

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<sup>74</sup> *Rep.* 433a. This is also evident from a linguistic aspect in the history of the word in Greek. As will be discussed in due course, the original word δίκη has the primary meaning of 'mark, indication' and then 'way, manner'; δίκη θεῶν, for example, means the manner of the gods; δίκαιος, subsequently, is the person who behaves according to the manner that is most appropriate to his position in life or in society, the person, that is, who keeps within the limits set by life or society.

<sup>75</sup> In a way, retribution can be seen as an attempt towards a re-definition of violated limits.

punishment on the basis of fixed principles and irrespective of personal preconceptions, aims, or passions - an idea also related to that of equality.

Righteousness and morality, retribution, legality, fairness, equality: these seem to be the ideas essentially related to that of justice; ideas actually which are subject to philosophical enquiry themselves. Still, one thing should be made clear: justice is *not* morality or righteousness, but is simply associated with it; an act can be just, yet immoral, and vice versa.<sup>76</sup> Similarly, justice is *not* simply legality, retribution, or fairness. According to the social or legal norms that form the basis of a particular society, different values emerge, indicative of the individual as well as the social end, and the quality of the highest value is what finally and essentially determines the meaning of both justice and morality.<sup>77</sup>

Roughly speaking, then, we could distinguish two basic aspects of justice: an internal aspect, which could be also seen as a disposition, and an external aspect, the law; that is, a moral and a legal aspect. Law seems to be the result of a conscious attempt to put into a concrete shape the principles that define the behaviour of a social group, what we call habits or customs, or at times oral or customary law, and which is actually a reflection of the internal aspect of justice, of a collective disposition. Still, even oral law, for all its flexibility, corresponds to a conditioned form of justice, 'manipulated' as it is by already existing social forces. The internal urge for justice seems to precede and indeed cause the social principle.

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<sup>76</sup> For example, in Greek tragedy Antigone's refusal to obey Creon is a form of injustice, since it implies disobedience to law or authority, yet it is deeply rooted in a sense of morality; while, Orestes' vengeance may be just, as well as in accord with law or custom, yet it leads to a basically immoral action, matricide. For the immorality of matricide, or murder within one's family, testifies the important role of the Erinyes.

<sup>77</sup> See Kelsen in Westphal (1996)183-206.

Both aspects exist in both poems; yet one should have in mind that the legal aspect does not correspond to our sense of legal justice, simply because the Homeric age is still an age of oral and customary law; laws are no more than principles of proper behaviour, transmitted from one generation to the next orally, and therefore quite probably adapted each time to the demands of society. This observation has implications for the relation between the legal and moral aspects of justice: legality would appear to be more moral when formed by vague principles of morality than by fixed laws; for legality corresponds to the moral concern for the observance of proper limits and not to the adherence to some fixed law, which can doubtless often prove to be immoral.

The word used in classical Greek to denote justice is δικαιοσύνη. It first appears in a doubted couplet of the Theognidean corpus,<sup>78</sup> to be found again first in Herodotus, and then in Antiphon, Thrasymachus, Damon and Thucydides,<sup>79</sup> before finally attaining its full importance as an abstract moral term in Plato. Evidently, the word is much later than the Homeric poems; consequently, the conclusion has been reached that, since the term denoting justice is absent from the poems, the idea of justice must accordingly be absent. True, δικαιοσύνη belongs to abstract Greek terminology, and the actual idea of justice was not conceptualised or internalised before the fifth century. Even Hesiod, who first composes a poem concerning justice itself, does not refer to any abstract

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<sup>78</sup> 147-48: ἐν δὲ δικαιοσύνῃ συλλήβδην πᾶσ' ἀρετὴ 'στιν, | πᾶς δέ τ' ἀνὴρ ἀγαθὸς Κύρνε δίκαιος ἑών. Line 147 is also attributed to Phocylides (fr.10). The couplet's position in the corpus is doubted on the grounds that it employs a term, and thus expresses an idea, that is essentially alien to the age of Theognis. According to Havelock (1969:69), 'the age of Theognis himself was innocent of any such conception. But the corpus patently came to serve as a school textbook and as such was receptive to editorial interpolations, especially of a moralizing character. The language of the crucial line...is in fact philosopher's language, as the adverb [συλλήβδην] may indicate'. Similar doubts have been expressed by P. Friedländer, *Hermes* 48 (1913) 587, n.; Dodds, (1951) 35. For the use of συλλήβδην in philosophical contexts, Havelock provides the following examples: Aesch. *P.V.* 505; Eur. Frag. 362; Plato *Protag.* 324A, 325C; *Resp.* 344B, etc; Lysias, 13.47 and 62; and συλλαμβάνω in this sense, Hdt. 3.82.5, 7.16.

<sup>79</sup> Hdt.1.96.2, 2.151.1, 6.86.2, etc.; Antiphon, 87 B 44 DK; 2.346 DK; Thrasymachus, 85 B 8 DK; Damon, 37 B 4 DK; Thuc. 3.63.4. For a discussion on the Herodotean use of the term see Havelock (1969) 52-64, and (1978) 297ff.



concept; his justice, despite its relation to Zeus, corresponds mostly to a legal process, and even when referring to propriety or morality, it does so without the philosophical background or dimension of later ages. Still, acknowledging that the idea is not conceptualised is one thing, and proclaiming its total absence is another. The issue is more complicated than it might appear at first sight, and a mere examination of the relevant terminology would prove to be insufficient; still, such an examination is necessary before any discussion on Homeric justice can be held.

The word that Hesiod uses, and accordingly, the word that Homer uses, in the absence of δικαιοσύνη, is δίκη. According to Palmer, δίκη stems from the Indo-European root *\*deik-*, and there is ‘little doubt about the basic meaning of this root [*\*deik*], which is exemplified in the verb δείκνυμι “I show, point out”’.<sup>80</sup> It has been mentioned already that δίκη belongs to the same group of ‘boundary words’ to which μοῖρα, αἴσα and πέπρωτο belong, implying the demarcation of certain limits; in other words, it is another term suggesting an idea of morality. It remains to be seen how δίκη is actually associated with morality and what the connotations are in Homeric thought.

As regards the semantic field of the term, Palmer remarks that, by contrast to the development of similar terms in other languages, ‘Greek is faithful to the primary significance of the root “mark, indicate”, and so we must postulate for *dike* the primary significance “mark” or “indication”.....Greek shows no trace of the development “to say”, and so *dike* cannot mean “pronouncement” of the judge’.<sup>81</sup> From this primary

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<sup>80</sup> Palmer (1950) 157, quoting Schwyzer, *Griech. Gram.*, I 459 for the term’s etymology.

<sup>81</sup> Palmer (1950) 157f. This observation is made basically in order that the Greek term be distinguished from the Latin *dico*, for example, which, although stemming from the same root *\*deik-*, and indeed retaining the original meaning in derivatives such as *index* and *indicare*, evolves, however, towards the sense ‘say’. See Palmer (1950) 158, n.1, for examples of a similar development in other languages. The view that δίκη denotes the verbal aspect of a decision or a settlement has also been expressed, with particular insistence by Gagarin (1973), (1992).

meaning we have two different applications of the word: a quasi-legal application, with δίκη denoting a settlement, or a procedure which aims at a settlement, or even a decision, and a rather distinct meaning of ‘characteristic, manner’, which seems to attain a moral sense, with δίκαιος, for example, being the one who behaves in the manner characteristic of his position in life or society, the one, that is, who keeps within his proper limits.<sup>82</sup> It will be useful to examine the two meanings separately on the basis of the evidence we acquire from the Homeric poems before inquiring how they might be related to each other. One thing should be borne in mind, though: the affinity between legality and morality entails that quite often the term seems to be ambiguous, susceptible to both interpretations, and therefore a degree of reservation or even indecisiveness seems inevitable.

### 2.2.1 *Δίκη as a legal term*

A common way of describing δίκη is by means of the adjectives ἰθεῖα /straight and σκολιά /crooked. This seems to provide further support to the argument that the word was used originally in the sense of ‘mark’ or ‘indication’: δίκη was the ‘direction’ or perhaps the ‘ligne marquée’,<sup>83</sup> the result of the act denoted by δείκνυμι, which, if seen in the context of a quasi-legal procedure, might have designated ‘the dividing boundary line between two pieces of land or two property claims, the line being either “straight” or “crooked”’.<sup>84</sup> From such an original meaning the word came to denote a judgement, which could accordingly be either straight or crooked, but which would not necessarily

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<sup>82</sup> Palmer (1950) 158-59, Chantraine (1968), s. v., 283.

<sup>83</sup> Chantraine (1968) s.v., 284.

<sup>84</sup> Gagarin (1973) 83.

have to do with property claims.<sup>85</sup> When, for example, Hera accuses Zeus at A 540-43 on the grounds that he always decides, *δικαζέμεν*, in secret from her, the word has obviously a less limited sense than the above described legal context would demand. The word, then, starts out with the meaning of a dividing line, which is defined during a settlement, and develops towards the meaning of a decision, usually a part of a process that aimed at appreciating data and deciding thereupon on how best to have a dispute settled, until it was gradually identified with the process itself. A look at the texts for support is necessary at this point.

A Homeric dispute can be settled by means either of violence (M 421-424, ρ 470-73), or of an informal reconciliation between the disputants (I 632-36), or of a more formal legal process, which is associated with *δίκη* (Σ 497-508, μ 439-41). In the case of the more formal legal procedure, the judgement can be delivered either by a king (B 205-6, I 98-99, Π 541-42), or by a body of authority (A 234-39, Π 386-88, Σ 497-508), and this probably reflects different practices of the same basic principle. This variety in the settlement of disputes does not necessarily entail processes of different periods of history, nor should it necessarily be taken to imply different strata of composition. As MacDowell remarks, 'the various kinds of dispute-procedure mentioned in the Homeric and Hesiodic poems all existed in early Greece, even if not all in the same place at the same time'.<sup>86</sup> Besides, this very variety appears to be a natural corollary of the oral quality of the archaic age: the absence of writing, and consequently the absence of formally written laws, entails that no external power exists

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<sup>85</sup> See Palmer (1950) 159, who quotes the powerful lines of Theognis (453f): *Χρή με παρὰ στάθμην καὶ γνώμονα τήνδε δικάσσαι, | Κύρνε, δίκην.*

<sup>86</sup> MacDowell (1978) 11. See also Gagarin (1973) 83.

which would demand the settlement of a dispute by means of standard and fixed principles or procedures.

Interestingly, *δίκη* is used when a dispute is settled through a procedure, that is, there must be a kind of a more or less formal process taking place. This apparently trivial observation entails that when referring to a settlement, *δίκη* is used so that the legal aspect of the word be stressed more than the moral - if we can indeed separate the two; in other words, behind the legal use of *δίκη* there is often no concept of general justice as an internal principle, but simply of justice settled through a procedure. Justice in general, as the moral, but not necessarily legal re-establishment of order, is rather expressed by the word *τίσις*, which certainly underlines the retributive quality of the concept.<sup>87</sup> At the same time, *δίκη* is often used in distinction from *βίη*, violence,<sup>88</sup> and this seems to underline the relation between morality and justice: legality appears to originate in morality, the two being actually very close as regards their sense and their connotations, while the distinction between *δίκη* and *βίη* further underlines the social dimension of *δίκη*, reflecting as it does, an organisation of the social group, however premature or non-elaborate this may be.

Thus, Menelaus talks of *τίσις* in the *Iliad* (e.g. Γ 351f.), just as Odysseus does in the *Odyssey* (e.g. ω 325-26), while the settlement of the dispute between Agamemnon and Achilles by contrast is described in terms of *δίκη*, because it is indeed

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<sup>87</sup> By no means does this entail that the legal usage is devoid of any moral connotation; procedural justice is, or at least should be, a process whose ultimate aim is to establish an order of a moral quality. Still, as regards the usage of the particular word in this particular context, we have to admit that the legal implications are more powerful. This is perhaps also evident in the use of the adjectives *ἰθίαια* and *σκολιά* as necessary attributives of *δίκη* that define whether justice has been established properly or improperly (Π 387, Σ 508, Ψ 580).

<sup>88</sup> See Π 387-88, ξ 90-92; the same distinction is apparently implied at ι 214-15, ζ 120-21= ι 175-76= ν 200-1= θ 575-76.

reached through a procedure.<sup>89</sup> At T 179-83 we have the reconciliation of the two heroes: Odysseus tells Achilles to accept a meal with king Agamemnon, so that he lack nothing of his δίκη, while Agamemnon is advised to be δικαιοτέρος in the future, when entering a dispute with another noble. The particular passage certainly exhibits an ambivalent usage of both δίκη and δικαιοτέρος, yet it is worth noting the context of a quasi-legal procedure: the term is used not merely because justice is settled, but because a settlement is reached through a procedure.

When used in a legal context, δίκη is associated with a number of words that seem to form an almost standard legal terminology; thus, there is an ἀγορά, where disputants and people assemble when a settlement is to be reached (Π 187, Σ 497, β 26, μ 432); there are the θέμιστες, most probably the oral principles or perhaps the precedents on the basis of which decisions are made (A 238, Π 387, λ 569); the σκήπτρον, the staff held by a speaker, and believed to be a symbol of sanctity (A 234-39, Σ 505, β 37, λ 569); and finally, we have the standard way of describing a judgement either as ἰθεῖα/straight, or as σκολιά/crooked (Π 387, Σ 508, Ψ 580; cf. pp.96, and 98 n. 87). Relevant are also the references to the ἴστωρ, who could be either the king or an elder of great experience and integrity so as to be regarded capable of reaching a straight judgement (Σ 501); the γέροντες or elders who sit in a sacred circle give their judgement in turn and finally announce their decision (Σ 503); the δικασπόλοι who are responsible for the protection of θέμιστες, the oral customary law, their position believed to be sanctified by Zeus himself and their authority being emphasised by means of the staff they hold (A 237-39, λ 185-86).

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<sup>89</sup> In the *Odyssey*, we hear also of Orestes' revenge on Aegisthus (α 40), which is not related in terms of δίκη, even if it should be seen as a rightful reaction that aims at establishing justice.

The most detailed reference to this proto-legal procedure is found at Σ 497-508. This is a part of the leisurely ekphrasis of the book, known also as the *Ὀπλοποιία*. Following Thetis' request, Hephaistus is preparing Achilles' new armour; the uniquely magnificent shield is embellished with scenes from various aspects of life: there is the sky and the earth and the ocean, and then there are two cities, one at peace, another at war; the scene from the ἀγορά belongs to the description of the city at peace, and is itself characteristically peaceful in its atmosphere: everything seems to be happening in perfect order.<sup>90</sup>

λαοὶ δ' εἰν ἀγορῇ ἔσαν ἀθρόοι· ἔνθα δὲ νείκος  
 ὠρώρει, δύο δ' ἄνδρες ἐνεΐκεον εἴνεκα ποινῆς  
 ἀνδρὸς ἀποφθιμένου· ὁ μὲν εὖχετο πάντ' ἀποδοῦναι  
 δήμῳ πιφάσκων, ὁ δ' ἀναίνετο μηδὲν ἐλέσθαι·  
 ἄμφω δ' ἰέσθην ἐπὶ ἴστορι πείραρ ἐλέσθαι.  
 λαοὶ δ' ἀμφοτέροισιν ἐπήπυον, ἀμφὶς ἀρωγοί·  
 κήρυκες δ' ἄρα λαὸν ἐρήτυον· οἱ δὲ γέροντες  
 ἦατ' ἐπὶ ξεστοῖσι λίθοις ἱερῶ ἐνὶ κύκλῳ,  
 σκῆπτρα δὲ κηρύκων ἐν χέρσ' ἔχον ἠεροφώνων·  
 τοῖσιν ἔπειτ' ἦισσον, ἀμοιβηδὶς δὲ δικάζον.  
 κείτο δ' ἄρ' ἐν μέσσοισι δύο χρυσοῖο τάλαντα,  
 τῶ δόμεν ὅς μετὰ τοῖσι δίκην ἰθύντατα εἶποι.

<sup>90</sup> See Taplin in MacAuslan-Walcot (1998) 101. Taplin provides a very interesting interpretation of the Shield of Achilles, which, as he remarks, is widely spread among German scholars; according to it we have on the shield a 'microcosmos, not a utopia, and death and destruction are also there, though in inverse proportion to the rest of the *Iliad* ... It is as though Homer has allowed us temporarily to stand back from the poem and see it in its place ... within a larger landscape, a landscape which is usually blotted from sight by the all-consuming narrative in the foreground' (107); the aim of this antithesis is not mere pacifism, but also an emphasis on the tragic aspect of man himself, for the *Iliad* 'is a tragic poem, and in it war prevails over peace - but that has been the tragic history of so much of mankind' (112). Quite different is the view expressed by Havelock (1978:127, 135-37), who sees in the shield another instance of the poet's didactic purpose: by presenting the proper way of settling a dispute he creates a sharp contrast to the way litigation is conducted in the main plot - a way which proves disastrous.

Two men have entered a dispute about the due payment of a sum of money as a form of reconciliation for a murder. The one responsible for the murder claims to have paid the money, while the other man, most probably a relative of the murdered man, denies having received it. The two contending parties come to the ἴστωρ, who could be either a witness or a judge, in order to reach an end or a solution, πείραρ ἐλέσθαι (501), while people, assembled to support the two disputants (502: λαοὶ δ' ἀμφοτέροισιν ἐπήπυον, ἀμφὶς ἄρωγοί·), are kept back by κήρυκες (503); then we suddenly move to the γέροντες, who sit on well polished stones ἱερῶ ἐνὶ κύκλῳ and, holding σκῆπτρα κηρύκων (504-5), 'judge' in turn, ἀμοιβηδὶς δικάζον (507); in the middle of the sacred circle two talents of gold are laid to be given to the one who δίκην ἰθύντατα εἶποι (508).<sup>91</sup>

The shield of Achilles obviously presents us with an early form of a legal procedure, the reference to the 'sacred circle' and the sceptres of the κήρυκες underlining the solemnity and formality of the occasion.<sup>92</sup> The reference to the ἀγορά appears to hint at an age other than that of the Homeric heroes and the Trojan War: what we most probably witness is an early form of the democratic ἀγορά rather than a procedure of the Mycenaean or heroic age.<sup>93</sup> Whether the body of the elders simply

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<sup>91</sup> True, the passage presents obvious difficulties in interpretation, a result of the fact that the poet refers to a procedure with which his audience must have been familiar. Thus, although in line 501 the two disputants are said to appear before the ἴστωρ in order that they may receive a judgement for their dispute, lines 503-508 refer to the γέροντες, the elders, who now seem responsible for the final decision. A further difficulty arises from the reference to the two talents of gold: κείτο δ' ἄρ' ἐν μέσσοισι δύω χρυσόιο τάλαντα, | τῶ δόμεν ὅς μετὰ τοῖσι δίκην ἰθύντατα εἶποι (507-8); does τῶ refer to one of the disputants or to one of the elders? The very issue of the dispute is also obscure: does the second man deny having received the money, or does he refuse to receive it, asking therefore for a different way of reconciliation? Doubtless, one hardly expects that the poet should be concerned to draw his picture in all accuracy and detail, as a historian would probably do; what he aims at is presenting "the stable justice of a civilized city" (Taplin, *ibid.*). Thus, we are inevitably faced with terms which are not explained, and with a procedure whose sequence and operation we can only faintly reconstruct, fully aware of the vague and blurred quality of the meagre information provided by the poet.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. Edwards, (1991) on Σ 504-5.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Havelock (1978) 135-136 for the importance of δῆμος.

oversees the procedure described, or if it is also responsible for the final judgement and settlement of the dispute is not easy to decide on the basis of the meagre and rather oblique information the poet provides. Still, it is evident that δικάζειν and δίκη are strictly legal terms, implying the final judgement reached, and at the same time the speech act necessary for this judgement to be reached, as emerges from the parallel use of δικάζον (506) and δίκην εἶποι (508).<sup>94</sup> Since we are still in an age of oral law, I have to agree with Gagarin that what we see is an *ad hoc* administration of justice, whereupon the aim is not adherence to some fixed principle, but rather a solution that will prove advantageous and satisfying to both opponents; this doubtless entails a certain degree of flexibility in regard to the laws applied and the decision made.<sup>95</sup>

Of the remaining Iliadic passages in which δίκη has a legal sense Ψ 573-85 is worth considering as well, albeit very briefly. The chariot race in honour of the dead Patroclus has just finished; Antilochus has managed to defeat Menelaus and come second, but only by means of his cunning; when Achilles is about to give the second prize to Nestor's young son, Menelaus revolts:

ἄλλ' ἄγετ', Ἀργείων ἠγήτορες ἠδὲ μέδοντες,  
 ἐς μέσον ἀμφοτέροισι δικάσατε, μηδ' ἐπ' ἄρωγῆι,  
 μή ποτέ τις εἶπῃσιν Ἀχαιῶν χαλκοχιτώνων·  
 ἄντίλοχον ψεύδεσσι βησάμενος Μενέλαος  
 οἴχεται ἵππον ἄγων, ὅτι οἱ πολὺ χεῖρονες ἦσαν  
 ἵπποι, αὐτὸς δὲ κρείσσων ἀρετῆ τε βίη τε.  
 εἰ δ' ἄγ' ἐγὼν αὐτὸς δικάσω, καί μ' οὐ τίνα φημι

<sup>94</sup> See Gagarin (1992) 61.

<sup>95</sup> Gagarin (1992) 61, 68. Cf. also Havelock (1978) 135-136: δίκη does not refer to a set of principles or rulings imposed by the judges, but is a symbol or process achieved through oral persuasion and oral conviction; certainly, this process is based on principles, yet these principles are quite flexible, rather precedents upon which the decision is based.



ἄλλων ἐπιπλήξειν Δαναῶν· ἰθεῖα γὰρ ἔσται.

Ἄντιλοχ' εἰ δ' ἄγε δεῦρο, διοτρεφές, ἧ θέμις ἐστί,

στάς ἵππων προπάροιθε καὶ ἄρματος, αὐτὰρ ἰμάσθλην

χεροῖν ἔχε ῥαδινήν, ἧ περ τὸ πρόσθεν ἔλαυνες,

ἵππων ἀψάμενος γαιήοχον ἐννοσίγαιον

ᾧμνυθι μὴ μὲν ἐκὼν τὸ ἐμὸν δόλω ἄρμα πεδῆσαι.

The procedure is not very different from the one appearing on Achilles' shield: in both cases we have two parties in dispute, and at the same time a third party apparently functioning as a neutral power of balance. This third party is not a single person of authority, but rather a group of people, at Σ 503 represented by γέροντες and at Ψ 573 by ἡγήτορες ἠδὲ μέδοντες - soon, though, to be replaced by Menelaus himself. The latter have obviously replaced the elders at this point because the settlement takes place during a war, and the conditions are certainly different from those described in Σ.<sup>96</sup> The nobles are to offer their judgement ἐς μέσσον ἀμφοτέροισι (574), while the final, aimed at decision has to be straight, ἰθεῖα (580).

Here again there seem to exist no fixed laws upon which the judgement is formed. Most interesting, however, is that Menelaus does not appear to assume the role of the judge because of his status as a king, but rather because he is the affected party in the particular situation. The procedure seems therefore even less formal, as the shift of power from the nobles to Menelaus proves the flexibility of the procedural principles themselves. The only detail that could be seen as implicit of an order that has

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<sup>96</sup> We can see this reference to the nobles as a hint of their judicial power in earlier times of history, yet the question would then arise why Agamemnon, the chief-commander of the expedition and the most powerful Achaean in Troy, who has received Zeus' θέμιστες and σκῆπτρον is not called to settle the dispute. I prefer to see this detail as an anachronism, the presentation of a procedure that would be immediately recognised by the poet's audience; besides, as Havelock (1978:92) observes, the poems commingle 'romanticism and realism', for it is hard to imagine that the poet had an accurate knowledge of the actual practices of such a distant age as that of his heroes. See also Havelock (1978) 69ff.

to be followed is Menelaus' requirement that Antilochus should swear on Poseidon in a quite ritual fashion, and tell the truth. No other principles are invoked, no fixed laws or rulings.<sup>97</sup>

At Ψ 542 we have the dative δίκη whose application seems rather obscure. During the chariot race, Eumelus has an accident, which is caused by Athena in order that Diomedes may win (388-400), and as a result the hero does not manage to finish the race; however, Achilles deems it proper to give him the second prize on the grounds of his well-known excellence (536-38); this causes the reaction of Antilochus, who was the second to finish: Ἀντίλοχος μεγαθύμου Νέστορος υἱὸς | Πηλείδην Ἀχιλῆα δίκη ἠμείψατ' ἀναστάς. Richardson's interpretation of the word 'with a formal appeal' seems to be in accordance with the view that δίκη means a settlement, mostly a verbal one,<sup>98</sup> although the situation does not seem to evoke any formality whatever; besides, a meaning that would be closer to 'justly' or even 'properly' does not seem particular relevant, since Antilochus' means were not fair, and his behaviour is later checked by Menelaus (570-72) and condemned even by himself (587-95). The only way in which the dative could be seen as equivalent almost to the adverb δικαίως, is if we ascribe to it the meaning of an expected, and therefore proper reaction. Antilochus reacted as was proper for someone who felt offended by the decision made; the fact that he has acted himself improperly is irrelevant until the moment when the offended Menelaus intervenes and demands an acknowledgement of the violation and a restitution of order.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Similarly informal seems to be the instance described at λ 543-47, which, however, assumes a degree of gravity because of the reference to Thetis' and Athena's presence.

<sup>98</sup> Richardson (1993) 228.

<sup>99</sup> This certainly does not mean that Antilochus' 'act of individuation', is not of importance, for Menelaus' reaction obviously proves the contrary. What is not important is that this act is not an act that would be against δίκη, if δίκη should be seen as the manner characteristic of Antilochus both because of his youth and because of his conviction that he deserves the second prize.

The most important occurrences of δίκη in a legal context having been looked at, I can now proceed with the examination of the term's application to a more moral meaning. But first, it has to be repeated that the distinction between a legal and a moral sense of the term is not as sharp as it would appear at first sight; if legality does indeed reflect morality, the relation is not difficult to grasp: even in the cases in which δίκη has a legal sense, signifying simply a procedure, and thus assuming after all different connotations, since it refers to social rather than personal morality, the two meanings may be almost fused, the word thus bearing the connotations of both.<sup>100</sup> Abiding by a/the law is a conscious decision of an agent, indicative of his moral qualities. In an age of oral law the moral nuance of legality is perhaps even more prominent, for there are no fixed principles, the violation of which is immediately recognised as a kind of formal injustice, but rather vague and flexible norms of behaviour, which can or cannot be violated at the discretion of the agent. Even if we see δίκη merely as a legal process, its proper administration entails, or even demands, a moral sense.

### 2.2.2 Δίκη as a moral term

The moral nuance of δίκη is particularly evident in the use of the adjective δίκαιος and the adverb δικαίως. The latter is totally absent from the *Iliad*, while the former has only a limited appearance there; both occur in the *Odyssey*, evoking the sense of morality that is believed to characterise the poem. The use of δικαιοτέρος for Agamemnon at T 181, which was mentioned along with the use of δίκη at T 180, is rather complicated, pertaining

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<sup>100</sup> It is in this way that ι 214-15 and ζ 120-21(= ι 175-76= ν 200-1≅ θ 575-76) should perhaps be interpreted, while the ambivalence of the term can also be noted in relation to Π 542 and γ 244; see p. 108.

to the content and the perspective of the *Iliad* as a whole, and therefore I would sooner postpone its discussion for the next chapter. The two other occurrences of the adjective in the *Iliad* are at Λ 831 for Cheiron, and at Ν 6 for the people of the Abioi; the adjective being used as a plain attributive, and no explanation being given as to what constitutes the ‘justice’ of Cheiron or the Abioi, the references are vague and not particularly helpful. It seems inevitable, therefore, that I should focus at this point on the examples provided by the *Odyssey*. The examination will certainly not be limited to the adjective and the adverb; for the noun δίκη will prove to have moral connotations, thus being worthy of notice.

To begin with, it has to be noted that the original form in which we sense a moral nuance is δίκη when denoting the ‘characteristic’ or ‘mark’: we have already seen that δίκη at Ψ 542 could be taken to imply that Antilochus reacted in a way that suited his character, and one could even say his social position; the reference is obviously not made to some abstract idea of justice, but instead to an idea of propriety as this is defined by the code of behaviour of the particular society. This would then have to be an application similar to that of the expression δίκη (ἐστί) + genitive, in which case δίκη means ‘manner, way’ and refers to a characteristic of the noun in the genitive, e.g. ἀλλ’ αὕτη δίκη ἐστὶ βροτῶν, ὅτε τίς κε θάνησιν (λ 218). But it seems that the expression does not simply imply a characteristic behaviour, but also the behaviour that is most appropriate for the person concerned; thus, at σ 278-79 we hear of the way in which the suitors were expected to behave: instead of consuming Odysseus' property, since μνηστήρων οὐχ ἦδε δίκη τὸ πάροιθε τέτυκτο, | οἳ τ’ ἀγαθὴν τε γυναῖκα καὶ ἀφνειοῖο θύγατρα | μνηστεύειν ἐθέλωσι καὶ ἀλλήλους ἐρίσωσιν (σ 275-77), they should have brought presents to the bride and her relations.

This last example should be associated with ξ 90-92, where Eumaus talks of the suitors' behaviour to his guest, the disguised Odysseus: ὄ τ' οὐκ ἐθέλουσι δικαίως | μνάσθαι οὐδὲ νέεσθαι ἐπὶ σφέτερ', ἀλλὰ ἔκηλοι | κτήματα δαρδάπτουσιν ὑπέρβιον, οὐδ' ἐπι φειδώ. The adverb δικαίως obviously implies a proper behaviour that the suitors disregard: their impropriety lies in their consuming the property of another; in other words, the suitors go beyond their own limits, and in this way they violate the limits of Odysseus and his οἶκος. The adjective δίκαιος is also used as the antonym of ὑβριστής in the formulaic line ἦ ῥ' οἷ γ' ὑβρισταί τε καὶ ἄγριοι οὐδὲ δίκαιοι (ζ 120= ι175= ν 200). The etymology and actual meaning of ὑβρις remain uncertain,<sup>101</sup> yet it is generally accepted that it refers to an excessive behaviour which proves dishonouring and offensive for the injured party.<sup>102</sup> If ὑβριστής is, then, one who exceeds the limits of propriety, δίκαιος must be the one who keeps within these limits.<sup>103</sup>

The words certainly imply adherence to the particular code of conduct that exists in Homeric society, as is obvious from the reference to the proper way of wooing a lady at ξ 90-92 and σ 275-77, or the reference to the principle of ξενία at ζ 121(= θ 576= ι176= ν 201, cf. υ 294f.= φ 312f.). Δίκαιος is, then, the person who conforms with the principles of society, thus keeping within the limits that these principles have established. The word can be used for a proper way of speaking (σ 414-15= υ 322-23) or for someone with proper table manners (γ 52), and it is therefore very close to the

<sup>101</sup> See p. 73, n. 42.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. the use of ὑπέρβιον and φειδώ at ξ 92. For ὑβρις as excessive behaviour see p. 44.

<sup>103</sup> Rodgers (1971) also relates δίκη and being δίκαιος with the idea of keeping within one's proper limits, and rightly relates the terms with αἰδώς; thus 'being δίκαιος depends on knowing where one stands in society' (299), a quality that leads to properly respecting another; however, I would not totally agree with her that 'observing δίκη is not getting into trouble' (ibid.); it is indeed true that 'whether one is δίκαιος or ἄδικος ... depends on the consequences of one's actions' (292), but this common sense statement does not justify, I believe, the prudential meaning she ascribes to the terms; justice can be both a conscious choice on prudential grounds, but it can also be a dispositional attitude, conditioned rather subconsciously. Dickie (1978:99) also sees δίκη as opposed to ὑβρις, which denotes 'a transgression or overstepping of the due order of things', normally consisting in 'one person's invading the rights of another'; see also his criticism of Rodgers' arguments (100-1).

use of the expressions κατὰ μοῖραν, κατ' αἴσαν. It does not come as a surprise, then, that we find δίκη alongside αἴσιμα ἔργα at ξ 84: the line belongs to Eumaeus, part of the same utterance as ξ 90-92, the context being again the suitors' insolent conduct; their impropriety disregards the norms of Homeric society. Although both the noun and the adjective may be said to refer to a disposition of the agent, it is obvious that they should not be seen as indicative of an abstract and conceptualised notion of justice.

Worth noticing is also the association of δίκη with θέμιστες at ι 214-15; Odysseus gives his impression of the Cyclops: ἄνδρ' ἐπελεύσεσθαι μεγάλην ἐπιείμενον ἀλκὴν | ἄγριον, οὔτε δίκας εὖ εἰδότα οὔτε θέμιστας. This is the second occurrence of the noun in a largely moral context, the first being the above mentioned case of ξ 84. As happens in the formula of ζ 120-21 δίκη is again paired with ἄγριον, and the lines are generally thought to reflect the opposition between a civilised and a primitive world. Δίκας, therefore, could be taken to denote the legal procedures by means of which disputes are settled in an organised society, and the lack of which entails violence. The application in this case would not be different from Π 542, where Sarpedon's kingly qualities are described,<sup>104</sup> or from γ 244, where we hear of Nestor who περὶ οἶδε δίκας ἠδὲ φρόνιν ἄλλων. Θέμιστες refers to principles of behaviour, which can be seen to have either a moral or a legal content. This is exactly the point at which the two applications of δίκη seem to converge, morality and legality appearing as the two aspects of the same essential quality.

It is indeed very difficult to prove or assert that the two applications of the word have a common origin; Gagarin is against such an interpretation, insisting that we have

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<sup>104</sup> As Janko notes (1992: on Π 541-7), we have here 'the two desiderata for a king', that is 'to avert civil strife and prevent foreign attack'. Cf. also τ 108-114, where we find the *hapax legomenon* εὐδικία.

actually two distinct semantic developments of the term, the one leading to δίκη as a process, the other to δίκαιος as an attribute of the person who behaves properly. One could see the former as the basis of the judicial terminology of later times, and the latter as the basis of the respective moral terminology, with δικαιοσύνη being the term that denotes justice in an abstract sense.<sup>105</sup> Such a solution seems indeed plausible, for the relation between δίκη as the line between land properties, or as a judgement, and δίκη as one's characteristic behaviour is not easy to trace.

I would not be so categorical myself. One should consider that the economy of language that so intensely characterises epic poetry should perhaps raise the question whether it was possible, or rather desirable, to use the same term in two sharply distinct ways; the fact that the noun is mainly limited to a legal context certainly allows a differentiation, but there seems to exist a latent reference to morality even in these cases which permits the term to be used in other contexts with equal readiness. The key, I think, is the relation that exists between morality and legality, which demands that even a legal act is based on and should be conducted according to essential principles of morality. A society which enjoys the privilege of having laws on the basis of which it can pursue social harmony is a society which has acknowledged the importance of morality for its survival and has therefore formed a code of some kind in order to ensure that certain essential principles are not violated. Behind the non-elaborate Homeric concept of justice, either as a procedure or as a disposition, one can detect the basic principle of morality as defined in the previous chapter: a *condicio sine qua non* for all societies, which acknowledges the crucial role that the existence of limits may have for survival.

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<sup>105</sup> Gagarin (1973) 82, 87.

At the same time, it has to be admitted that the Homeric concept of justice is non-elaborate. Whether implying a legal process, or a moral behaviour, δίκη and its derivatives appear quite inarticulate or even premature. For the reference is obviously made to the particular principles of the Homeric code of behaviour, and therefore we can hardly say, for example, that δίκαιος denotes a 'just man' in a conceptualised sense. It is propriety and adherence to the code that is commended or criticised, and not a disposition of some abstract quality that could potentially entail a conflict at times with the code itself. The quality suggested by the adjective is defined by the particular demands of the particular society, and this certainly means that it is not of a universal value that supersedes time and space. As Havelock rightly observes, 'both epics...are very far from identifying "justice" as a principle with a priori foundations, whether conceived as the necessary "rule of law" or as a moral sense in man'.<sup>106</sup>

Still, for all that it would be absurd, in my opinion, to insist on this characteristic of Homeric thought or society; if this society is ignorant of other possibilities as regards morality and justice, and is, therefore, content with the existence of a code that ensures, at times successfully, at times not so much so, social stability and even prosperity, it is obvious that what is lacking is simply the awareness of the ephemeral quality of this code or of an elaborate philosophical system that would transcend the necessities of the particular time and place;<sup>107</sup> by no means should this be

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<sup>106</sup> Havelock (1978) 180-81.

<sup>107</sup> The absence of writing is perhaps a significant factor for the non-elaborateness of thought, although not the only factor. Havelock (1978:221ff) stresses the importance that writing had for the conceptualisation of ideas; 'Language, as it presented itself to be read, became a physical material amenable to an arrangement which was structural - or "geometric"...This meant rearrangement, for whereas the previous need for oral memorization had favored sequences governed by the laws of sound, it was now possible to supplement these by dispositions suggested by the laws of shape' (225). In any case, the absence of an elaborate legal system should be seen as closely affected by the oral character of the period. But the question remains whether a more elaborate legal awareness entails an equally elaborate moral awareness; as I said, in a society of written laws, the line between legality and morality seems sharper. See p. 44, n. 43 and the reference to Williams (1993) 63ff.



taken to imply that Homeric man is incapable of moral behaviour. We have already seen in the first chapter that moral behaviour can exist irrespectively of the presence or acknowledgement of internal or conceptualised principles; the fact that Homeric man acts out of a concern for his name is not incompatible with his ability to distinguish right from wrong, or proper from improper behaviour, and act accordingly.

What I hope to have made clear in this chapter is that both *moira* and *δίκη* can be seen as essentially moral terms. The former denotes an order which results from an act of departmentalisation, and although this order is usually seen in the dimension of nature or life, the relevant terms can also be used to designate a moral order that is socially defined. *Δίκη* also refers to such a social order, and although no idea of departmentalisation is implied, still, there is the idea of the existence of certain limits that a *δίκαιος* man does not transgress. These are the limits set by the Homeric code of ethics, and although they may appear to be of a rather ephemeral quality, they still have the power to create a nexus of principles against which right and wrong are defined. Moral behaviour is not only possible, but necessary, and, more important, acknowledged as such.

One final remark in anticipation of what is to follow: *moira* is obviously related to the gods. Whether or not it should be seen as identical to them will be examined in the remaining two chapters; but whatever the case, the gods represent in some way the order implied by *moira*. This is certainly not necessarily a just order; neither nature nor life is always and consistently just, in the sense in which man perceives justice. Accordingly, the gods are not always and consistently just: even if they behave occasionally in a manner that would justify the use of the term, this is not the characteristic for which they are renowned and acknowledged in the Homeric world.

Δίκη, with its limited application and meaning, is far from denoting such an idea of divine justice. Its moral nuance is beyond doubt, but it is confined to human behaviour, and the closest that the gods can come to it is by observing social order in human society; this function, when applicable, should be distinguished from the idea of a just god who dispenses happiness and misery according to merit, or who is invariably concerned with human happiness. The gods with their concern for order, rather than justice, are a successful explanation for both good and evil.

*The Iliad*

The *Iliad*, whose title is certainly not the poet's own, is the poem about Achilles' terrible μῆνις. A wrath so obdurate and powerful that it caused the death of tens of thousands of heroes, comparable only to the wrath of a god.<sup>1</sup> This is the point of reference for the poet, who finds, nonetheless, quite often the opportunity to divert from this main subject and narrate events that belong to the background, whether of the past, the present or the future: we hear of the beginning and the end of the Trojan war, we see the great heroes of this glorious era fighting, discussing, crying and loving, and we witness the destruction of Troy, the story of a family and a people slowly disintegrating before our eyes. The gods, at times simply observing, but most often participating in the war, are constantly present, advancing life to its end in one way or another. Being frequently in the poet's focus, they form another excuse for digression, this time on a different plane, which, however, retains a relation to the basic plot. These episodes that surround the main theme are manipulated with extreme mastery so as to be both related to and independent from it. Thus, the poet manages to return to his central hero at regular intervals without however disturbing the flow of his narration, until he finally becomes entirely absorbed with the hero's own action.

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<sup>1</sup> For μῆνις as the word used only for the gods' wrath see Clay (1983) 65ff.; according to Clay μῆνις is caused when an attempt is made 'to blur or overstep the lines of demarcation separating gods from men' (66); for her application of this argument to the plot of the *Odyssey*, see p. 243, n. 27.

The nucleus and essence of the poem is Achilles' wrath. The theme of the angry hero who withdraws from battle must have been traditional, as the *exemplum* of Meleager's story seems to imply (I 524-605),<sup>2</sup> although this story is finally accommodated to the needs of the narrative.<sup>3</sup> However, as Griffin has rightly observed, this is exactly the point at which the *Iliad* diverges from tradition: besides the *exemplum* which is used in order to prescribe how Achilles should behave, and consequently how the plot should evolve, there are indications in the preceding books that Achilles will return to the battlefield as soon as he receives proper gifts of reconciliation from Agamemnon.<sup>4</sup> This is not what happens after all, however. Achilles refuses the gifts, and the poet, almost defying tradition, sets off for the construction of a totally different plot: from this point onwards the essence of Achilles' tragedy takes a definite shape, as he becomes entangled in the unpleasant consequences of his own decisions and passions.

As already noted, a great part of the plot belongs to the gods. Either in relation to Achilles' wrath or not, their intervention remains undoubtedly imposing. At the same time, moira has an all-compelling presence; if nothing else, it appears to define Achilles' life in a way that raises the question of human freedom of will and action: the hero is said to have a choice between two fates: he can either stay and fight and win a glorious death, or return

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<sup>2</sup> The presence of Phoenix in I has been suspected of interpolation. For relevant bibliography see Willcock (1964) 146, n.4; see also Griffin (1995) 23-25.

<sup>3</sup> Willcock (1964) 152f. In his discussion on the poet's way of manipulating mythological paradigmata according to the development of his own plot, Willcock argues in a quite persuasive manner that the story of Meleager as found in the poem is not entirely traditional; the detail about the hero's wrath and subsequent withdrawal from battle is an invention of the poet of the *Iliad*, aiming at creating the necessary parallel that would make Phoenix' speech of exhortation effective. Still, the theme, as Willcock observes (152, n.6), may be said to be latent in the withdrawal of Paris (Z 326) and Aeneas (N 460), while the *Odyssey* provides examples of quarrels between heroes at γ 136, θ 75 and λ 544.

<sup>4</sup> Griffin (1995) 19-21.

to Phthia, and live a long but quiet life (l 410-16); still, and despite the fact that he seems at some point to be opting for the latter (l 427-29), his life seems to be inextricably bound to the fate of death. Is this not a cruel power, refuting all that has been said about moira in the previous chapter? Is the hero not confined to well-established movements, that defy his wishes and his plans? And if moira is of such a power in the poem, how could it be reconciled with the belief in divine justice? The latter seems to demand that the gods act on the basis of principles that support morality and propriety, yet no such basis can exist if the gods have ultimately to obey the irrational force of moira. Should we, then, exclude the possibility of divine justice in the poem? Or, should we, instead, see moira as part of divine justice itself? The issue is complex, and moira's coercive power may be seen in relation to the limited importance that the idea of divine justice has in the poem.<sup>5</sup>

### 3.1 Moira

In the previous chapter I examined the concept of moira mainly as this is perceived by the heroes, believing that in this way we might have a better glimpse of the actual Homeric belief. It was noted at this point (87) that moira is used as a *post eventum* explanation of life: being employed once an event has been accomplished, and implying the order of life's departmentalisation and distribution in shares, it provides the reason as

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<sup>5</sup> Chantraine (1952:92) describes the difference between the two Homeric poems as follows: 'L' *Iliade* est une tragédie du destin, sans justice. L' *Odyssée* est un roman optimiste qui fait triompher la justice'. Moira and divine justice do seem to be incompatible to a certain degree: if fate defines the course of life, the gods are obliged to obedience, whether or not fate is their own decision, disregarding, it would seem, the consideration of justice; however, if moira should be seen as implicit of an order, divine justice is certainly not incompatible with it, granted that divine justice does not refer to a universal and unconditional idea of morality, but simply to a reciprocal punitive justice.

to why things ought to be as they are. The truth is that moira is actually employed in exactly the same way by the poet himself; the events which he narrates are events that belong to his past, that have been accomplished and defy any other rational explanation, and which he cannot by any means disregard or modify: Achilles and Hector have indeed died, and Troy has been utterly destroyed, and the reason behind these events can be no other than fate.

In a way, then, the poet's perspective of life is not different from that of Hector standing outside the Scaean gates and realizing that life is subject to fate's decree after all (X 297-306). The difference is that the poet has an entirely different purpose when employing moira: while the hero seeks an explanation, the poet seeks the material upon which he will construct his plot. Detached emotionally from the events he narrates, he can use moira almost at will, according to the emphasis he wishes to put on life and the perspective he wishes to endorse himself. I will try to examine here the way in which the poet appropriates this knowledge to his narrative purpose, how moira is intertwined with the plot and how the subsequent outcome defines our perception of the Iliadic man; to this end I will focus particularly on the cases in which moira refers to events that the poet himself perceives as fated or predetermined.

The events that the poet ascribes to moira, either directly through his own narration or indirectly through the gods, are the death of Sarpedon (Π 433-34), Patroclus (Π 47, 687) and Hector (O 612-14), and although Achilles' actual death is not narrated by the poet, its connection to moira is drawn explicitly and with increasing emphasis in the poem. The fall of Troy seems also to be related to moira, an event foretold on numerous occasions both by

the poet and by the gods - interestingly enough, though, foretold mainly by means of a negative application of moira: thus, we hear that it was not fated that Troy should fall to Patroclus or to Achilles (Π 707-9), or that a possible capture of Troy during the battle narrated in Φ would be against fate (ὑπέρμπορον, 517) - two instances from which we can conclude that the fall of Troy was indeed fated.<sup>6</sup> Although it is not made clear, therefore, whether it is the actual destruction or the circumstances of the destruction that are predetermined, the event still looms over the plot, and its inevitability is admitted by the poet and his gods, and anticipated by the heroes.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, there are events of less, and less direct, significance to the actual plot, such as Aeneas' survival of the war (Υ 302-8), or the death of minor figures, such as Asius (Μ 116-17) or Dioreus (Δ 517).

In order that the implications of moira be illuminated, it is necessary that we examine its relation to the gods. The relation between moira and the gods is certainly not unexpected. On the one hand, moira implies a cause which is external to and independent of human will; since non-human, it must be related to the divine in some way. On the other hand, the gods are presented as being responsible for everything in life, small or great, exercising their power of control over human lives with unquestionable ease. The gods' decisions, then, inevitable as they are in their accomplishment, seem to entail a degree of predetermination for life: Hera's insatiable hatred for Troy and her fervent wish for its destruction, Aphrodite's power over the notorious couple, and most of all Zeus's plans,

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. also Β 155. For Achilles' fate not to capture Troy, see also Υ 29-30. The event is explicitly attributed to αἴσα in the *Odyssey*, at θ 509-13, although the reference there is supposed to be part of Demodocus' song; see Garvie (1994) on θ 506-12.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Η 30-32, Π 707-9 and Ζ 447-49. Troy's fall is actually rather complicated; in the background there seems to be the idea that Troy is destroyed because of Paris' violation of the principle of hospitality, which is believed to be protected by Zeus himself; however, and as will be made clear in the following chapter, this explanation is rather suppressed by the poet. We do hear that Zeus promised a victory to the Greeks, but no reason is given for that promise.

obviously define life, forcing man into an established course from which he cannot escape. Thus, it happens that the impression of predetermination that so powerfully dominates the poem is not only the result of moira's application to the text; most often it is the gods' planning and plotting on human lives that creates the suffocating impression that man is actually deceived and entrapped within imperceptible yet all too oppressing confines.

So, what is the difference from moira? Could the gods' activity be interpreted as moira? Is moira the very action of the gods, their decisions which are imposed on the heroes irrespective of their will? Zeus in particular is the supreme power, the *ἄναξ* that reigns over gods and men alike by the right of his might and imposes his will against all odds.<sup>8</sup> It would seem only natural, then, that he should be responsible for moira as well. Given the fact that man is inclined to attribute to moira those events that have been accomplished irrespective of or against his own will, and that moira is simply the name given to life *post eventum*, there seems to be no obvious reason why moira should be distinguished from divine action: life is indeed defined by the gods in its smallest detail. What would prevent one from drawing the connection, or from suggesting the identification of the two?

In fact, nothing. As will become clear fairly soon, the relation does indeed exist in the poem. This is not surprising, granted the power that Zeus's regime enjoys. What is surprising is that this idea co-exists with that of moira's actual differentiation from the

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<sup>8</sup> Zeus is an *ἄναξ* like Agamemnon (A 186; A 280-81; Θ 211; Ο 107-8), a characteristic instance of interpreting the divine in terms of human behaviour and social principles. However, the two worlds exist in sharp contrast to each other, as the gods enjoy an eternal and ageless life of ever-lasting happiness, while men are doomed to misery. This antithesis is essential to the poem's ideology and perspective, for in this way human tragedy, and therefore, human grandeur, are illuminated even more distinctly. See Griffin (1980)



gods. It is moira's ambivalent status against the gods that is rather disquieting and confusing. The relation, as presented by the text itself, is problematic and inconsistent. On the one hand, it appears that moira and the gods do not coincide, either in their action or in their intention, but, with the boundaries between them not being clearly cut, it frequently happens that the gods' interference bears the same significance for the heroes, and the same unbearable truth of man's fragility, as fate or moira, the relation between the two being therefore only the result of confusion.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, the gods are indeed related to moira: they know of its decrees and seem to act towards their fulfilment; moreover, quite frequently they seem to be even responsible for the decision that elsewhere belongs to moira, thus disallowing the conclusion of their subordination to it; Zeus in particular enjoys a much closer relation, manifest also on a verbal level, which may often create the impression of his identification even with moira.

Obviously, albeit sadly, the question of moira's relation to the gods can receive no answer that would establish a solution of absolute consistency, for the mere reason that no such answer is ever given in the poem itself. Moira is both independent of and related to the gods, at times even seeming to be identified with them. This lack of determination, so to speak, on the part of the poet, and the subsequent self-contradicting and certainly flexible presentation of moira are easily justified once we consider the nature of the

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<sup>9</sup> See for example the explanation Agamemnon gives for his delusion which made him take Briseis from Achilles: ἀλλὰ Ζεὺς καὶ Μοῖρα καὶ ἠεροφοῖτις Ἐρινύς, | οἳ τέ μοι εἰν ἀγορῇ φρεσὶν ἐμβαλον ἄγριον ἄτην (Τ 86-87). The passage may be interpreted in more than one way; Dietrich (1965:202ff.), for example, sees here an instance of Moira's tendency to become all the more related to some notion of justice and morality, and although 'Moira and Erinys are not yet - as in later literature - clearly defined moral agents that are imagined to inflict retribution for guilt', still the 'connection ... of the personal Moira with Erinys is conceived on a higher level than that of death-dealing deities' (203); Dodds (1951:6), rightly as I believe, suggests that moira is here simply 'brought in because people spoke of any unaccountable personal disaster as part of their "portion" or "lot", meaning simply that they cannot understand why it happened, but since it has happened, evidently "it had to be"'; see p. 88, n.66.

concept of fate itself and the nature and function of the poem. If the concept represents a human 'invention' or illusion, it is only natural that it should be inconsistent or deficient; if it really corresponds to an external force which can indeed control life, it is only natural that it should be beyond human perception and therefore the cause of eternal human puzzlement. Moira or fate proves, therefore, far too complex an idea for the poet to be concerned with the definition either of its essence and function or of its relation to the gods; with his primary interest lying with the narration of a story and the construction of a plot, inconsistencies and vagueness are expected, when it comes to the application of philosophical or theological ideas.

Moira and the gods exist in a relation of a very fine balance indeed, which can by no means correspond to a system which is fully developed and totally consistent with itself. Behind the plot there is no theological system which can be detected, and therefore, the best one can hope for, when examining Homeric theology, is to describe different ideas and tendencies, not rarely in conflict with one another, in the most accurate way. If we are frustrated by the flexibility both of moira's nature and of its relation to the gods, we have to bear in mind that the poet is equally frustrated and confused, the only difference being that he does not seem to be concerned either with the cause of his confusion or with the solution to it; to him moira seems to be both an event and a power, both independent from and related to the gods, and he appears to be employing the idea most suitable to the context of his narration. But these are after all expected inconsistencies when it comes to such a concept as that of fate, and certainly not peculiar to Homeric thought.

The ambivalence of the relation may be said to result from moira's basically distinct province and field of activity. It would appear that the occasional preference of moira to the gods and vice versa is often a matter of different perspectives and emphases. The difference is to be detected mainly in the poet's own manipulation of both moira and the gods, but it would seem that even the heroes' more vague utterances do imply such a distinction, if only occasionally. Although this difference may be said to be only slight, still it disallows the complete and unconditional identification of the two. The literary quality of our poem, and its indifference to the problem, simply results in their being brought into sharp relief. In what follows, I will attempt to explore the way in which the poet employs and manipulates the gods and moira, and to interpret the poem accordingly.

There is certainly little doubt about the importance of the gods' role in the poem; whether seen as individual deities, each pursuing a different plan and exercising a different power, or as the collective idea of divinity that permeates nature and life, their incessant participation in the plot underlines their power over human affairs. Every single situation in life seems to be explained in terms of divine participation or intervention throughout the poem: from Apollo's plague up until Zeus's command for the burial of Hector, the plot is unfolded with the gods interfering with human affairs, deciding the course of life, and causing thereupon the events narrated. Their intervention being at times discreet and imperceptible, as when they bring courage to a warrior or manipulate a hero's mood, and at times patent and incontrovertible, as when they participate in the battle themselves, or even discuss with the heroes, they seem to be omnipresent and ubiquitous.

The importance of divine interference and the conviction of its effectiveness is more than frequently asserted by the heroes themselves. Although unable, as mortals, to know the exact workings of the gods, and therefore unable to identify them with certainty, they still draw the link between life and the gods, all too often unmistakably. Achilles rightly suspects a divine presence in the plague (A 62-67), for example, just as Priam does when coming to Achilles guided by the disguised Hermes (Ω 374-77). The gods are deemed responsible for a turning in the course of battle, for success or failure, for looks and courage, for life and death. And when Achilles reflects on human misfortune, trying to soothe both Priam's and his own pain, he talks of the famous jars of Zeus (Ω 527-33): there are two jars at the threshold of the god's palace, the one containing misery, the other happiness; and out of those the god distributes life to the mortals: either a combination of the two, or plain misery. True, the heroes' utterances are vague, referring to an indefinite, collective power of the divine rather than to the individual, personal gods that we see moving about in the poem. But, although this may result in some confusion, as regards divine responsibility, as well as the relation of the gods to moira, the importance of divine action, confirmed as it is by the plot itself, remains beyond doubt.

Not at all surprisingly, the supreme power belongs to Zeus. He is the father of mortals and immortals alike, whose power is acknowledged both by the other gods and by the heroes, but more important, by the poet himself, who uses this power as the motive force of the plot. It is at the very beginning of the poem that we hear of Zeus's will: the poet will sing of Achilles' wrath towards Agamemnon, a wrath with terrible consequences for Greeks and Trojans alike: tens of thousands of heroes were to become the prey of dogs and birds, and it was in this way that Zeus's will was fulfilled - Διὸς δ' ἔτελείετο βουλή (A

5). It is not easy to define what exactly Zeus's will or plan involves, yet it seems to refer to Zeus's promise to Thetis to honour her son (A 523-27), rather than to a more general plan concerning the Trojan War and its outcome.<sup>10</sup> Hearing of this plan so early in the poem certainly underlines the significance that this concept has both for Homeric thought and for the Iliadic plot; for it is true that, besides reflecting an essential belief of Homeric religion, the idea of an all powerful Zeus is particularly helpful for the construction and unfolding of the narrative.

The god first appears at A 494f.: the gods have just arrived on Olympus from the land of the Aethiopes; καὶ τότε δὴ πρὸς Ὀλυμπον ἴσαν θεοὶ αἰὲν ἑόντες, | πάντες ἅμα, Ζεὺς δ' ἦρχε. After this ceremonial, almost theatrical procession, the meeting with Thetis follows. The goddess ascends Olympus; Zeus is sitting apart from all the gods on the highest peak of Mount Olympus; there, in isolation, Thetis will come as a suppliant and ask for a favour: 'Honour my son, for he is much dishonoured by king Agamemnon: grant power to the Trojans, until the Achaeans will honour him back again'; Zeus, silent at first, finally assents to her request; afraid of Hera's complaints though he is, he nods to Thetis, and his immortal locks shake, and along with them the whole of Olympus. When Zeus appears before the gods again, all of them stand up at his entrance - οὐδέ τις ἔτλη | μῆναι ἐπερχόμενον, ἀλλ' ἀντίοι ἔσαν ἅπαντες (A 534-35). And when Hera finally confronts

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<sup>10</sup> Such a plan is mentioned in the *Cypria* (I 1-7, Allen); according to the poem, the Trojan War was caused by Zeus out of pity for earth, which was carrying too heavy a load of people at the time. The fact that the poet of the *Iliad* does not mention such a plan does not preclude the possibility of his knowing about it; even if the *Cypria* should be regarded as later than our *Iliad*, the tradition could well have existed before the composition of the latter, for the idea of a destruction of mankind is certainly one of the subjects of Near Eastern literature, cf. Burkert (1992:101-106). That Zeus's will here is to be restricted within the confines of our poem is evident from the structure of the sentence: A 5 comes as a complement to the preceding lines; besides, as will become clear later on, it is necessary that Zeus's will should be the promise to Thetis, for in this manner Achilles' responsibility and subsequent tragedy are emphasised.

him and whines at him, as any woman would, when feeling that her husband's decisions do not particularly suit her own plans, Zeus responds first rather mildly, and then less so, threatening her with his power and evading her question by establishing the ultimate nature of his plan - as any husband would, when getting tired of his wife's endless whimpering. Εἰ δ' οὕτω τοῦτ' ἐστίν, ἐμοὶ μέλλει φίλον εἶναι (564) is the verse containing the essence of his words, and at the same time of his power.<sup>11</sup> Hera retreats; she feels fear and pain (568-69); Hephaistos tries to reconcile the two gods, by pointing out to Hera that Zeus's power is not to be disregarded - ἀργαλέος γὰρ Ὀλύμπιος ἀντιφέρεσθαι (589). And with Hephaistos narrating how he was once hurled down from Olympus, and thus bringing merriment again to this divine gathering, the scene comes to its close.<sup>12</sup>

Reminders of Zeus's unique power are dispersed throughout the poem, establishing both his superiority and the inevitability of his plan. Among the plethora of references, there are two scenes, which, placed at rather regular intervals, seem to function as stepping stones to the plot: they are the two instances in which Zeus discloses the future to the gods, the first in Θ, the second in Ο. Both instances are the point of culmination of divine discord and disorder, with Zeus establishing his power thereafter even more firmly and

<sup>11</sup> Cf. the phrase οὕτω που Διὶ μέλλει ὑπερμενέει φίλον εἶναι (Β 116, Ι 23, Ξ 69), a typical explanation of events offered by the heroes.

<sup>12</sup> This scene of marital discord has often been seen as improper and all too human for the father of gods and men, especially after the grand presentation that precedes it. Along with episodes such as the Theomachy in Υ, Zeus's seduction by Hera (Ξ 159-353) or the lay of Aphrodite and Ares in the *Odyssey* (θ 266-366), it is believed to account for the accusation of the gods' frivolous and therefore irreligious character. However, 'their carefree existence is necessary, to throw into relief and make us see human life as it is' (Griffin (1980) 170); see also Macleod (1982) 3-4. Of interest is also Burkert's account of Hera's characteristic divine qualities (1985:132ff), according to which the goddess's almost comic status in Homer should be related to her representing both the before and the after of marriage, that is both virginity and dissension, a trait which is also evident in her cult. It is worth noting that Xenophanes actually criticises this side of the gods as improper to divinity, and not their attitude towards man, which we find most disturbing; see Babut (1974). This is also a point in which the *Iliad* is different from the *Odyssey*: with the exception of the scene between Aphrodite and Ares, the gods of the more recent poems seem more dignified; this could be seen as further supporting the idea that there is a moral development in the *Odyssey*, to which, however, I would not subscribe.

forcefully. Pointing both backwards and forwards, recapitulating and at the same time foreshadowing the plot, they emphasise Zeus's role both in life and in the poem.

The whole of Θ has been interpreted by Kirk as evolving round the central theme of Zeus's superiority: in its 'spasmodic structure' and 'inconclusive episodes' it is confirmed that 'Zeus's will is paramount, that the other gods cannot frustrate it, and that it points towards Trojan dominance and Achaean crisis until Akhilleus' wrath is assuaged'.<sup>13</sup> The book opens with a 'manifesto' of the god's power: the gods are assembled on Olympus, and Zeus states his demand of absolute obedience to his will: whoever fails to conform with his plan will be severely punished; for he is θεῶν κράτιστος ἀπάντων (17); and even if all the gods together tried to pull him down from Olympus with a golden chain, him, who could move the earth and the sea and suspend them from Olympus, well, even so, they would not be able to move him from the sky; τόσσον ἐγὼ περί τ' εἶμι θεῶν περί τ' εἶμι ἀνθρώπων (27). Zeus's law is the law of physical strength, and it is the threat of imposing this law that prevents the other gods from objecting to him. Zeus is determined to fulfil his plan, and he will do so, whether or not the other gods agree with him.

Later on in the same book the threat is almost materialised and the god's power is confirmed: Hera and Athena decide to ignore Zeus's command; feeling pity for the Greeks, they enter the war (350ff.); besides, as Athena complains, it is not fair for Zeus to help the Trojans: how can he forget that she was the one who helped his son Heracles through the labours imposed by Eurystheus; an instant flashback towards A and we are reminded how everything began: behind the Trojan victory there is the god's promise to Thetis (370-72);

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<sup>13</sup> Kirk (1990) on Θ 350-484.

everything has been advancing towards the accomplishment of this promise and, therefore, it is in accordance with it that the plot is built up. Religious belief and narrative necessity impose and fulfil their parallel aims, without, however, proving themselves incompatible. But now it is time that Zeus intervened: his messenger Iris warns the two goddesses of the terrible punishment they are to have inflicted upon them, if they do not withdraw; they have to know that far too many Greeks will still have to be killed by Hector, before Achilles joins the war again; and that will not happen until after Patroclus' death, ὥς γὰρ θέσφατόν ἐστι (477). By thus revealing the future, Zeus reaffirms and re-establishes his power.

In O the plan is given in even more detail: Apollo will help Hector against the Achaeans, who, in their flight, will reach Achilles' tent; Achilles will then send Patroclus to help, but for all the help he will offer, and for all the enemies he will kill - among them Zeus's son Sarpedon - he will be killed by Hector; and Achilles, mad at Hector, will kill him in turn; what remains is the final and total destruction of Troy (59-71). Here again a reference is made to the promise to Thetis (74-77), and here again the plan follows after a god's attempt to disobey and disregard Zeus's previous threats and commands: this time it is Poseidon who helps the Greeks stealthily and unbeknown to Zeus; for the supreme god has been seduced by Hera and is now asleep; but as soon as he wakes up, his will is once again imposed in a fashion similar to that of Θ.

The detail in which the god's plan is presented inevitably emphasizes the inevitability of his words; not for a single moment do we question their truth, and even if it is the poet who is ultimately responsible for them, still, it has to be acknowledged that the



image he presents us with is that of an all powerful god, whose will is a command and a law, inescapable and indisputable. Everything that Zeus wills becomes an unavoidable necessity imposed on mortals and immortals alike; and it often appears that everything happens simply because Zeus wants it to happen. As Hera says to Athena at Θ 430-31, it is only natural and proper, ἐπιεικής, that he should be the one who makes the decisions; and it is beyond doubt that his decisions shape a substantial part of the plot. The plan which he conceives in A and then discloses in Θ and O is indeed fulfilled in the poem in all its detail: the god comes into action by first deceiving Agamemnon with a dream into believing that the god is on the Greeks' side (B 3-6, 35-40); the Greeks are defeated, the Trojans are glorious in their victory, with Hector leading them closer and closer to the Greek ships, to which he finally sets fire - and then everything comes out as foreseen or planned by Zeus.<sup>14</sup>

Zeus has the unquestionable privilege to transform his will into a certain future under the threat of an exercise of physical strength, or rather violence. Nothing and no one can ever hinder the accomplishment of the events he has determined. The other gods do not necessarily always agree with him, yet, whatever they will, or whatever means they employ to achieve their own aim, in the end they always have to yield to his power and acknowledge his unique claim to the final decision; even if they gain a momentary control over events, as happens with Hera and Poseidon in Ξ, causing thus a significant turn in life,

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<sup>14</sup> The question is whether this is a plan formed by Zeus or a decree of moira. But if we accept that the two are essentially one and the same thing in the sense that they are viewed from a different perspective, not that they are identified, there is no reason to insist on the differentiation. It is worth noting at this point that Zeus's plan is not placed randomly by the poet in Θ and O; immediately after the plan is disclosed, we are transferred to the human plane of action, and the heroes' limited knowledge, which is the basis of their decisions and actions, comes into sharp contrast with the knowledge of the audience; such rapid shifts between the two worlds further enhance the tragic sense of the poem; see, for example, the scene of the divine assembly at Δ 1-72.

still, the final outcome can only be the one decided by Zeus; and when again it appears that life is brought forward through the agency of one of the lesser gods, as happens with Apollo in Π or Athena in Χ, it is once more Zeus who allows, or even requires their action. Even the god himself seems to be bound by his own will: feelings of pity towards the Greeks or the Trojans are not sufficient an excuse for him to violate his previously made promises;<sup>15</sup> his will and his plan are of the utmost importance, thus becoming the motive power operating directly or indirectly behind every final event.

This idea of Zeus, as expressed by the poet himself, is reflected in the heroes' perception of the god as well, with Achilles' description of the god's jars at Ω 527-33 being its most powerful manifestation. The difference obviously is that, while the poet's references to Zeus are supposedly accurate accounts of the god's intentions and actions, the heroes simply express an assumption about divine intervention; exactly because of his superiority, Zeus frequently features in their words as the natural cause of everything, even when we know that this is not really the case. Every single thing, every situation may be directly or indirectly linked to Zeus, and his name is invoked almost in a *façon de parler*, or as a synecdoche for the divine, each time that a hero recognizes the presence of divine agency, but is still uncertain as to which god is actually to be praised or blamed.<sup>16</sup> Still, there is no reason why we should differentiate the poet's view of the god from that of the heroes, since in either case Zeus features as the supreme power which is responsible for a

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Δ 44-49, Θ 245-46, Χ 168-176.

<sup>16</sup> For direct link see A 63, B 134, 668-70, E 91, 224, Z 159, Ψ 298-99, 306f.; for indirect link through reference to gods in general, see A 178, 290, Δ 320, H 288, N 727. That Zeus features in such cases as the supreme power, representative of the divine in general, rather than as an absolutely personal god is further supported by the fact that quite frequently his name is used alongside the general θεός, θεοί, or δαίμων, almost as their alternative; see, for example, Z 349 and Ω 534.

plan that has been defined and determined some time in the past and is now fulfilled. Zeus himself proves this unique privilege of his when he proclaims that his nod entails inevitability, as already noted, for as the god himself explains, τοῦτο γὰρ ἐξ ἐμέθεν γε μετ' ἀθανάτοισι μέγιστον | τέκμων· οὐ γὰρ ἐμὸν παλινάγρετον οὐδ' ἀπατηλὸν | οὐδ' ἀτελεύτητον, ὃ τί κεν κεφαλῇ κατανεύσω (A 525-27); or when he tells Apollo that it will be he alone who will decide the course of the war: κείθεν δ' αὐτὸς ἐγὼ φράσομαι ἔργον τε ἔπος τε, | ὥς κε καὶ αὔτις Ἀχαιοὶ ἀναπνεύσωσι πόνοιο (O 234-35). The heroes' tendency to relate their life and death to the supreme god is justified and validated by the poet's own narration and presentation of the god. The two jars of which Achilles talks may be the assumption that a mortal makes on the data of his limited knowledge, yet the very plot that our poet constructs confirms this assumption and justifies the position of Achilles' words at the end of the poem.

The connection with *moira* is obviously not surprising. It appears first of all to be supported by the mere fact that the whole development of the plot seems to depend on the god's will. Everything in the poem seems to be controlled by Zeus, as his promise to Thetis triggers the plot and causes an all important change in the course of the war, while it is also his will that demands the destruction of Troy. One could easily draw a conclusion for the identification of the two: *moira* is nothing but Zeus's will, which is inevitable and irreversible, and whose power we witness in the poem all too intensely; there is no other power greater than Zeus in the poem, and nothing ever seems to be fulfilled unless it is decided by the supreme god.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> So Lloyd-Jones (1983:5): '*Moira*, one's "portion", is in the last resort identical with the will of Zeus'.

The connection is evident on the verbal level as well. Αἴσα is directly related to the god at I 608 and P 321.<sup>18</sup> At P 321ff. the reference is obviously made to Zeus's plan for a temporary Greek defeat, a plan that the Achaeans would have violated, had it not been for Apollo: Ἀργεῖοι δέ κε κῦδος ἔλον καὶ ὑπὲρ Διὸς αἴσαν | κάρτει καὶ σθένει σφετέρω· ἀλλ' αὐτὸς Ἀπόλλων | Αἰνεΐαν ὄτρυνε. It has to be noted that this is the only case in which Zeus's plan is mentioned in terms of moira; otherwise, moira and the plan may be interwoven, but are never explicitly identified. I 608-10 are different: Phoenix has just advised Achilles to give up his wrath and accept Agamemnon's presents; the hero refuses the advice and scorns the reconciliation offered; οὐ τί με ταύτης | χρεὼ τιμῆς· φρονέω δὲ τετιμῆσθαι Διὸς αἴση, | ἧ μ' ἔξει παρὰ νηυσὶ κορωνίσιν, εἰς ὅ κ' αὐτμῆ | ἐν στήθεσσι μένη καί μοι φίλα γούνατ' ὀρώρη. Moira appears to have been defined by Zeus himself, it is part of his decisions for the course of Achilles' life, it is the reason behind Achilles' prowess and status.

We also hear Helen ascribing Paris' and her own bad fate or fortune to Zeus at Z 357: οἷσιν ἐπὶ Ζεὺς θῆκε κακὸν μόρον, and Priam drawing a similar conclusion at X 60-61: ὄν ῥα πατὴρ Κρονίδης ἐπὶ γήραος οὐδῶ | αἴση ἐν ἀργαλήη φθίσει. There are also instances which, although less direct, and perhaps of a slightly ambiguous status, seem to point towards the same direction. At Σ 328-30 Achilles reflects on how his hopes and wishes for the Trojan War were all frustrated since Patroclus died: ἀλλ' οὐ Ζεὺς ἄνδρεςσι νοήματα πάντα τελευτᾶ· | ἄμφω γὰρ πέπρωται ὁμοίην γαῖαν ἐρεῦσαι | αὐτοῦ ἐνὶ Τροίῃ. A similar ambiguity is sensed at Φ 289-91, where Athena and Poseidon come to the rescue of Achilles from the river-god Xanthus; Poseidon reassures the hero of their help: τοίω γάρ

<sup>18</sup> One could also add T 87, for which see p. 119, n. 9.

τοι νῶϊ θεῶν ἐπιταρρόθω εἰμέν, | Ζηνὸς ἐπαινήσαντος, ἐγὼ καὶ Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη· | ὡς οὔ  
τοι ποταμῶ γε δαμήμεναι αἴσιμόν ἐστιν.<sup>19</sup> The ambiguity obviously lies in the fact that  
Zeus is presented as knowing and advancing the ordinance of fate, but not necessarily as  
being responsible for it as well.

Some could certainly distinguish between the heroes' utterances and those made by  
a god or the poet's own narration. In the former the tendency for an identification almost  
of moira with the god could be seen as the result of the heroes' limited knowledge: not  
knowing the exact relation between the two, they easily attribute moira to the god who is  
commonly accepted to be the cause behind life. Thus, Achilles' reference to Διὸς αἴσα at I  
608 could be taken as the inference that a mortal would draw, without necessarily proving  
the truth of the statement. Similarly, Helen's and Priam's words are only an assumption.  
Poseidon's words, on the other hand, are obviously more vague in their implications of a  
relationship: Zeus approves of the god's intervention for the sake of Achilles, but this  
proves ultimately nothing for his relation to moira.

Unfortunately, the situation is not as simple as to be explained by the means of  
such a distinction. At T 410 moira appears alongside the great god, who can be no other  
than Zeus: this is the moment when Achilles re-enters the war; a terrible battle is  
imminent, for we already know that Hector will soon be killed by the ferocious son of  
Peleus; the climax is built up and Achilles' tragedy is further underscored by the prediction  
of his own death: this is not simply the moment of triumph of an illustrious and all  
majestic hero, but, more important, the irrevocable moment that will lead to his death; his

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. also Σ 115-21, Φ 82-84

horses, Xanthus and Balius, Podarge's famous offspring, pronounce his fate: ἀλλά τοι ἐγγύθεν ἤμαρ ὀλέθριον· οὐδέ τοι ἡμεῖς | αἴτιοι, ἀλλὰ θεός τε μέγας καὶ Μοῖρα κραταιή (409-10).<sup>20</sup> The immortal status of the horses provide the utterance with a degree of momentous significance. Should one see this powerful collocation as an hendiadys and associate it with Zeus' predictions at Θ 470-77 and Ο 57-71, or more important, with Zeus's actual action in the poem; or rather see two distinct powers aiming at the same end but moving actually in parallel? The question will be discussed later on; here it suffices to note that, whatever the case, the connection between the great god and moira remains beyond doubt.

Moreover, Zeus may occasionally appear to be responsible for the events that are elsewhere attributed to moira. The plan he announces at Θ is called a θέσφατον,<sup>21</sup> although the main events affected have a relation to moira as well. The god may also appear as being responsible for one's death or survival (Λ 52-55, Μ 402-3, Ν 222-27); for Patroclus'

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<sup>20</sup> As already noted (88, n.66) I see no obvious reason why μοῖρα should be written at this point with a capital 'M', implying a personal goddess, unless we wish to see some sense of grandeur in the horses' words, and consequently in the whole episode; the personal, or quasi-personal appearance of Ἐρινύες a few lines later on (Τ 418) could be said to further incite such an interpretation, yet the formulaic character of μοῖρα's occurrence seems to me to be against it; I would deem it more probable that what the poet and his audience perceived was an impersonal fate, rather than a powerful goddess. The only cases in which μοῖρα appears personally, as we have seen, is in the capacity of the spinning woman at Ω 209 (cf. Υ 127, where we find Αἴσα), and in the unique occurrence of the plural Μοῖραι at Ω 49; certainly Τ 410 is not a reference to such a general function.

<sup>21</sup> The word appears once again in the poem, at Ε 64, this time in the plural: Meriones kills Phereclus, the son of Harmonides the joiner, ὅς καὶ Ἀλεξάνδρῳ τεκτῆνατο νῆας εἴσας | ἀρχεκάκους, αἱ πᾶσι κακὸν Τρώεσσι γέγοντο | οἱ τ' αὐτῶ, ἐπεὶ οὐ τι θεῶν ἐκ θέσφατα ἦδη. Θέσφατα is taken by Kirk (1990: ad loc.) to mean Paris' neglect of ξενία, a supposition that refers us to the idea of Zeus's justice in his capacity as Ξείνιος. However, the scholia refer to 'two different prophecies of doom (if Paris went overseas, or if the Trojans pursued seafaring)' (Kirk, *ibid.*) an explanation which accords better with the application of θέσφατον at Θ 477. Unfortunately, the passage is quite vague. But I would tend to prefer the scholiasts' explanation to a moral remark on Paris' behaviour, for the simple reason that, as will become clear in due course. Zeus's protection of the principle of ξενία is indeed alluded to, yet it is never witnessed in the plot. The reference to such a prophecy could also be seen in the light of a previous tradition, similar to that found in the *Cypria*, according to which the war was part of a greater plan by Zeus. See Clark (1986:381) where Kullmann's argument that Β 3-40, Λ 52-55, Μ 13-23, Ν 222-27, Τ 86-90 and 270-74 can be seen as reminiscences of this tradition is mentioned.

death in particular (Π 684-93; cf. Π 232-52, Σ 8-11), and Achilles' fate (Σ 115-16= X 365-66, Σ 429-41; cf. Π 37=51); and certainly for the outcome of the Trojan War. We are informed by the Greek heroes that Zeus nodded to their cause (B 300-30, 350-53) - a sign whose importance is made clear at A 525-27, as we have seen (129). Troy's destruction, therefore, is not only something that the heroes expect or fear, but more important, something that all the gods are certain of (H 30-32, Π 707-9).<sup>22</sup> Even when the Greeks suffer heavy casualties and all the leaders are wounded, yet they are all still alive, and thus Zeus's plan for the end of the war is never reversed. Doubtless, we have here simply an historical necessity which the poet cannot help obeying: but the intensity of Zeus's connection to the facts, conscious of it as the poet is, evidently proves the god's unique ability to define and control human affairs.

Hector's case is actually indicative of this shift of emphasis from moira to the god. It is in Θ that we first hear of his imminent death in a rather oblique statement by Zeus: οὐ γὰρ πρὶν πολέμου ἀποπαύσεται ὄβριμος Ἴκτωρ, | πρὶν ὄρθαι παρὰ ναῦφι ποδώκεα Πηλεΐωνα ( 473-74) and the whole plan is named a θέσφατον (477); in O Zeus lays out before the gods the future, but this time more explicitly: Hector will kill Patroclus and will then be killed by Achilles (68); at O 612-14 the poet foreshadows Athena's role in the hero's death, his μόριμον ἦμαρ; at Π 851-53 the dying Patroclus foresees Hector's death, ἄγχι παρέστηκεν θάνατος καὶ μοῖρα κραταιή; at P 201-8 it is Zeus himself who talks: let me honour you now, miserable you, for death is near, θάνατος [...] σχεδὸν εἶσι, and Andromache will not receive you back again. And thus we come to X, Ἴκτορος ἀναίρεσις. as early as line 5 the subject becomes clear: Ἴκτορα δ' αὐτοῦ μῆναι ὀλοῖη μοῖρα πέδησεν;

<sup>22</sup> Zeus has already decided on the Trojan destruction, O 69-71; cf. O 213-17, 559-602.

at 209 Zeus takes his scales and weighs the deaths of Achilles and Hector: ῥέπε δ' Ἐκτορος αἴσιμον ἦμαρ (212); when Hector himself realises the inevitability of his death, he cries: ὦ πόποι, ἦ μάλα δὴ με θεοὶ θάνατόνδε κάλεσαν (297),<sup>23</sup> while a few lines on he says νῦν αὐτέ με μοῖρα κιχάνει (303) - the same formula, slightly varied, that Hecabe uses at 436: νῦν αὖ θάνατος καὶ μοῖρα κιχάνει.<sup>24</sup>

The confusion is clear, and any attempt to define the relation between the two powers in a totally rational and consistent fashion proves vain. Both moira and Zeus take part in Hector's death, according to the narration of the poet himself, and whether the god succumbs to moira's ordinance or he forms himself what is later to be termed fate by the poet, remains moot. What is clear is that the poet carefully builds up his narration so that Hector's death will finally seem inevitable, demanded by forces that are external to him, and independent of his will. At the same time, he uses the god whenever this is necessary for a motive force to be given to the plot, and moira when a plain explanation must be given to the events.

True, one could object by saying that the fact that Zeus controls the future does not necessarily entail that he has also defined it; his demand of the lesser gods that they should abide by moira's ordinance, as well as his disclosure of the future in Θ and Ο could be seen not as a confirmation of his identification with moira, but as an indication of his very

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<sup>23</sup> This explanation is not very different from that given later by Achilles: ἐπεὶ δὴ τόνδ' ἄνδρα θεοὶ δαμάσασθαι ἔδωκαν (X 379), although it could be said that Achilles, seeing Hector's death from a different perspective, talks rather of the gods' support to him than of their enmity to his opponent.

<sup>24</sup> True, one could take moira at 303 as meaning simply death, as Dietrich does, thus avoiding any inconsistency in Hector's words; however, Hecabe's words prove that the meaning of the word is flexible and almost ambiguous: moira can be both death and fate at the same time.



subordination to it: being the supreme god, he uses his power and strength in order to ensure that moira will not be violated. Besides, Διὸς βουλή is never explicitly identified with moira;<sup>25</sup> being of a rather haphazard origin, Zeus's will is only a momentary plan that is conceived and accomplished within the limits of the narration, and with no further implications of destiny or fate; more important, this plan can well be seen as being fulfilled in I, when the Greek embassy comes to Achilles with the news that king Agamemnon is willing to offer due honour to him, were he willing to help them in their struggle against the Trojans; for they seem doomed to destruction, ever since he abandoned them. Strictly speaking, this is the point at which Achilles' wish that his τιμή be properly recognized comes to its fulfilment, and at which tradition itself would demand that the hero's wrath be appeased.<sup>26</sup> If thus seen, the poem appears to advance further than proclaimed in the proemium;<sup>27</sup> the Διὸς βουλή, of which we hear at A 5, dominates then only part of the poem, the rest of which moves forward independently of the god's initial promise.

The truth is, however, that even after I, the plot flows in the same rhythm it has acquired in B and which has by now become regular. The fact that Achilles does not yield to the Greeks' appeal may indeed trigger an unexpected turn of the plot, but this passes unnoticed, for what was initiated by Zeus in B with Agamemnon's dream will for a long time still constitute the main theme of the poem. In fact, the poet succeeds in intertwining different strands of traditional and non-traditional material into a smooth and consonant

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<sup>25</sup> The only exception, as we saw, is P 321, where Zeus's plan is mentioned as Διὸς αἶσα; the fact that this αἶσα has to be attributed to Zeus in order that the reference be made clear seems to function as a restriction; Zeus's plan of honouring Achilles is nowhere presented as something fated to happen.

<sup>26</sup> Griffin (1995) 19-21.

<sup>27</sup> This is a technique which, according to Rutherford (1991-1993: 43), is common to both Homeric poems.

flow of events: for if the temporary Greek defeat is explained by the promise given in A, and is therefore an event confined within the limits of the poem, and most probably suggested by the poet's own poetic creativity, the final Greek victory is demanded by a similar promise that Zeus made to the Greeks nine years ago (B 300-30, 350-53), but more important it is demanded by a tradition that has most probably developed around an allegedly historical nucleus. The two themes, the promise to Achilles and the destruction of Troy, that up to a point move in parallel lines, are, then, intermingled in Zeus's statements so as to form a coherent whole, namely Zeus's will, which is inevitable in its fulfilment.

At the same time, moira is indirectly, as it appears, related to the god's promise to Thetis through its relation to the outcome of the Trojan War: moira is mentioned as the determining force behind the death of the heroes, but more important behind the destruction of Troy. It is moira that demands Sarpedon's death, thus causing Zeus's own exclamation of pity for the hero at Π 431-38, as is also the case for Hector and Achilles; and it is against the violation of Troy's moira that the gods often act, intervening at crucial moments and thus securing not only that Troy should be destroyed, but that it should not be destroyed in a different fashion or at a different time from that ordained by moira. Moira is combined with Zeus's promised plan for the destruction of Troy, which in its turn is combined with the promise to Thetis, the result being an inextricable continuum of events the causation of which is extremely hard to define.

It becomes obvious, then, that the poet not only avoids any unidimensional solution, but, more important, he is actually responsible for our frustration to a great

degree: closely interweaving Zeus's will and moira, he forms after all one single motive power of the poem. What we ultimately have before us is an ambivalent relationship: Zeus can indeed be seen as identical with fate, since he is responsible for almost everything that happens in the poem, and more important for events that are elsewhere attributed to fate; but he can also be seen as distinct from it with equal readiness, if we accept that his relation to moira is limited to the fulfilment of its decrees. Neither aspect seems more valid than the other, and both seem plausible, since both can be confirmed by the text. For the truth is that, apart from the ambiguity of all the afore mentioned references to Zeus and moira or fate, which does not allow us to talk of a clearly defined identification in the poem, further doubt is cast upon such a conclusion by the occasional appearances of moira as an independent factor of life, functioning in parallel rather than in a relation of some kind to Zeus or the gods.

These are the cases in which moira refers to death, or rather to human mortality. True, Zeus can be responsible for a hero's death, as already mentioned, and the possibility that this responsibility entails more than the fulfilment of moira's decree has already been discussed. When it comes, though, to man's very mortal nature, the impression is that moira functions on a different level from Zeus, and that subsequently the two should better be distinguished. Twice do we hear of Zeus pondering over the violation of mortality's restraint on man, once in the case of his son Sarpedon, and once in the case of his beloved hero Hector (Π 433-38, X 168-176). Both instances could actually be taken to refer to the heroes' particular share in death, in which case Zeus would imply that he wishes to save them from death at the particular moment and under the particular circumstances. With the reply that Hera and Athena offer respectively we have a shift of emphasis from the

individual to the general fate of death: Sarpedon and Hector have to die for they are human. The two aspects are almost identified: since they have to die, they have to die now; Zeus should not attempt to change this fate, for it would entail a violation of the very order of nature.

As already noted (83), at Π 441-42= X179-180 αἴσα denotes the only share of which man is certain, his inextricable link to death, and it is fairly obvious why such a meaning differentiates moira from the gods, either Zeus in particular or the gods in general: human mortality is part of an order that precedes the birth of the Olympian family of gods, it is one of the human characteristics for which the Olympians bear no responsibility. Even if the gods are occasionally responsible for the particular conditions of death of a particular hero, and even if Zeus may be seen as defining these conditions, the fact that the heroes have to die is far beyond their jurisdiction and their power.

Common sense, then, and plain experience require the differentiation of the gods from moira at this point; as will be discussed later, the gods are rational powers, their behaviour and their response to human conduct being based on principles that both underline and secure their superiority. But their being rational entails that they are also placable; the gods can be infuriated by human behaviour as easily as they can be appeased in their wrath when man finally acknowledges their power and status. Obviously, human mortality cannot be controlled by their power; death is inevitable and implacable, it is an almost irrational demand which has to be admitted as a part of natural order. This order the gods should not violate, and as experience proves, they do not violate.

The question, then, in these cases is not whether Zeus can overturn a decree that belongs to fate, or change a predetermined course of life, but rather whether he can violate what seems to be part of a natural order: man is mortal, and any wish of Zeus to go against this order will meet the disagreement of the gods - the only case where the gods prove able to check Zeus's authority. However, it is not without significance that Zeus is presented as being able to choose, if he so wishes, to save the heroes, that is as being able to control death and human mortality; the answer is never given, and the possibility 'remains significantly moot'.<sup>28</sup> Such an idea is in obvious harmony with the god's presentation in the poem as the supreme power, but there is more in it than the plain reaffirmation of Zeus's superiority. These instances certainly draw our attention to Zeus's actual differentiation from fate,<sup>29</sup> but they also seem to imply that Zeus is not after all subordinate to moira; even when he is not responsible for its decrees and demands on mankind, even when he is a distinct power with a different field of activity, he can still operate in parallel to and independently of moira. The relation is not necessarily one of

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<sup>28</sup> Clay (1983) 157; Clay also sees the lines as referring to the violation of natural order, but she talks of the hierarchy in the relationship between mortals and immortals, with moira being 'a critical element in this dichotomy' (156); her reference to Zeus's position being in jeopardy presupposes the belief in divine envy or resentment, which, however, is not relevant in the poem. Chantraine (1952:72) rightly draws our attention to the lines' possible implication merely of a retardation of events, which one can compare with Σ 239 and ψ 241-46. Adkins's (1972:15ff.) explanation is also worth noting: it is the gods' limited and conditional φιλότης towards man that prevents them from inconveniencing themselves for the sake of the mortals; this view well explains the gods' occasional indifference towards mankind which will be discussed in the context of divine justice; it further seems to accord with Glaucus' exclamation on Sarpedon's death ἀνὴρ δ' ᾧριστος ὄλωλε, | Σαρπηδῶν, Διὸς υἱός· ὁ δ' οὐδ' οὐ παιδὸς ἀμύνει (Π 520-21); the hero is not concerned with the fact that Sarpedon was mortal or that he had to die at this moment; at this moment of sorrow the emphasis is on Zeus's unwillingness to intervene and save his son.

<sup>29</sup> Different is the view of Lloyd-Jones (1983:5), who, in keeping with his interpretation of moira as the will of Zeus, sees Hera's words as a warning to Zeus that 'he cannot sacrifice to a sudden whim his own settled policy', but obviously such an interpretation overlooks the powerful implications of human mortality that line Π 441=X 179 bears.

subordination or of hierarchy: moira and Zeus seem after all to operate on two different levels, which often intersect.

Soon after Athena's reply at X 179-180, the scene of the κηροσταισία follows: Zeus takes his scales and weighs the κῆρες of Achilles and Hector; as expected, it is Hector's κῆρ that sinks. A similar scene exists at Θ 69-77 where Zeus weighs the κῆρες of Achaeans and Trojans, and this time it is the Achaeans' κῆρ that sinks. The association of Zeus with the idea of balancing the scales is also found at Π 658 and Τ 223-24, where, however, no reference is made to fate, but Zeus appears simply to be deciding on the course of the war. Regarding Π 658, Janko notes that 'the rapid allusion proves the idea traditional', providing at the same time two further reasons that would support the thesis that the idea should be attributed to the Dark Age at least: first, the archaeological find of an LH IIIA crater from Enkomi on which there is a depiction of a god holding scales, and second the Aeolic type ἰρός in the expression Διὸς ἰρὰ τάλαντα which suggests that we have an old formula which is simply 'under-represented'.<sup>30</sup>

Whether or not this traditional idea of a god deciding by holding the scales was also related to the fate of death from the very beginning is difficult to say, although Dietrich mentions a pair of golden scales of Mycenaean origin, with a butterfly, supposedly representing the dead soul, being engraved on each scale.<sup>31</sup> Whatever the origin of the

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<sup>30</sup> Janko (1992) ad loc. An interesting approach is that of Morrison (1997) who sees the instances of κηροσταισία as a conscious device of the poet which creates a swinging movement from a sense of 'openness and flexibility' to that of 'fixity' and predetermination, while it conceals at the same time the poet's own quest for possible alternatives in terms of the narrative and against tradition. Such an interpretation highlights the poet's freedom in manipulating fate and the gods according to the demands of the narrative.

<sup>31</sup> Dietrich (1965) 295.

connection, the idea is used in the poem in a rather figurative fashion: it is 'a visual or symbolic representation of the crucial moment at which the decision becomes irrevocable'.<sup>32</sup> The question whether Zeus should be seen as subordinate to fate or at any rate to a law of natural order, or rather as responsible for the decision made, seems to be irrelevant and non-existent for the poet, who uses this old image for its own sake only. As in most of the cases already discussed, the reference to Zeus is the consequence of his superiority, and not necessarily a proof either of his responsibility for fate or of his subordination to it.

More powerful than the image of Zeus weighing the fates of death is certainly the already mentioned image of his distributing happiness and misery out of his two jars (Ω 527-33). It is the very act of distribution that recalls the function of moira and the correlative idea of apportionment, while it is also worth noticing that the distribution is not conducted according to some principle, but is instead the result of pure chance - exactly as happens with fate. Achilles' words obviously reflect man's own perspective; the very fact that in the example of Peleus that he provides in the following lines he talks of the gods - ὡς μὲν καὶ Πηληϊ θεοὶ δόσαν ἀγλαὰ δῶρα | ἐκ γενετῆς (534f.) - is an indication of the generalising character of the statement. It remains beyond doubt, however, that the passage seems to find considerable support in the very development of the plot, with Zeus being truly the power that bestows happiness and misery; in view of Achilles' own sorrowful experience in the poem, the association seems justified and appropriate.

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<sup>32</sup> Richardson (1993) on X 208-13. See also Greene (1944) 16; Emlyn-Jones (1992) 102. Different is the view of Chantraine (1952) 73: 'Le roi des dieux mesure et détermine ainsi le destin de chacun'. For other views expressed on the scene of κηροσταςία see Dietrich (1965) 294.

When compared to Zeus, the lesser gods are obviously of limited power. Doubtless, it cannot but be admitted that they participate in life all too effectively, thus influencing the development of events to a considerable degree; more important, they do so as individual forces, each having a different field of activity and power and representing a different reasoning, their aims not necessarily deriving from or being suggested by some other personal or impersonal force. Thus, Aphrodite intervenes on her own initiative and saves her favourite Paris from Menelaus' vengeful attack, brings him to Helen, and sees to the re-establishment of their relationship (Γ 373-420); Hera, helped by Athena, prevents the Greeks from leaving Troy at a most crucial moment of the war (B 155-181), while later on she seduces Zeus in order that Poseidon may help the Greeks (Ξ 153-165); Apollo, fighting against the Greeks, checks Diomedes' forceful assault and saves Aeneas (E 431-53) and stands as an obstacle against Achilles' ferocious spirit (Φ 595- X 20).

However, in this patriarchal system of hierarchy, where might is right and violence is always imminent, it is obvious that the lesser gods, when not willingly obeying Zeus, are often forced to obedience, having to postpone, modify, or even cancel their plans in the face of Zeus's requirements or demands.<sup>33</sup> They consistently and constantly pursue their own aims, even when this entails a confrontation with Zeus,<sup>34</sup> thus often changing the

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<sup>33</sup> The idea of a divine family is of Near Eastern origin, as Burkert explains (1985:182), and exists already in Mycenaean religion, albeit not so elaborate and complex; Hesiod's *Theogony* seems to be a further evidence for the perception of the gods in terms of familial relations. Along with the idea of departmentalisation, then, we find an idea of hierarchy, and the question is whether this idea reflects an actual belief which would place Zeus above all other divine powers, or whether this is only a literary device or convention. One can admit a degree of exaggeration in literature, and the fact that every region had its own special deity who was worshipped more than all others creates some suspicion towards Zeus's superiority as expressed in the poems. However, regional cult of gods other than Zeus does not necessarily exclude the possibility that Zeus was acknowledged at some point as the supreme god, and it seems plausible to suppose that the idea was already established by the time of our poems; both the heroes' invocation of the god and the poems of Hesiod, which profess to be revealing a truth of some kind, point in this direction.

<sup>34</sup> It is especially the gods who favour the Greeks who come in conflict with Zeus - naturally, for in the poem Zeus's will develops so as to favour the Trojans; see Θ 350-80, Ξ 159ff, Ο 153-65, 352-62.



course of life, for, as I said, each one corresponds to a distinct power of life as well as of the plot; but these aims can be fulfilled only as long as they do not threaten Zeus's own plan. Thus, if Zeus's plan is not affected by the gods' action, he seems rather indifferent to their participation, occasionally giving them even the permission to act as they wish ( $\Delta$  37, 68-72); but if it is, he soon brings the gods' attempts to a fruitless end, re-establishing his order ( $\Theta$  397-408, 447-56;  $O$  13-33, 158-167).<sup>35</sup>

Being thus subordinate to Zeus and his will, the lesser gods obviously lack the power of an irrevocable decision that is imposed on mortals and immortals alike; and this is why they are to be distinguished from fate; the privilege of an irreversible will, which can be seen as an inevitable certainty, is one that only Zeus enjoys - thus providing the reason for his occasional identification with fate. It is, therefore, not surprising that no one of the lesser gods is ever personally related to moira directly, by means of a collocation similar to  $\Delta\iota\omicron\varsigma\ \alpha\lambda\omicron\alpha$ , and that their relation to it on a personal, individual level is only limited to the fulfilment of its ordinances. Athena, for example, is responsible for Hector's fated death ( $O$  612-14), just as Apollo will be for Achilles' ( $T$  417). In such cases the gods' action is in manifest agreement with the requirements of moira, but their position towards moira remains ultimately unclear: are they consciously fulfilling what is already defined for the future, or does their intervention agree with moira only coincidentally? Do they

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<sup>35</sup> Indicative of this shifting relation between the gods' and Zeus's own plan is the divine action in  $E$  and  $\Theta$ : Athena's essential support for Diomedes could be taken as a threat to Zeus's plan for the Trojan advance and victory, yet not only is it effective, but it is also in agreement with Zeus's concession to Hera's wish for Troy's final destruction ( $\Delta$  34-38); one could suggest that Athena's intervention at this point well accords with the god's desire to first deceive the Greeks into believing in his favour and then bring upon them the decided disaster, thus posing no threat to the god's plan; it seems, though, most probable that we have here a conscious delay on the part of the poet, in order that Diomedes'  $\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\sigma\tau\epsilon\acute{\iota}\alpha$  be accommodated in the narration; thus, he skilfully postpones the declaration of Zeus's plan until  $\Theta$ : any divine intervention in favour of the Greeks after that point is forbidden and doomed to failure.

succumb to moira, do they know of the future and act in accordance with it, because they are subordinate to some external power which is superior to them, or do we simply have a reference to a hero's death and a god's action, with the implications of fate being more or less irrelevant?

The truth is that in most cases the gods appear actually to be consciously following the directions given by Zeus himself or to fulfil some plan related to the god in some way, as happens in the examples quoted above, or with Poseidon at Y 293-307, who helps Aeneas, for he is to survive the war.<sup>36</sup> There are other cases, though, in which the gods seem to be acting in accordance with moira without actually being conscious of or concerned with the fact. Thus, at B 155-156 we see Hera intervening just at the right moment to prevent the Greeks from leaving Troy - an event that would be against fate (ὑπέρμορα); and at E 671-76 we hear how Athena intervenes unbeknown to Odysseus and directs him away from Sarpedon, because it was not fated that he should kill Zeus's son. Are we to see these actions as conscious attempts against a possible violation of moira, or as plain coincidence? The poet is not interested in providing a definite answer, but what seems to be beyond doubt is that the gods are certainly not presented as being responsible for the definition of moira's actual content.

There is, however, a possibility that the lesser gods could be seen as related to or even identified with fate, and this is when they feature as the collective idea of the divine, a body of diverse forces which, however, converge at some point under the power of Zeus

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<sup>36</sup> This instance is of particular interest, since Poseidon fights against the Trojans; here, he appears to be concerned both for the hero and for the fulfilment of Zeus's plan, which he also relates to fate.

and act in unison towards the fulfilment of a common end; in other words, when acting as individual powers with distinct plans and aims, the lesser gods are not seen as capable of defining fate; it takes Zeus's prior decision for them to be ascribed such a function. The references made to such a collective capacity of the gods are issued mainly, but not only, by the heroes, and they seem to underline both the belief in the divine origin or quality of moira and that in the gods' own power over human life. When, for example, Priam says at Γ 308-9, Ζεὺς μὲν που τό γε οἶδε καὶ ἀθάνατοι θεοὶ ἄλλοι | ὅπποτέρω θανάτοιο τέλος πεπρωμένον ἐστίν, one could see here simply an implicit acknowledgement of moira's non-human and therefore divine nature, of the control, that is, that non-human powers exercise over human lives, the actual identity of which, though, remains of no concern; or suppose that these vague gods are the personal gods of the poem, who, when it comes to the final decision, converge under the power of Zeus and affect life as a unified and harmonious body.<sup>37</sup>

The confusion is again evident: are we to assume that the gods' *knowledge* of moira - οἶδε - entails their responsibility for it as well? If the reference is not made to the personal gods of the poem, what are the implications of the relation that the heroes draw between moira and the gods?<sup>38</sup> One could go on raising similar questions indefinitely, but the labour would prove futile and fruitless. However perplexing these references, we have to admit that no rational or systematic explanation can be given, for there is no intention

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<sup>37</sup> The idea that the gods might act as a body and actually in order to ensure the fulfilment of moira is evident from the very plot: despite their occasional disagreements and conflicts of interest, the gods finally act together and under the power of Zeus. Despite Zeus's authoritative power, we often see the gods deciding as a body, cf. Δ1-77 and Χ 174-76

<sup>38</sup> Cf. also Ζ 345-50, where Helen explains her life as a result almost of a divine plan, αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ τάδε γ' ὥδε θεοὶ κακὰ τεκμήραντο, later on substituting Zeus for the gods, whom she relates to μόρος, οἷσιν ἐπὶ Ζεὺς θῆκε κακὸν μόρον (357).

for such an explanation on the part of the poet. The poet uses the gods and moira according to his narrative aims each time.

It is worth lingering for a moment on this differentiation between the heroes' perception of divine action and the poet's supposedly accurate account. It was at the beginning of the twentieth century that Jørgensen (1904) first observed a distinct difference between the two. Focusing on ι-μ of the *Odyssey* and being concerned with the inconsistencies detected there in terms of divine responsibility, Jørgensen noted that the poet consciously and consistently follows a technique according to which his mortal characters are not allowed to talk of the divine in more detail than is expected of them: being of limited knowledge and perception, they cannot possibly be aware of the exact nature of the gods, their motivation and their behaviour; they can only sense their presence in life, and assume, on the data of experience, their intervention, without being able, however, to accurately define which deity is involved each time; by contrast to the poet himself, who can give an accurate account of divine action, the heroes can only talk in obscure and indefinite terms, such as θεός, θεός τις, θεοί or δαίμων, simply acknowledging in this fashion the indubitable presence of the divine in their lives; the only god who is ever personally credited with responsibility is Zeus, who appears in such cases in a synecdoche almost for the gods rather than as the personal, individual god participating in the plot. Some forty years later, Else (1949) further examined this differentiation, concluding that the principle aims basically at realism: the heroes talk as Homer's contemporaries talked, and this is the language of later philosophy as well; man can talk of the divine only in abstract and vague terms.

When seen in this light, a considerable number of inconsistencies can be dealt with, without our having to resort to the solution of multiple strata of composition. As regards moira, in particular, we are furnished with a further explanation as to why an event can be ascribed both to fate and the gods at different times and contexts, without necessarily implying that the two are identical: the gods who appear as responsible for fate are the unified gods of the heroes' utterances, the divine in general, and not the personal, individualised gods whom we see moving about in the poem and who are subordinate to moira. When, for example, Hector senses the inevitability of his death, as he stands alone against Achilles, he talks first of the gods, ὦ πόποι, ἦ μάλα δή με θεοὶ θάνατόνδε κάλεσσαν (X 297), he follows with a reference to Athena's deceit, ἔμὲ δ' ἔξαπάτησεν Ἀθήνη (299), and concludes with moira, νῦν αὐτέ με μοῖρα κιχάνει (303); if the presence of Athena and moira at this point can be accounted for by the preceding narration, the reference to the gods is no more than the hero's acknowledgement of the divine presence and responsibility for so important an event, and should by no means be seen as a reference to the personal gods, who are certainly not involved in Hector's death.

Obviously, for the heroes who lack the poet's, and consequently our own, knowledge of the gods' exact behaviour and action, the boundaries between fate and the gods seem rather fluid and flexible; fate and the gods appear to be of equal preponderance, for both entail unpredictability and inevitability; they both define the limits within which man is allowed to move, since both are capable of determining the course of human life; and it is, therefore, ultimately of little, if any, importance for the heroes what the exact nature of fate is and what its relation to the gods. Out of this fusion or confusion of

powers, the gods often emerge as responsible even for events that elsewhere seem to fall under the jurisdiction of fate.

However, extreme caution is demanded when applying Jørgensen's observation to moira, for it can lead to a polarity which corresponds to a rather simplistic and not at all accurate interpretation of the poem. On the one hand, we have the poet's narration, part of which consists of the gods' utterances; on the other, the heroes' perception of divine action, which is not accurate and certainly not always correct. Are we supposed to see here a distinction between truth and non-truth, reality and non-reality? And if so, with whom does the truth lie?

A similar confusion had been previously observed in the case of Zeus's relation to moira (131ff.), and it was noted at that point that, however useful the distinction, it does not always account for the inconsistent presentation of this relation, for it often seems that even the poet is as confused as his heroes. The same is true of the gods: it is not simply the heroes who assume a relation to moira, but the poet also lapses occasionally into the same vague and uncertain references. Thus, at Π 692-93 he talks of Patroclus' death: 'Ενθα τίνα πρῶτον, τίνα δ' ὕστατον ἐξενάριξας, | Πατρόκλεις, ὅτε δῆσε θεοὶ θάνατόνδε κάλεσσαν; he asks, using the same formula that Hector uses at Χ 297. Despite his privileged position when compared to his heroes, the poet is still another mortal who can indeed talk of the gods as his heroes do, not being always able to systematically present his beliefs, often being inconsistent with himself when it comes to the exposition of religious ideas, and thus avoiding any clear definition either of fate or of its relation to the gods.

It would be rather misleading, then, to see the differentiation as indicative of a polarity between the poet's supposedly true conception and the heroes' misconception of the divine, between truth and non-truth. It is indeed true that a polarity exists, through which we seem to gain a bifocal view on life: reality becomes of an ambiguous quality, at times being identified with the heroes' own perception, at times with the narration of the poet himself, the latter often belying the former; the heroes' limited knowledge is thus further emphasised, especially since it often proves disastrous for the heroes themselves, yet at the same time this mortal view on life is shown to be true in its own way, since life is to be lived after all on the data of this very limited knowledge. But this has ultimately little to do with the way that moira is perceived.<sup>39</sup>

The assumption that the poet possesses a truth that is denied to his heroes rather blurs our view of moira's meaning and function; for the truth is that both the poet and his heroes share the same basic idea of moira, both being equally puzzled at its workings and its nature. If the poet appears to be revealing a truth, this is only a coincidental consequence of his inevitably detailed account of divine action: by profession he is entitled to more knowledge than his heroes or even his audience, but his aim is not to enlighten us in regard to some theological or philosophical truth of which only he knows, nor to inform us of the essence of the divine, but rather to use his privilege and create a narration that will be both coherent and interesting. The privileged knowledge that our poet enjoys as a

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<sup>39</sup>As will be discussed in due course, this differentiation is detected in the case of divine justice as well, but there it is even sharper: the poet is consistently silent on the issue of the gods' exercising any form of justice as regards the events narrated, while the heroes not only express a vague belief in it, but more than that they constantly seek for its manifestation.

present from the Muses is a knowledge of facts, both divine and human, and not of theology or philosophy. And his difference from his mortal heroes is one of perspective and aim: the poet constructs a plot; his heroes express their frustration at the life they have to live, and the death they have to die.

Nor is it of any help to diminish the importance of the Olympians, as Dietrich does; according to his view the differentiation between the poet and his heroes should be seen as indicative of the poet's distorted view of the divine which results from the fact that the Olympian family of gods is no more than a poetic creation, a literary convention that has no existence outside the confines of the poem; the actual religious belief of the poems' age is expressed by the heroes.<sup>40</sup> The problem with Dietrich's argument lies, I believe, in his drawing too sharp a distinction between the literary 'god-machinery' and the actual objects of religious belief; this he does in an attempt to support his main thesis that Moira was originally a goddess, whose divine status was diminished in literature because of the more useful and certainly more recent Olympians; she survived nonetheless in popular belief, as the evidence of cult practices and inscriptions seem to prove. The vague references to the gods are taken, then, to correspond to such popular beliefs: Moira is one of the many divine powers acknowledged and worshipped.

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<sup>40</sup> Dietrich (1965) chapter 13; as Emlyn-Jones informs us (1992:93), the idea of the 'Machines of the Gods' was suggested in 1715 by Pope, while the term *Götterapparat* was coined in the nineteenth century, but as is suggested by Emlyn-Jones's discussion (ibid.) the idea was not as inflexible as Dietrich implies. For similar views expressed on the gods by G. Finsler, U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff and M. P. Nilsson see (1960) 2; Nilsson in particular (*The Mycenaean Origin of Greek Mythology*, Berkeley 1932, 244) sees that the Olympian scenes are 'sometimes tainted with burlesque, a tone due to Ionian minstrels, who were fundamentally irreligious'. Calhoun himself (1960) rejects this interpretation, arguing instead that the Olympian scenes originate in well-known motifs and themes, and that the gods are not the poet's own invention, but rather 'traditional figures, gods of ancient myth and folk tale'. I would obviously agree with Griffin (1980:144f) that 'if the poems are to be taken seriously at all, then it would seem that the gods who preside over them must be taken seriously, too'.



Dietrich's main argument for an original divine status of moira has been discussed already (88ff.). Here I would like to focus on his perception of the Olympians as a literary device, for it creates a new polarity, not innocent or insignificant in itself. It is indeed true that the readiness with which the poet manipulates his gods raises suspicions as to their status in actual Greek religion; it is not simply their occasionally frivolous character, apparently in conflict with their more severe and majestic aspect, that is in disagreement with our perception of divine essence, but also the rather obvious fact that they are often employed for their mere usefulness to the plot: their action advances the plot, and their intervention often helps the poet out from an impasse.<sup>41</sup>

However, such an interpretation seems to do a grave injustice to the Homeric gods. Flexibility is actually an essential characteristic of Greek religion; not simply because the literary texts prove it to be so, but because this is a natural concomitant of a culture that is basically oral in its operation. With no written religious texts, that could profess an unalterable truth about the divine, Greek religion enjoyed a unique freedom of development, unhindered by dogmatic fears and limitations.<sup>42</sup> True, a poet may well use the gods to advance his plot, to construct a multicoloured narrative, or to escape from a narrative impasse; yet by no means should this be taken to prove that these gods are void of a religious status. Besides, one has to bear in mind that the gods may have been

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<sup>41</sup> The problem is actually more complicated than it appears at first sight, for it raises the issue of the nature of myth and its relation to cult and ritual, an issue that has been much discussed by scholars. The question is whether the gods of a literary text correspond to actual powers of cult, or they belong only in the literary time and space. The research on ritual does throw light on aspects of religion that are not included in our texts of myths, yet one should consider whether the two can not after all co-exist as complementary to each other. See Gould (1985).

<sup>42</sup> See Gould (1985) 24.

introduced into Greek religion through the medium of literature, but literature was at that point one of the essential ways in which ideas were exchanged between cultures and crystallised in memory.<sup>43</sup> The attacks that Homer was to receive in later centuries from Xenophanes and Plato, or even the very development of Ionian philosophy, could be seen as a testimony to that; reaction always follows action.

The essence of the Homeric gods seems to lie neither in their morality nor in their claim to a mystical awesomeness; their essence is their unquestionable power, not only in terms of their physical strength, but also in terms of their immortal, eternal existence. Every other characteristic of theirs is accommodated to this basic quality, and everything seems to stem from it. Their very function in the poem certainly proves this element; more important, this very power operates as the negative of human essence, god and man being thus defined against each other. As regards moira, the gods' relation to it is such as to further underline this interrelation and interdependency between the human and the divine - a relation, no doubt, that demands that the Olympians be viewed as actual objects of belief, and not merely as a poetic device.

Up to now I have examined the possibility that moira, embodying the idea of predetermination in life, could be seen as related to or even identified with the gods: moira is actually defined by divine action. But it has been noted that moira entails more than plain predetermination; the idea of an apportionment of shares, I argued, implies a sense of moral order. Is there any way in which order could be related to the gods?

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<sup>43</sup> See Burkert (1992: 95), where he refers to the ritual, iconographic and literary channels of transmission of ideas from one culture to another, observing that they were not mutually exclusive, but 'may have overlapped and reinforced one another in many different ways'.

The two instances of κηροσασία, as well as the cases of Zeus's wish to save Sarpedon and Hector from death, could seem to imply that Zeus, and consequently the gods, are after all obliged to follow an order that is external to their own plans or wishes. The same could be said of the cases in which the expressions ὑπὲρ μοῖραν, ὑπὲρ αἴσαν and ὑπέρομον occur, which imply the possibility of moira's violation: the gods intervene just at the right moment to prevent such a violation, and in this way the order suggested by moira is maintained (see p.144). The difference is that in these cases the reference could be taken to imply that the gods follow actually a plan of their own, and do not obey some externally imposed decree.

The issue is obviously not different from the one already discussed: there is once more a question of priority and hierarchy. Does this order pre-exist, and do the gods obey, for it is undoubtedly superior to them? Or are the gods responsible in some way for this order, which is after all the consequence of their very action? One should perhaps see the issue in a totally different light: the gods co-exist with the order, without necessarily being subordinate to it, or responsible for it. The order exists, the gods act, and it happens - we are never told why or how - that the gods' actions agree with that order. The poet is never concerned to prove that there is some particular kind of relation between the two. That there should be a relation is only the expected consequence of the gods' status in life and nature, and in Homeric thought itself.

The only conclusion to be reached after this examination is that the relation between moira and the gods is ambivalent and not at all clear. Zeus, being the supreme

god, whose will is imposed in the form almost of a law, enjoys a unique relation to moira that can at times be said to entail the identification of the two. The lesser gods, when seen individually, lack the power that could imply an unconditional or unquestionable identification with moira; they rather appear to succumb to it as they succumb to Zeus, fulfilling its decrees even when these are against their own plans or wishes. However, they could be seen as closely related to or even identical to moira, when they feature collectively; although this is mostly the case in the utterances of the heroes, the occasional vague references made by the poet himself prove that the belief in this relation is not simply the result of the heroes' misapprehension due to their limited knowledge, but also a reflection of the poet's own bewilderment at the proximity of the two and his utter frustration at providing a solution.

It was noted earlier (118-21), that the inconsistency in moira's relation to the gods is an intrinsic characteristic of the very concept of fate, which, moreover, the poet is not at all concerned to explain away or avoid; no person who believes in fate can expound in a totally rational fashion the workings of fate, or its relation to the divine. More interesting, although the gods *can* be identified with moira, the poet seems to prefer to keep the relation vague. His own uncertainty as regards the nature of moira, which he shares with his heroes, accounts for his occasionally connecting moira with the gods himself, and especially with Zeus. At the same time, however, he seems to be consciously avoiding the total identification. However close the two may seem at times, such a relation is finally avoided; the poet needs an independent moira and an independent Zeus for the effective construction of his plot. What I would wish to examine at this point are the reasons, in terms of narrative, for which the poet avoids establishing a categorical identification of

moira with the gods, and the characteristics of moira that allow the possibility of such a choice.

First of all, a crucial difference between moira and the gods should be noted. Both are certainly the cause of good and evil alike. The gods can destroy as easily as they can glorify, and it would appear that their anthropomorphic qualities, their passions and whims, justify exactly this behaviour. In this way, their relation to moira, I have argued (111f.), is definitely stronger than their relation to any form of justice, whether this be denoted by δίκη or not. For the gods are ultimately closer to the power of life and nature than to that of law or morality; they suggest the existence of an unknown dimension that proves able to control human life, all too often without a comprehensible reasoning as such.

However, this very anthropomorphic quality of the gods that explains their occasional injustice or immorality is the point at which the gods are to be distinguished from moira. Moira has no passions, no wishes and no reason; it simply exists and man cannot propitiate it or manipulate it according to his wishes and by means of his behaviour. Propriety is irrelevant, piety even more so. The gods, on the other hand, can change their disposition towards man, or at least this is what man wishes to believe. Although they have the right, because of their superiority, to disregard man's wishes and prove cruelly indifferent to him, or even to destroy him for reasons suggested by thoughts of self-interest, still they can be placated, and their decisions can be therefore seen as largely conditioned by human behaviour.

The Iliadic plot evolves around the promise that Zeus made to Thetis in order that Achilles' wrath towards Agamemnon be appeased. Διὸς δ' ἐτελείετο βουλή, is the programmatic statement made at A 5, establishing the role of the god in the plot and foreshadowing the solution. But this will is ultimately the result of Achilles' own will; a constant interaction between divine and human activity leads to the inevitable fulfilment of Zeus's plan. In the background of this combined action there is always moira, confirming us or informing us of the solution to the plot; not moira as an agent or a power, but moira as an order, as an autonomous, unbiased and self-sufficient reality. It is obvious, I think, why the poet needs Zeus to be independent of moira: his will should not have the impersonal and irrevocable character of moira; irrevocable though it is indeed, because of the god's power, it is, however, a will that would not have existed had not Achilles asked for the god's favour.

But there is more to be said about the hero's responsibility. Both human and divine action fulfil moira, the difference being that, although the gods are aware of the order which permeates life beforehand, man acquires this knowledge only afterwards, and most important, too late. Whereas the gods appear as conscious agents of fate, therefore, man looks like a pitiful puppet, obliged to blind obedience; even Achilles, privileged with the foreknowledge of his fate does not manage to escape after all its demands. But is this all? Is man simply subject to this impersonal order, to its inevitable course, all his decisions and actions being doomed in advance, existing in vain? Certainly, this is not the impression we have of the poem.

Achilles' will, as I said, causes Zeus's will; as Thetis says to her son, after Patroclus is killed, τέκνον, τί κλαίεις; .. | .. τὰ μὲν δὴ τοι τετέλεσται | ἐκ Διός, ὡς ἄρα δὴ πρίν γ' εὔχεο χεῖρας ἀνασχών (Σ 73-75). The hero knows of his fate, he knows that if he re-enters the battle he will be killed himself. His reply is not the helpless cry of a man who feels the restraints of some superior force; instead, he confronts his fate for it is the inevitable consequence of his own action: αὐτίκα τεθναίην, ἐπεὶ οὐκ ἄρ' ἔμελλον ἑταίρω | κτεινομένω ἐπαμῦναι .. | .. ἄλλ' ἦμαι παρὰ νηυσὶν ἐτώσιον ἄχθος ἀρούρης (Σ 98-99, 104).

Not all heroes are as determined and as sincere as Achilles. But then, no other hero knows of his own fate beforehand.<sup>44</sup> What remains true for everyone, however, is that fate refers to that single moment to which one's own actions lead, and whence everything takes what seems to be an inescapable route. When Hector is found against Achilles, he grasps the detail in his previous decisions that makes his death an inevitable reality: recalling Polydamas' advice to retreat before it is too late, he assumes total responsibility for what followed and feels shame before his people (X 99ff).

In the previous chapter, I discussed the possibility that the Homeric concept of fate, as expressed by words such as μοῖρα, αἴσα, πέπρωτο and even κήρ, should imply an order which can, but should not be violated. This order exists independently of man, and according to the preceding analysis, in parallel with the gods. Each entity, divine or

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<sup>44</sup> We hear, however, of heroes who went to the war despite a prophecy foretelling their death (B 831-34= Λ 329-32, E 150-51), and more important we hear of Euchenor, who, like Achilles, is presented as having a choice between two fates (N 663-65).

human, has its own portion in this order, which portion is defined by well established limits. By ascribing certain events to moira, man is reassured that good and evil are part of an order, and therefore necessary and inescapable elements of life itself. The explanation may prove of little practical help, yet it is a powerful enough mechanism of defence for man to confront life. Life is no more incomprehensible and irrational, and the fact that man himself cannot totally perceive the reasoning of such an order that demands his death does not disprove the existence of the order.

But this irrational order entails, as it appears, a paradox that accepts both predetermination and responsibility. What is interesting in the case of Achilles is that his decision coincides with the demand of moira; this is the point at which the concept seems to be functioning as a restrictive power. However, the truth is that this coincidence is inevitable in the sense that as things have turned out, and considering the hero's character, the decision he makes is the only possible decision. There is a sense of cause and effect that determines life's course, the balance between action and reaction, this being the order implicit in moira. But, and this is where the irrational element is relevant, the very first beginning that leads to the cause, and subsequently to the inevitable effect, remains inexplicable and beyond control.<sup>45</sup> A different approach would talk of chance, as I said; but in the Homeric world chance simply does not exist, and behind every single moment there is a power acting in parallel to man.

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<sup>45</sup> In other words, we have a form of *fatum condicionale* as opposed to *fatum denuntiativum*, according to Servius' distinction; see Pack (1939) 352.



It is in this way that the expressions ὑπὲρ αἴσαν, ὑπὲρ μοῖραν, and ὑπέρμορον (-α) should be understood. The possibility of moira's violation seems at first sight to contradict the impression that moira is irrevocable and ineluctable. The imagery used for moira in the text is indeed evocative of its coercive power: we hear that moira πέδησεν (Δ 517, Χ 5), κατέλλαβε (Ε 82-83= Π 333-34= Υ 476-77), ὤρσεν (Ε 629), ἀμφεκάλυψεν (Μ 116), ἄγε (Μ 613-14, Ν 602), δάμασσε (Σ 119); equally compelling is the image of Αἴσα or Μοῖρα spinning events apparently with the thread of one's life - thus creating an inextricable and therefore well established course for life (Αἴσα at Υ 127-28, Μοῖρα at Ω 209-10). The element of inevitability seems to be a link between moira's diverse applications; whether it is death in general, or one's particular death, or the destruction of Troy, the impression created is that this is an event that can by no means be avoided.<sup>46</sup>

The text, however, does suggest at the same time the possibility of a transgression and a subsequent alternative course by means of the expressions ὑπὲρ αἴσαν, ὑπὲρ μοῖραν, and ὑπέρμορον (-α). Out of the seven occurrences of the expressions, Ζ 487 belongs to a hero's utterance: Hector attempts to dismiss Andromache's fears and gloomy premonitions by confirming that, as long as fate allows it, he will not be killed, οὐ γάρ τις μ' ὑπὲρ αἴσαν ἀνὴρ Ἄϊδι προΐάψει. The human perspective is obvious: for the hero nothing can ever happen against fate; although the words could be seen as prompted simply by his concern for his dismayed wife, still, we discern the determination of the warrior that Hector often proves to be in the poem: only fate can stop him. The poet, on the other hand, either through the narrative or through the gods' words, presents us with a more flexible view. Here again moira is not violated in the end, yet now the poet can tell us why this is so - a

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<sup>46</sup> Cf. the powerful image of Π 442= Χ 180: θανάτοιο δυσηχέος ἐξαναλῦσαι.

knowledge that Hector certainly lacks: a situation against moira is always avoided by means of divine intervention.<sup>47</sup> Only once does something happen against moira: at Π 780 we hear that the Achaeans were for a moment victorious ὑπὲρ δίσσιν.

For a moment, then, it appears that the fated event is suspended and everything seems to move against it. Yet, at the crucial moment, divine intervention seems to confirm the inevitability of fate. It is perhaps in the same light that Zeus's momentary hesitation over Sarpedon's and Hector's death should be seen: fate's course is almost in danger, only to be re-established by Hera's and Athena's intervention. Everything happens in the end as it is fated to happen, and inevitability becomes one of the essential qualities of the concept.<sup>48</sup>

The solution seems to be in total harmony with the plot's development. Fate is fulfilled, and whether this is a poetic device of anticipation or a necessity suggested by tradition, or perhaps a combination of the two, nothing and no one seems to be able to change this course. Not surprisingly, since the relation of cause and effect of which I talked cannot be overlooked. For what ultimately prevents the violation of moira is the

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<sup>47</sup> These are the cases of Β 155-56 (the Greeks should not leave Troy), Ρ 321-23 (the Greeks almost victorious ὑπὲρ Διὸς αἰσάν), Υ 29-30 (Achilles should not capture Troy), Υ 335-36 (Aeneas should not be killed), Φ 516-17 (the Greeks should not capture Troy yet). The expressions could indeed be taken as a means of emphasis, as Edwards (1994: on Ρ 321) remarks, or they can be seen in the light of the poem's purpose; so Dietrich (1965: 284ff.). For the relation of divine intervention and moira's fulfilment, see p.155

<sup>48</sup> Morrison (1997: 285) sees the examples as cases of openness (see p. 140, n. 30), which fall actually into two categories: events determined by tradition, and events determined by the plot of the particular poem; such passages 'show that, just as Achilles contemplates alternatives to his fate of dying young, Homer is determined to challenge the tradition by showing how easily events - and his song - might have followed a different course'; among the cases mentioned, besides the ones relating to moira's violation, are Menelaus' and Nestor's premature death (Η 104-8, Θ 90-91) which stand against tradition, and Θ 130-32, Ο 458-65, cases which are against Zeus's plans.

very fact that it would take an almost supernatural effort on man's side to exceed the limits of his own nature.

It is very tempting indeed to see in this religious belief, which is innocent of philosophical and psychological analysis, the quintessence of human behaviour: moira denotes the limits of our existence, which we can never escape, for they actually define our 'self'; what we do and what we live is indeed pre-determined by our own self, by the limits that constitute our being, the limits that have been imposed on us from without and irrespectively of our will; everything may be predicted and foreseen, as long as we have the sobriety to see and the courage to admit the truth. Doubtless, this is not what the poet or his heroes see in moira, nor how they would explain moira's power in life; yet, it is interesting to see how these apparently different views seem to have the same implications. In place of the self there is moira and an order of a religious and moral quality; the inevitability is not internally suggested or imposed,<sup>49</sup> but it is ultimately the same idea of limits that is implied, even if this time the limits cannot be explained on the grounds of genes or milieu. Man seems entrapped and compelled to live a life that is already established. Moira denotes the limits and the order that describe and circumscribe human nature.

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<sup>49</sup> For moira as the externalisation of essentially internal mechanisms of behaviour, see Bartosiewiczova (1977-1978) 3. The idea is certainly in keeping with the more general tendency of Homeric thought to ascribe the causation of life to an external sources; Dodds (1951:7, 16) talks of 'overdetermination', thus giving a somehow simplified and schematic account of the Homeric 'irrational', while Lesky (1961), by emphasising the parallel and inextricably linked action of mortals and immortals, presents an interesting and highly discerning approach of Homeric religious experience.

Nevertheless, by no means should this idea be taken to contradict the belief in human responsibility. For it is after all man himself who constructs his own fate.<sup>50</sup> What we have, then, in the concept of fate is a peculiar and complex system of causes which exist in parallel to one another, acting towards the accomplishment of an inscrutable order. Moira may be the name given to the haphazard action of the gods, or it may be their conscious attempt towards the preservation of this order; it may be the name given to man's own actions, when seen as fulfilling this same order, or it may be a chance event, which assumes in this way a reasoning. This order exists in parallel both to human and divine action, the difference being that the gods are aware of this order, either because of their superiority or because of the poet's puzzlement. Lesky (1961) has shown rather convincingly how human and divine action evolve on two parallel levels, without the one affecting the other's degree of responsibility; moira should perhaps be seen to represent a third level, even if occasionally it comes close to coinciding with divine determination, and although this time we cannot talk of proper causation, since moira refers not to a power, but to an abstract natural order.

At the same time, predetermination is perceived *post eventum* as indicative of this very order. The poet's ability to manoeuvre during the narration and use at times moira and at times the gods, or even a combination of the two, with human action being always indispensable for life's performance, proves that all explanations can be plausible at the same time. What determines which idea is to be used each time is the emphasis that the

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<sup>50</sup> See Leach (1915) 380: 'Where would be the great ethical teaching of the Greek Drama if it were merely the spectacle of men and women moving like automata to a destined end?'; also Jones (1996) 117f.: 'Achilles must be seen to be acting as a free agent, otherwise the epic and Achilles' story would become mere melodrama: mere Cyclic epic. As it is, it becomes tragedy'. The same idea is expressed by Morrison (1997), this time through the antithesis between 'openness' and 'fixity', see p. 140, n. 30.

poet wishes to put on events and the perspective from which life is ultimately viewed. For the heroes, moira and the gods are easily interchangeable, for they often exercise an equally coercing power on their life. For the poet it seems that the narration often drags him towards one or the other solution; when Zeus talks of the future, it is inevitable that we view a powerful god who knows of the future and is capable of defining it as well; when moira is used, the emphasis is on the inevitability of natural order, since this order is now seen as predefined and inescapable. By the end of the poem, the audience gains a bifocal view on life, with man being at the same time subject to and responsible for life: Zeus may foresee the future, he may observe moira's decrees, but he never forces Achilles or any other hero to some particular action; his plan is a human wish, and the heroes act as free agents aware of their own wishes and plans, and of their responsibility.

### *3.2 Divine Justice*

The question of divine justice, or more generally of divine morality, in the Homeric poems has apparently always concerned scholars, as well as readers of Homer. One can simply remember Theagenes of Rhegium's attempt to defend and explain the Homeric poems as an allegory, thus justifying possible immoral deeds of the immortals - an attempt which clearly proves that by the end of the sixth century Homer had already been the object of criticism; Xenophanes' polemics towards Homer, as well as Hesiod, provoked by the poets' misrepresentation of the gods as agents of an immoral behaviour that even among men was

impermissible, the cause of disapproval and shame;<sup>51</sup> as well as Plato's decision to expel the poet from his ideal πολιτεία on the grounds that his poetry was neither useful nor true.<sup>52</sup> Accordingly, scholars have often sought a solution in emendation or elimination, in cases where the behaviour of the gods seems extraordinarily, almost unacceptably immoral or human.<sup>53</sup>

True, after the work of Milman Parry and Albert B. Lord, and with the compositional principles of oral poetry being known and widely acknowledged as the cause of the Homeric multilateral quality, many apparent discrepancies in the poems were at last explained and accounted for. Still, Homeric theology remains of the most ambivalent quality, susceptible to diverse, indeed conflicting, interpretations.<sup>54</sup> The problem seems to lie with the gods' inconsistent, rather than totally immoral character, further accentuated by a discrepancy often traced between the actual behaviour of the gods and the ideas about divinity expressed in the poem by the mortal characters. Once more the differentiation observed by Jørgensen proves to be of relevance (see p.146). The acknowledgement of the poet's omniscience, a result of his special relation to the Muses, combined with the observation that the poet's own presentation of the gods is differentiated from that of his mortal heroes, can easily, albeit simplistically, lead to the conclusion that the truth should be sought for in the poet's own words; the heroes' expression of a belief in gods' morality or justice is nothing but a mere 'wishful thinking', their naive conviction, being the result of their

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<sup>51</sup> See fr. 11B (DK): πάντα θεοῖς ἀνέθηκαν Ὀμηρός θ' Ἡσίοδος τε | ὅσα παρ' ἀνθρώποισιν ὄνειδεα καὶ ψόγος ἐστίν; cf. also fr. 12B (DK): ὡς πλεῖστ' ἐφθέγγαντο θεῶν ἀθεμίστια ἔργα, | κλέπτειν μοιχεύειν τε καὶ ἀλλήλους ἀπατεύειν.

<sup>52</sup> *Rep.* 398 a-b, 607a.

<sup>53</sup> Thus, θ 333-42, Apollo's and Hermes' expressed wish that they were in bed with Aphrodite, as Ares is, were omitted by a number of ancient editions as morally offensive; see Van der Valk (1949) 186, n. 5.

<sup>54</sup> In fact, Homeric theology seems to defy the oral theory, as Kullmann (1985) has shown; see p. 21, n. 24.

limited knowledge and power of perception; the actual character of the gods is the one presented by the poet himself, as seen in his characterisation of them.

True, if we consider only the behaviour of the Homeric gods, we can hardly allow them being called just or moral. Their obsession with their personal τιμή, which often results in man's destruction, seems to defy all principles of justice and morality. Thus, statements like that of Dodds, who finds 'no indication in the narrative of the *Iliad* that Zeus is concerned with justice as such' or Chantraine, who speaks of the 'caractère anarchique du panthéon homérique',<sup>55</sup> seem justifiable - still, not satisfying. On the other hand, the opposite view which advocates gods' justice and sees in it a force that permeates the poems, does not seem satisfying either. Order is indeed established in the end of both poems, the lesser gods always succumb in the end to Zeus's will, and we do hear of Zeus's concern for justice from the poet himself; yet, does this entail that we can apply to the Homeric gods the principle of justice and the quality of moral behaviour? Such an approach proves extremely dangerous, for it can lead to associations that do not actually exist in the poems themselves. Thus, Lloyd-Jones, although stating that the Homeric concept of divine justice does not necessarily have to correspond to any abstract or absolute idea of justice, still tries to accommodate Zeus' behaviour with a train of thought

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<sup>55</sup> Dodds (1951) 32, Chantraine (1952) 64; Chantraine (ibid.) further argues that the Homeric gods do not correspond to no moral or natural law, a view with which I would not agree totally, in the face of what has been hitherto discussed about the gods' relation to moira; moreover, I would think that the very fact that the gods are related to nature and its laws explains their moral inadequacy, with moral being defined in human terms. Of interest is also the view expressed by Adkins, (1960a:62), that the 'gods as portrayed generally in the Homeric poems are far from just. Though right triumphs in the main plots ... it does not do so *because* it is right'; there is a point in Adkins's remark, yet one should consider that although the gods do not appear as agents of justice, the audience quite probably perceived the solution of the plots as a proof of divine order; that this is not always relevant to the Iliadic plot will become clear later on. For similar views as expressed by G. Murray and C. M Bowra, see Clay (1983) 135, n.8.

that is essentially abstract and absolute in its morality, therefore concluding that the Homeric gods are agents of a moral power that is finally established in both poems.<sup>56</sup>

Such conflicting readings of the poems certainly correspond to the conflicting qualities of the Homeric gods themselves. Although the two opposing views presented tend to be rather extreme, still they do not emerge *ex nihilo*; there is a trace of truth in both - however implausible or disquieting this may appear at first sight. For the Homeric gods are both just and unjust, moral and immoral. At times they seem to sanction morality with their own behaviour and mete out justice among men, yet there are also times when they can appear indifferent to both, concerned only with their own prerogative of τιμή, selfishly disregarding all principles, if this is deemed necessary for their personal aims and plans to be fulfilled. Interpretations which aim at, or wish for, a single and more consistent idea of the divine in Homer, inevitably depend on a choice, a preference for the one or the other characteristic, ignoring or neglecting the aspect against which they opted, and thus disregarding an essential quality of the Homeric gods, namely their moral ambivalence.<sup>57</sup>

It is perhaps necessary that the questions about the Homeric gods be redefined. The matter is not whether they are just or unjust, moral or immoral; if, or rather since, they can be both at the same time; if the poet is not interested in concealing this apparent contradiction by constructing a more or less coherent image of them; if he is indeed quite satisfied, as it seems, with their presence in the poem, and does not feel he is being unjust towards their nature or

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<sup>56</sup> Lloyd-Jones (1983) ch. 1.

<sup>57</sup> The reasons that permit this ambivalence will be discussed in due course; here, let it suffice for me to say, in anticipation, that however vast the differences between the two poems, and even if the *Odyssey* clearly puts more emphasis on the gods' moral aspect, this equivocal quality characterises their behaviour and its perception by the heroes in both poems.



disrespectful to their status; then, the question is which is the aspect of the gods that actually constitutes their inmost and indisputable essence, the aspect which it would be disrespectful on the part of both the poet and his heroes to question or even deny. For it is obviously not their justice; justice and morality can be ascribed to them, but they are neither their only nor their primary function.

True, it is very probable that the sanction of morality and the distribution of justice are essential characteristics of the divine almost by definition. As Burkert remarks, 'if reality appears dangerous and downright hostile to life, religion calls for something beyond experience to restore the balance'.<sup>58</sup> Cults, rituals and religious systems seem to be based on the assumption that the powers that exist beyond man's reach or comprehension are affected by human behaviour in multiple ways and respond to it accordingly. Such beliefs in their turn seem to condition human behaviour and ultimately form the basis of social principles and codes, or even superstitions. And this is basically the reason why we cannot deny this function to the Homeric gods. Or rather, why the poet cannot deny it; for this is a conclusion drawn from the poems themselves, as will become obvious later on.

Still, it has to be acknowledged that, however important an element of the divine behaviour, justice or morality are not, in the case of the Homeric gods, the characteristics on which their divine quality is based; that is, the Homeric gods are not acknowledged as gods

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<sup>58</sup> Burkert (1996) 33. For Burkert this is another characteristic of religion that proves its effectiveness in 'making sense' of chaos, and therefore an explanation of its persistence through the ages; 'by establishing connections of fault, consequence, and remedy, it creates a context of sense and premises a meaningful cosmos in which people can live in health and at ease' (128); see his discussion on pp. 118-126, and especially p. 125, where he talks of guilt as 'universal and aboriginal and typical of the human mind and human behavior in general'.

because they sanction the behaviour of the Homeric society; the sanction they provide derives from rather than supports their authority. The Homeric man seems to wish for, or at times even enjoy their justice, but what he ultimately respects and fears in them is their immortality and their extreme and omnidirectional superiority, evident in their ability to interfere with and thus control human life. The Homeric gods offer an explanation of life and nature; they represent the other world to which man has no access, which is beyond human control and human perception; and as such they should be definitely respected or feared, but they cannot be forced to be consistently just or moral.<sup>59</sup>

Any discussion on justice has to begin with the examination of the relevant terminology. As noted in chapter two, in the place of the later more abstract and conceptualised term δικαιοσύνη the Homeric poems have the rather less elaborate term δίκη. The word and its cognates are rarer in the *Iliad* than in the *Odyssey*, and this observation has given rise to the conclusion that what we witness is the process of a development of thought: the *Odyssey* being the more recent poem of the two, we can see how archaic Greek thought gradually matures towards a more elaborate phase, and while δίκη (or, assumedly, justice) is almost absent from the *Iliad*, it becomes more important in the *Odyssey*, and finally acquires its full importance in Hesiod's *Works and Days*, even if it is still not as elaborate a concept as in later periods. This schematic development on a verbal level is supposed to reflect a corresponding development of thought, as perceived through the different emphasis that is put on justice in each of the three poems: in the *Odyssey* justice, and in particular divine justice, is supposedly both more elaborate and

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<sup>59</sup> I have been talking about the Homeric rather than the Iliadic gods at this point, because I believe that the discussion is relevant to the gods of both poems. There is certainly a difference between the two poems, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

more frequently employed than it is in the *Iliad*, while Hesiod represents once again the point of culmination of archaic Greek moral thought, as the idea comes now into the poet's focus. This scheme of a development of thought well agrees with the generally accepted outline of Ancient Greek literary history, with Homer chronologically preceding Hesiod.<sup>60</sup>

My aim will be to question this idea of a linear development. As far as δίκη is concerned, it is beyond doubt that the poems do present an interesting and thought-provoking difference in the use, and perhaps also the function, of δίκη. Still, I believe that words and their accurate meaning, function or frequency are but the starting point of a research; one should always bear in mind that the absence of a particular term from a work of literature, although indicative of the poet's milieu, may also be determined by the poet's literary or narrative intentions - even if only partly. Moreover, it has been argued earlier on that δίκη is of a rather restricted meaning in the poems, and hardly ever does it seem to refer to divine justice; which would entail that the frequency of the word has after all little, if anything, to do with the issue.

I do not mean to imply that the limited presence of δίκη in the *Iliad* is of no significance; it is indeed significant, as far as the particular term is concerned. However, two things should be considered: first, that its absence from the particular poem in no way proves its absence from the eighth-century vocabulary; the poet does use the word when this is necessary or helpful, and his avoiding or neglecting it may be simply because he does not essentially need it; second, even if the particular term in which we are

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<sup>60</sup> Doubts about Homer's priority to Hesiod have been expressed by M. L. West, *Hesiod: Theogony*, Oxford 1966, 46f.

accustomed to trace justice in Greek literature is but rarely employed, the poet has other ways available to express both a notion of justice and its commendation. If δικαιοσύνη as the term for an abstract idea of justice is absent from Homeric, and even Greek, thought before the fifth century, this only proves that philosophical inquiry and scrutiny into the details and essence of fundamental principles of life is still not elaborate enough to engage in the nuances that an idea may involve. Words with elaborate meaning, implicit of subtle differentiations, presuppose an elaborate thought and investigation; and this is doubtless not the world either of Homer or of his heroes.

Moreover, the fact that the use of δίκη is still unsophisticated and non-conceptualised in the Homeric poems, and that consequently the idea of justice is not elaborate enough to be regarded as a concept of a coherent philosophical system, is not a sufficient proof of the absolute absence of the concept; one should consider that the Homeric idea of justice could be simply wider than the use of δίκη seems to imply. The Homeric poems, each in its own succinct manner, allude to the idea of justice, and in fact of divine justice, on various occasions, thus proving that any absolute identification of δίκη with the idea can only be misleading and partial.<sup>61</sup> Besides, as has been already discussed, the idea of morality and justice in the Homeric poems is also closely related to the word μοῖρα, and the implied idea of fate.

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<sup>61</sup> Dickie (1978:95f) rightly observes that the absence of an abstract and theoretical terminology in the Homeric poems should not be taken to imply the absence of the respective ideas as well; for, as he further notes (96), one has to take under consideration the whole vocabulary of the poems and the way in which terms behave in relation to each other.

A distinction should be drawn, therefore, between δίκη and justice; if the information provided by δίκη proves to be insufficient and slightly inconclusive for our understanding of the Homeric concept of divine justice, it should be acknowledged that the examination merely of δίκη is simply not enough, nor crucial to any conclusion; other aspects of the Homeric gods will have to be considered alongside the meaning and use of δίκη, such as their behaviour, their perception by the heroes and their interpretation by the poet himself, as evident in indirect and discreet comments throughout the poem, or in the very manipulation of the plot, and finally their relation to μοῖρα as a power not of destiny, but of a moral order that pervades life; besides these aspects, the gods' function as *dramatis personae* of the narrative, as well as the implications of their divine essence, should also be considered.

The vital difference between the two poems in their respective ways of relating notions of justice with the gods can certainly not be overlooked. The *Odyssey* seems to provide us with a different concept of the gods that does not allow us always to speak of the poems in common terms. Both the degree and the fashion of divine participation is different, and one could say, as Kullmann does,<sup>62</sup> that there is a difference in divine motivation, which has consequently an effect on the way the gods are perceived by mortals, whether they be the heroes or the poet's audience, or even the poet himself. Still, the question remains: is this sufficient proof of a development, or simply the expected consequence of the vital differences of narrative aims that each poem seems to fulfil? Before comparing the two poems, though, it is only wise to return to the terminology and ideology of the *Iliad*.

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<sup>62</sup> Kullmann (1985) 3.

In the poem, the noun δίκη itself appears four times in the singular (Π 388, Σ 508, Τ 180, Ψ 542), and once in the plural (Π 542), while the verb δικάζειν occurs five times (Α 542, Θ 431, Σ 506, Ψ 574, 579); of these occurrences only three are related to the gods, or more precisely, to Zeus himself (Α 542, Θ 431 and Π 388); of the remaining cases, Π 542, Σ 506 and 508, and Ψ 574 and 579 have clear legal implications and are therefore related to morality only indirectly, while Τ 180 and Ψ 542 have an ambivalent meaning.<sup>63</sup> The adjective δίκαιος, which has been said to be the form most clearly related to some notion of morality (p. 105 above), is limited to three occurrences: we have δικαιοτέρος at Τ 181, and δικαιοτάτος at Λ 832 and Ν 6; finally, the word δικασπόλος appears only once at Α 238.<sup>64</sup> Of great importance is the fact that only Τ 180 and 181 are related to the main plot, referring to the dispute between Achilles and Agamemnon - the lines will be discussed in due course.

It has already been noted that the word appears to be of a quite restricted meaning in the poem, especially when compared to the terminology and philosophy of later ages (110f.). In its legal sense the noun δίκη may be said to denote the decision made during a procedure, the settlement reached through the procedure or, finally, the procedure itself, while the verb δικάζω denotes the act of deciding through such a procedure; this non-elaborate character is obviously related to the very oral character of the legal 'system' of

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<sup>63</sup> Of these cases, Σ 506, 508, Ψ 542, 574, and 579 have been discussed in pp. 100-4, and Π 542 in p. 108.

<sup>64</sup> Havelock (1978:127-133) rightly observes that δίκη is used in the *Iliad* mostly in the legal context of a procedural justice, and talks therefore of the legalities of the poem, while the *Odyssey*, where the adjective is more frequently used, the term is related to the 'moralities' of the poem's subject; however, as far as the *Iliad* is concerned, he is led astray by his thesis of the poem's didactic character and sees in the plot a paradigm of oral 'justice', an item of oral storage to be memorised through poetry (see p. 18, n.22; p. 100, n.90): Agamemnon has violated a legal procedure, and the references to the proper administration of such procedures which are dispersed especially in the second half of the poem aim exactly at creating a sharp contrast by means of which the didactic end of the poem will be accomplished.

the period. It is evident that the term does not imply a coherent and consistent system, according to which disputes are settled; instead there seem to exist precedents on the basis of which a legal procedure can be conducted, aiming at a peaceful and satisfactory solution that would be acceptable by both disputants. In other words, δίκη can hardly be said to denote any abstract and elaborate notion of justice, either as a behavioural norm or as a judicial system. But it has to be repeated that the absence of an elaborate system, legal or judicial, and the rather restricted meaning of δίκη as a moral term do not necessarily entail the absence of all sense of justice and morality from the Homeric world. Rather, it only proves what can easily be assumed about an oral culture, namely that its ways of administering justice and ensuring morality are different from those of a culture that is accustomed to the facility of writing.<sup>65</sup> As noted, and as we have seen in chapter two (109-10), both the notion and the practice of justice exist, yet not only or not necessarily in relation to δίκη.

And the question remains: how are the Homeric gods related to δίκη? Up to now I have consciously avoided the occurrences of the word where such a relation is implied, for they demand a more careful examination. I begin with the famous, if not notorious, simile of Π 385-93:

ὡς δ' ὑπὸ λαίλαπι πᾶσα κελαινὴ βέβριθε χθῶν  
ἡματ' ὀπωρινῶ, ὅτε λαβρότατον χέει ὕδωρ  
Ζεὺς, ὅτε δὴ ῥ' ἄνδρεςσι κοτεσσάμενος χαλεπήνη,

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<sup>65</sup> Hence, the importance of the ἀγορά and the ὄρκος: they function in the absence of a written document that could be used for future reference. Of importance is also the connection of the gods themselves, and especially Zeus, both with the θέμιστες, which are supposedly given to a king by the god, and with the oaths, in his capacity as Ζεὺς Ὀρκίος; as Richardson (1993: on Ψ 566-85) remarks on the practice of oath-taking, 'it effectively makes the gods the witnesses, and so could be considered more secure'.

οἱ βίη εἶν ἀγορῆ σκολιάς κρίνωσι θέμιστας,  
ἐκ δὲ δίκην ἐλάσωσι, θεῶν ὅπιν οὐκ ἀλέγοντες·  
τῶν δέ τε πάντες μὲν ποταμοὶ πλήθουσι ῥέοντες,  
πολλὰς δὲ κλιτῆς τότε ἀποτμήγουσι χαράδραι,  
ἔς δ' ἄλλα πορφυρέην μεγάλη στενάχουσι ῥέουσαι  
ἐξ ὀρέων ἐπικάρ, μινύθει δέ τε ἔργ' ἀνθρώπων·  
ὥς ἵπποι Τρῳαὶ μεγάλη στενάχοντο θέουσαι.

The simile has been suspected of interpolation on the grounds that the general idea of Zeus as a god of justice who punishes human transgressions is not compatible with the idea of the god as expressed in the main plot, but rather evocative of a later age;<sup>66</sup> as will become clear presently, Zeus seems quite often indifferent to human impropriety, proving consistent only with regard to the fulfilment of his plan. Besides, the strong resemblance of the lines to Hesiod's *Works and Days* 220-24, seems to cast further doubt on the authenticity of the lines. In support of the lines one could use the argument that similes correspond to the poet's own age rather than to that of the heroes, and therefore the idea implicitly reflects a more recent belief which is inevitably in conflict with the more traditional concept of the divine as reflected in the god's behaviour in the plot, but which is not necessarily the product of a later stage of thought.<sup>67</sup> Or one could also follow M. L. West and argue for Hesiod's priority to Homer (see p. 169, n.60), thus avoiding the solution of a late interpolation.

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<sup>66</sup> For relevant bibliography, see Lloyd-Jones (1983) 187, n.26.

<sup>67</sup> This view seems to be implied by Chantraine (1952:76) who talks of a progress in thought between the time of the appearance of traditional themes and the time of their composition. I would avoid regarding Zeus's possible indifference to propriety as a more traditional, and hence older perception of the divine, for, as already noted, I would believe that the relation of divinity to some sort of propriety is an essential element of religion in general; see p. 167.



More important, however, I would regard the fact that the idea of Zeus as implied by the simile is not alien to the poet at all, nor certainly unique to this simile. The idea is expressed on different occasions and by different heroes,<sup>68</sup> and although the poet himself avoids applying the principle to his plot, I would regard the heroes' utterances as sufficient evidence for the existence of the belief in the poet's background. Doubtless, the discrepancy between this belief and the god's actual behaviour in the poem would persist. To this issue I will return when I examine the possibility or necessity of the idea of divine justice in the poem.

What is unique about the simile, and perhaps misleading as regards its relevance or applicability to the poem, is most probably the association of Zeus with δίκη, the fact, that is, that he appears to be punishing a violation related to some concept of justice. It is certainly obscure whether δίκη here implies the legal procedure, which is violated because of men's crooked decisions,<sup>69</sup> or a morality of a more general quality which is similarly offended; the context, as well as the contrast between δίκη and βίη, seem to imply the former, yet with

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<sup>68</sup> See p. 180f. It could be suggested that the differentiation of the simile from other references to divine justice results from the fact that now the god seems concerned with human propriety in general, and not with a slight on his personal τιμή, which is basically the case in the other examples; this is certainly an idea that seems more fitting to the *Odyssey* rather than the *Iliad*, see p 485-87, where the gods are said to roam the earth in disguise, ἀνθρώπων ὕβριν τε καὶ εὐνομίην ἐφορῶντες. I would regard, however, that Apollo's concern for Hector's body (Ω 33-54) is also implicit of the same idea, and the resort to the explanation of interpolation, which has affected the whole Ω [see Macleod (1982:8)], seems to me too easy a solution; I would not find it impossible that two or even more distinct ideas about divinity should co-exist in the poems; even the application of moira could be interpreted in this way.

<sup>69</sup> So Gagarin (1973) 86. Cf. Havelock (1978) 214f.

σκολιάς θέμιστας being substituted for the expected σκολιάς δίκας,<sup>70</sup> the word assumes almost a more general sense: what people send away is propriety in the administration of justice.<sup>71</sup> The reference to θεῶν ὄπις, implicit of the idea of an all-seeing god who punishes transgressions, seems to further enhance the impression that the term has moral rather than legal connotations.<sup>72</sup> However, it would appear that the distinction between the two interpretations is not so sharp, once we remember that a legal process is after all an expression or version of morality itself; a legal sense would not be excluded, then, granted that legality functions as the guarantee of morality. For the audience the simile unfolds in seconds, and the connection drawn between crooked decisions, δίκη, and Zeus's wrath has most probably an immediate effect of relating impropriety to the god's punishment. Zeus is wroth at the described situation, he emerges as Zeus-τιμῶρος, the supreme god who oversees human behaviour and punishes transgressions of established principles of propriety. What is worth noting, however, on the basis of what has been already said about the concept of justice, is that the word does not apparently refer to an idealised or conceptualised notion, but to propriety, which is of a more restricted sense, and more particularly to the procedures that the god himself has given to man.<sup>73</sup> The image is the reverse of that presented at τ 108-14, where

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<sup>70</sup> Θέμις denotes the principles of propriety in general, which constitute the oral or customary law of Homeric society, or, in a legal context, the precedents upon which a decision is formed, rather than a decision which is reached during a settlement and can be characterised as straight or crooked; one can see, therefore, the line either as implying a crooked interpretation of such principles or precedents (see Janko (1992) on Π 386-88), or as resulting from the obvious relation between the two ideas; cf. λ 568-71, where Minos is said to be θεμιστεύων νέκυσιον (569), for the dead ἀμφὶ δίκας εἶροντο ἄνακτα (570).

<sup>71</sup> Dickie (1978: 98) examines the Homeric and Hesiodic passages together, and concludes that in Hesiod it is not the legal process that is driven away; 'A legal process still exists, but it is corrupt and biased. Similarly, in the Homeric passage, it is not legal process as such which is driven forth by those who pronounce crooked judgments with *bie*. It is rather the quality which makes a judge pronounce straight, i.e., impartial, judgments, and that quality is justice or equity'.

<sup>72</sup> For the old Indo-European idea of the omniscient god who sees everything and punishes trespasses, see Griffin (1980) 179ff, and especially 181f. for the particular Iliadic passage. Burkert (1996:43) refers to the very old and biological reaction of anxiety caused by the fear of the staring eye, although the reference is made to the evil eye in particular.

<sup>73</sup> See A 238-39, 198-99.

εὐδικία, along with εὐηγεσίη, are said to bring prosperity, the terms obviously referring to proper administration of justice and power.

Twice again is Zeus mentioned in relation to δίκη in the *Iliad*; both times we have the verb δικάζω: at A 540-543 Hera, suspicious of Thetis' visit to Zeus, complains to him that he always likes δικάζόμεν on his own and in secret from her; while at Θ 429-431, Hera finds that it is only proper, ἐπιεικές, that it must be Zeus who decides on the life and death of Greeks and Trojans. Line Θ 431, Τρωσί τε καὶ Δαναοῖσι δικάζέτω, could well seem to refer to a just settlement of the old dispute between Greeks and Trojans, yet the context suggests otherwise: Zeus favours not the Greeks at the moment, but the Trojans, realizing his plan to honour Achilles, and thus he can hardly be said to decide from the perspective of justice. It seems, then, that in both cases the verb δικάζω has the quite limited meaning 'adjudicate'; Zeus is here the supreme, the most powerful god, the father of men and gods, whose decision defines the course of events; whether justly or not is simply not mentioned.

One possibility exists that Zeus should be related in these references to some notion of justice, and this is if we see the act of δικάζόμεν as indicative of a king's offices: Zeus is himself an ἄναξ, often having to make decisions; a belief that when doing so, he administers justice in a proper or straight fashion, would not seem implausible; the order prevailing on Olympus despite the incessant conflicts between the gods might be taken as a proof of this. His decisions should, then, be regarded not as arbitrary and whimsical, but rather as the evidence of the god's justice. Besides, he is responsible for giving the θέμιστες to the mortal kings, a fact that seems to entail the divine sanction of the proper conduct of legal procedures. This is indeed the view expressed by Lloyd-Jones: the original meaning of 'indication' for δίκη is a

reference to the divine law<sup>74</sup> and the universal order which is supported and preserved by the gods.<sup>75</sup>

Such an interpretation would bring us to the expression *δίκη θεῶν*, which we find once only in the *Odyssey* (τ 43). If the word denotes the characteristic manner of the gods, this cannot be but a reference to the order of life as established by the gods, an order which takes us back to *moira*. Greene also seems to suggest a similar view, when he sees *Dike* as ‘the Way of Things’, the order of ‘Nature, the universal Mother’; the idea is believed to have been eclipsed when the Olympians invaded religion and Zeus was now married to *Themis*, ‘the new divine counterpart of human conscience and human ideals of conduct’.<sup>76</sup> The possibility that *δίκη* did enjoy such a relationship with the gods cannot be disproved; as noted, it seems to correspond to the idea of order that *moira* implies. Yet, what has to be stressed is that this order, however moral, is far from being just in the way that justice is usually perceived by man. Even if we accept that *δίκη* is after all the way of the gods, this does not necessarily entail that the gods are just in the sense that they distribute happiness and misery on the basis of merit - for after all this is what the human concept of divine justice essentially demands. *Δίκη* is the way of nature, and nature can be extremely unjust - this being probably the reason why man is constantly looking for justice. Thus, the gods’ relation to *moira*, as well as *moira*’s own relation to some sense of order, seem to make sense: life entails both good and evil, and as will become clear presently, the Homeric concept of the gods allows sufficient space for the explanation of both, while the belief in *moira* further removes the complexity of evil’s causation.

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<sup>74</sup> Lloyd-Jones (1983) 6-7.

<sup>75</sup> Lloyd-Jones (1987) 310.

<sup>76</sup> Greene (1944) 10. Cf. also Cornford (1912) 172-77.

However we interpret δίκη, then, whether as a quasi-legal term which can refer to propriety, but only in the limited sense of abiding by the principles of a particular society, or as a more 'metaphysical' concept that relates to the order prevailing in nature and life, the term is certainly not used to designate an idea of absolute divine justice. In other words, the idea that the god may respond to human behaviour and be concerned with propriety is not expressed by δίκη, even if the term implies an order of things which demands itself a proper administration and conduct. In the simile of Π 385-93 δίκη is not an attribute of the god, even if the idea implied relates to a god who is concerned with justice.

To conclude, δίκη has a fairly limited application in the *Iliad*, even less so in relation to the gods. The adjective δίκαιος, which has been said to have moral connotations more than the noun δίκη and the verb δικάζω do, appears only three times in all in the *Iliad*, as opposed to the ten occurrences of the noun and the verb together, while the adverb δικάίως is totally absent. Even so, and despite the scarce application of the adjective, the relation between δίκη and some idea of morality does exist. Moreover, one should be particularly careful not to infer that the limited use of δίκη in the poem entails a limited importance of morality or justice in the Homeric world. As we have seen in the previous chapter (72ff.), moira, apart from denoting an idea of predetermination, also refers to a notion of social order which demands the respect of limits - a notion which has been regarded as essentially moral.

As for the relation of δίκη to the gods, it has to be admitted that it does indeed exist, as the above examples clearly show, even if the idea never seems to attain an important place in the poem. More important, even if one should see δίκη as a technical or legal rather than a

moral term, it cannot be doubted that the poet is aware of the belief that the gods, with Zeus as their ἄναξ, do punish possible transgressions of men, being wroth at impropriety - an idea that certainly exists independently of δίκη as well, as will become clear presently. However, it has to be noted that no relation is ever drawn between δίκη, Zeus and the offences committed by Agamemnon and Paris, and also that, despite the belief in the gods' punishment, the gods are never called δίκαιοι themselves.

I have been mentioning quite often that there exists in the poem the belief in the gods' concern for propriety, which may also imply their punishing impropriety, an instance of this being the very simile at Π 385-93. What remains to be seen, then, is how this idea is expressed in the poem, and whether it is relevant to the plot in some way.

It is a quite common view that Zeus wants the Greeks to win, because Paris' improper behaviour towards Menelaus deserves punishment; the principles of ξενία, protected by Ζεὺς Ξεῖνιος, were neglected and violated by Paris and now this impropriety of a single person has an impact on Troy in general. The moral character of Troy's destruction is often stressed, as support seems to be found in the text itself: at Γ 351-354 Menelaus prays to Zeus for a victory against Paris in a most powerful way: Ζεῦ ἄνα, δὸς τείσασθαι ὃ με πρότερος κάκ' ἔοργε, | δῖον Ἄλεξανδρον, καὶ ἐμῆς ὑπὸ χερσὶ δάμασσον, | ὄφρα τις ἐρρίγησι καὶ ὀψιγόνων ἀνθρώπων | ξεινοδόκον κακὰ ρέξαι, ὃ κεν φιλότητα παράσχη, and Kirk sees in this prayer 'a powerful reminder of his rectitude', which 'in

itself gives him the advantage over Paris, who can naturally attempt nothing similar’;<sup>77</sup> at Δ 160-162, after Pandarus has broken the oath given for the agreement made at Γ 276-91, Agamemnon soothes his wounded brother, by reassuring him that εἴ περ γάρ τε καὶ αὐτίκ’ Ὀλύμπιος οὐκ ἐτέλεσεν, | ἔκ τε καὶ ὄψε τέλει, σὺν τε μεγάλῳ ἀπέτεισαν, | σὺν σφῆσιν κεφαλῆσι γυναιξί τε καὶ τεκέεσσιν; according to Kirk again, we have here ‘the first general statement in Greek literature of the powerful dogma that Zeus always exacts vengeance in the end’.<sup>78</sup>

If such statements in the poem are supposed to be explaining Troy’s fall in moral terms, the morality and justice of Zeus and the gods in general is further supported by parallels of other examples in which Zeus appears to be punishing acts of impropriety,<sup>79</sup> the most striking of which is supposed to be that of Achilles: at Ι 502-512 Phoenix talks of ἄτη that is sent upon men by Zeus for their not listening to Λιταί - an allegory aiming at persuading Achilles to accept Agamemnon’s gifts; on these lines Hainsworth comments that ‘it is correct to see a moral connexion between the temper of Akhilleus and his fate. In that sense the death of Patroklos and his own πότμος ἐτοῖμος are a penalty brought upon him by his own intransigence, not a morally neutral chain of causes and effects’;<sup>80</sup> in a similar way, Richardson comments on Hector’s reference to θεῶν μῆνιμα at Χ 358 that ‘it looks as if Akhilleus’ death may be seen as a retribution for his behaviour towards Hektor’s

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<sup>77</sup> Kirk (1985) ad loc. It is worth noting the use of πρότερος in Menelaus’ words, for it obviously relates to the retributive character of justice, and this is the very trait of the concept that makes Achilles’ reaction fairly legitimate, see Cairns (1993b) 160; not surprisingly, the wronged hero does not talk of the offence in terms of a slight on the god’s τιμή, but rather from the perspective of a patient who asks for divine support.

<sup>78</sup> Kirk (1985) ad loc.

<sup>79</sup> Lycurgus, for example, is punished for his attack on Dionysus’ nurses at Ζ 130-140, and Niobe for regarding herself as equal to Leto at Ω 603-7.

<sup>80</sup> Hainsworth (1993) ad loc.

corpse',<sup>81</sup> a view based, as it seems, on the fact that Apollo, 'a god concerned with fundamental Greek ethical principles',<sup>82</sup> is the one who gets extremely angry at Achilles' behaviour, and more important, the one who will later kill him.

Certainly, there is some kind of truth in all these views. It is beyond doubt that Zeus destroys the Greeks because Agamemnon dishonoured Achilles, or that Zeus destroys the Greek wall, because the Greeks did not sacrifice before building it. And we often find that a hero is punished by a god, as happens with Lycurgus (Z 130), Bellerophon (Z 200-202), Oineus (I 529-549) or Niobe (Ω 605-609) (see p. 181, n.79). Still, one should have in mind that justice and punishment are not necessarily connected, for if justice entails punishment, the contrary is not always true. My aim will be to show that the Iliadic gods do not after all appear to be concerned about justice itself, yet this should not be seen as indicative of the absence of the idea altogether, since the examples quoted above clearly testify to the contrary. The question, then, is why the poet actually suppresses any explicit reference on his part, avoiding the application of the idea to his plot.

As I have already said, the difficulty when discussing divine morality or justice in the *Iliad* lies with an essential inconsistency in the character of the gods: they are said to represent an idea of justice, even if vaguely and indirectly, yet at the same time they behave in a manner that actually defies all principles and obligations that an idea of justice seem to entail. In other words, their actual behaviour and participation in the plot does not seem to conform with the belief in their supporting justice, which does exist in the poem, whether related to δίκη or not.

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<sup>81</sup> Richardson (1993) ad loc. Cf. Clay (1983) 65ff., who further believes that with Achilles' ransoming Hector, the ordered hierarchy between men and gods is restored.

<sup>82</sup> Richardson (1993) on Ω 22-76, cf. note on Ω 33-54.



Being the witnesses of the gods' capricious and unpredictable behaviour, we are quite astonished at, if not shocked by, their self-absorption and egotism, and at the same time perplexed by the occasional references to their justice. As noted earlier in the chapter, neither aspect should be overlooked if we wish to comprehend the gods' complex character. The question is whether this is more our own appreciation of the issue, while for the poet and his heroes there is no inconsistency at all. An examination of the gods' behaviour is necessary at this point.

That Homeric religion is anthropomorphic need not be discussed *in extenso*. First of all, the very structure of the divine society is merely a reflection of that of human society.<sup>83</sup> Zeus is an ἄναξ (Γ 351), just like Agamemnon (Α 506), demanding obedience and having the power to impose his will on the divine family; the gods hold assemblies of their own, and opinions are heard before Zeus makes the final decision.<sup>84</sup> Each god has a personal field of activity, or, as noted (70-72), a personal μοῖρα, which entails personal status and τιμή, and which is protected not only against human offences, but also against offences from another deity.<sup>85</sup> Their relations to each other are reciprocal, based on the same principle of *do ut des* that defines human interrelations: Thetis helped Zeus once, and Zeus is obliged to help her now, showing thus his gratitude and properly recognising her τιμή (Α 503-510); if he refuses his help to her, she will think of herself as μετὰ πᾶσιν

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<sup>83</sup> The assimilation of religious systems to social practices or realities is often interpreted as a means of stability through a definition of the identity of the social group; see Havelock (1978) 25; Burkert (1996:15) underlines the paradox, from a socio-biological perspective, that although religion does reflect a social reality, it also proves unwilling to adapt to changing conditions, focusing instead on 'unchanging "eternal" truths'; the paradox obviously lies with the fact that despite its inflexibility religion finally persists, the principles of survival fitness thus proving non-operative.

<sup>84</sup> For Zeus's status as evident from his responsibility for deciding the outcome of events, see p. 145, n.37.

<sup>85</sup> This is the case, as we saw (70-72) with Poseidon and Zeus, while the idea underlies the tension between Hera, Athena and Aphrodite, since Paris opted for the goddess of love (Ω 29-30).

ἀτιμοτάτη θεός (A 516) - and thus Zeus makes the promise that is necessary for the plot to unfold.<sup>86</sup> There is even the idea of gifts as a means of sealing such a relationship and recognising one's help, as happens with Hera who promises to give Pasithea to Hypnos, granted that he will help the goddess seduce Zeus (Ξ 263-279).

Moreover, the anthropomorphic quality of the gods entails that they share the same passions and weaknesses as man. If the violation of Menelaus' τιμή can cause such a terrible war, the violation of Hera's or Athena's τιμή can cause an insatiable hatred that can be quenched only with the total destruction of Troy. Subject to love and hate, affection and jealousy, the gods seem to react in a self-centred and self-absorbed fashion. Earnest and sincere concern for morality or human welfare is rare, unless suggested by some familial or other special relation, and then only of a minor importance. Self-interest is more decisive a factor of their behaviour, often resulting in conflict among the gods themselves. Their incessant plots and deceits prove more than anything else that they are not models of propriety. As Greene points out, '[the poet's] ethics ... is nobler than his theology'.<sup>87</sup>

When the gods react to human behaviour, this reaction is not presented as a genuine concern for propriety or morality *per se*, but is seen instead in the light of the very principle of ἀρετή and τιμή. A prayer is listened to and a favour is granted in exchange for the τιμή received, and accordingly, disaster is the response for neglect and violation of a

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<sup>86</sup> Other references to the gods' reciprocal relations: Θ 360-73, Σ 394-409, Ω 110-11.

<sup>87</sup> Greene (1944) 11. Cf. Havelock (1978) 51: 'the gods' essential characteristic is not superior morality, but superior durability'. Superior power should also be noted, for, as will become clear soon, this is actually the most important quality of the gods, second only to their immortality.

god's τιμή. Due respect, then, is demanded for the god to intervene for the sake of a hero, and due respect is shown through offerings and sacrifices, not through the observance of some moral code of behaviour.<sup>88</sup> The principle of *quid pro quo* defines the relationship between mortals and immortals in a manner that seems rather inappropriate if the gods should be ascribed the more sober and dignified principle of justice.

It does not come as a surprise, then, that the gods punish lack of piety not out of a concern for the moral inadequacy of an impious man, but because their personal τιμή has not been properly acknowledged. Thus, we hear that Artemis punished Oineus for not sacrificing to her only of all the gods (I 533-40); the issue seems to be the offence towards the goddess and her τιμή, and not the moral aspect of Oineus' act, since it is clear from the narration that the latter acted out of negligence and not on purpose.<sup>89</sup> Furthermore, the gods may punish impiety, but they do not necessarily reward piety; either because of indifference, or because of a conflict between their own interest and the interest of those who seek for their support. When the Trojan women pray to Athena and promise sacrifices in return for her help (Z 297-310), Athena not only refuses to listen to their prayer (311), but actually wishes for and aims at their destruction. The gods' tendency to be influenced by human behaviour only when their personal τιμή is violated is also evident in the behaviour of Athena and Hera in general. Both of them wish Troy's utter destruction and do everything they can to achieve it; behind their hate we find no sense of morality

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<sup>88</sup> See A 61-66, E 177-178, Z 87-98, 111-115, I 533-536, Ψ 862-881, Ω 66-70.

<sup>89</sup> The question of Oineus' intentions proves of no importance to the goddess who is concerned with the result of impiety and dishonour; however, it is worth considering whether results are always more important even in religious systems; we are still far from any idea of divine forgiveness and mercy. More important, one has to see in such cases the belief that disaster follows a human failure, whether a mistake or a moral error is not of any significance whatever for life; since no belief in afterlife exists everything must be seen from the perspective of the present.

regarding Paris' behaviour; their only concern is that they were personally dishonoured by Paris and his preference for Aphrodite (Ω 22-30). What matters for the gods is not the act itself, but the impact it has on their pride and τιμή.

What we have, then, is an image of gods who punish every human act that threatens their τιμή, but do not reward every human act that exalts it. It is therefore doubtful whether divine justice can be detected in the poem, since it becomes clear, first that the only principle that can define divine behaviour is of an external and quite superficial nature, and second and more important, that even this principle is not steady, that is man cannot form upon it his behaviour in order to ensure his future happiness. As it appears that human behaviour does not always influence the order on the divine level, we cannot talk of a relation of cause and effect. More important, it would appear that divine response to human behaviour cannot form a sanction of propriety.<sup>90</sup>

However, a point should be made clear, even if only to refute the preceding conclusion; for we seem to make the same mistake that leads to the conviction that morality is absent from the poems. It would indeed be absurd to suggest that the gods can ever be seen as just in the sense that they are gods of an absolute and unequivocal justice that prevails life. For it often appears that merit and responsibility are not after all decisive factors of their response to man: the good do not always prosper, the bad are not always

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<sup>90</sup> As noted (50), this could explain perhaps the importance that αἰδώς has in Homeric society: the absence of any powerful and unquestionable divine sanction of propriety necessitates the function of other mechanisms which can ensure adherence to the code of behaviour. With no fear of an afterlife punishment, and with no evidence in life for a relation between behaviour and happiness or misery, public opinion functions as a reminder of propriety, a restraint of impropriety. I do not imply a conscious substitution; simply that public opinion and shame or fear of criticism are inevitably more compelling when they are the only evaluative criterium of one's quality.

punished, and this eternal question of life persists. But this is a question that cannot be answered by Homeric religion, since it lacks the metaphysical dimension of a belief in afterlife, and it further accepts a polytheism that allows enough space for all misery and unhappiness to be explained in terms of an offended god.<sup>91</sup>

More important, by insisting on the gods' inability to correspond to such a conceptualised idea of divine justice, we end up forcing on the poem's world a distinction and a belief that is utterly alien to it. As happens with morality, we have to look for the element in the gods' behaviour that would justify the expressed belief in their justice, and try to understand by the criteria that Homeric man uses how this concept is reconciled with his overall view on life. Only then can we examine whether this idea is applicable in the text, and if not, why it is not so. To do this, I have to re-examine some of the characteristics attributed earlier to the gods, wishing to see them in a slightly different perspective this time, avoiding, as much as this can be possible, mingling our own perceptions and prejudices with the actual beliefs as found in the text.

It was noted above that the gods' reaction to human behaviour is not sensed as a genuine concern for morality, but rather as the selfish, impersonal and rather immoral concern for their own prerogatives of ἀρετή and τιμή. We usually feel disconcerted by the gods' obsession with their personal ἀρετή and τιμή, but the truth is that this obsession is

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<sup>91</sup> For polytheism as an obstacle to the development of more moral gods, see Burkert (1985) 248: 'Polytheism encounters fundamental difficulties in giving legitimation to a moral world order. its multiplicity always implies opposition', the only sense of order possible being the one resulting from a departmentalisation of powers, of an apportionment of moirai among the gods. See also Chantraine (1952) 64ff; the solution provided by man to these gods who 'introduisent dans le monde plus de désordre que d'ordre' (66) is, according to Chantraine, the application of an idea of hierarchy, of an organisation 'familiale et féodale à la fois' (67).

the very principle on which they *are* seen as just. Behind this rationalisation of the gods and their assimilation to human standards and principles there is the belief in a reciprocal relation, essential to all religious systems. Anthropomorphism is simply the result of man's attempt to comprehend the indefinable power that exists beyond his knowledge, and this means basically that essential qualities of the divine are simply translated into signs or terms that will be easily identifiable or recognisable by man.<sup>92</sup> Hence the attributes of ἀρετή, τιμή and βίη, which are no more than the acknowledgement, in human terms, of the superiority of the divine; as Phoenix says of the gods, τῶν περ καὶ μείζων ἀρετή τε τιμή τε βίη τε (I 498). The gods represent the 'unattainable extreme, perfection',<sup>93</sup> and this perfection can only make sense if seen in the light of principles of which man is aware.

For Homeric man the fact that the gods are concerned with their τιμή is an indication of the interaction that exists between the human and the divine. The gods are believed to respond to human behaviour, which is therefore conditioned accordingly, due respect to the gods being an essential principle of the code of ethics.<sup>94</sup> When Chryses prays to Apollo, reminding him of all the past offerings, the god responds (A 35ff.), and this may be seen as the result of Chryses' own piety as manifested in the past and of his special relation to the god through his priesthood - a response, that is, based on reciprocity. To some, such a response may appear too superficial, the result of favouritism rather than

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<sup>92</sup> See Chantraine (1952) 57ff, especially 63.

<sup>93</sup> Burkert (1996) 27. Chapter 4 is also particularly relevant to the discussion.

<sup>94</sup> For vows, prayers and, most important, sacrifices and offerings being of the *universalia* of religion see Burkert (1996) 4.

moral consideration,<sup>95</sup> but I would think that for Homeric man this is simply an instance of a god's just reaction to a pious man. Behind it we can discern a most elementary concept of divine justice: the good have to prosper, the bad have to suffer.

Particularly interesting in this light is Zeus's protection of oaths and of the principles of ξενία and ἱκεσία, which protection is also seen as a matter of τιμή: the violation of any of these principles is a violation against Zeus himself, a sign of indifference towards his τιμή, and the god's reaction aims simply at restoring the order. Some of the most important principles of conduct, then, are related directly to the supreme god, thus being sanctioned by him. The necessary link between propriety and divine response is made comprehensible through the reference to the god's τιμή, and although we may find the association too mundane, it seems to provide the proof for the god's concern for propriety: if Zeus punishes possible transgressions, this means that he is offended by such transgressions, which are therefore unwelcome to him and condemned in man. The negative connotations of τιμή simply do not exist.

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<sup>95</sup> So Gagarin (1987) 294, n. 25. Gagarin draws a distinction between moral and religious offences by the criterion of self-interest; as religious offences he regards the offences to the gods' τιμή, which are obviously motivated by self-interest, thus proving that the gods are not actually agents of morality since it is only occasionally that they respond without being personally involved. Gagarin's reference to morality as the absence of self-interest (see p. 35, n.26), and further his argument that the weak divine sanction further justifies our terming these rules as moral, for in an ideal, Kantian system moral rules need no sanction (295), illuminates, I believe, the problematic basis of his interpretation. I would regard such a distinction as inappropriate to a world which does not evaluate action on such a basis. Nor would I agree that a divine sanction and the consequent fear of the gods necessarily diminishes the moral quality of an act: for the initiate, fear is even necessary, and what is important after all is knowledge of what one has to do. See p. 272 and n. 49 on θεουδής.

It would be misleading, therefore, to state that, since the gods are concerned with their ἀρετή and τιμή, they act out of self-interest, and therefore they cannot be just.<sup>96</sup> The terms are merely the Homeric version of the idea of submission and reciprocity that forms an essential characteristic of all religions, stemming from a feeling of dependence on the unknown 'other'; behaving with caution, showing respect and offering tokens of acknowledgement aims exactly at what seems the absurd basis of injustice, namely, conditioning divine response and consequently life itself.<sup>97</sup>

Such a concept of divine justice seems indeed too inarticulate and elementary in a way, and it definitely does not correspond to the ideas found in more recent religious systems. The punishment of Oineus for what is after all a mistake, and not a moral error, does seem too selfish a response, and not particularly just. Similarly, Athena's and Hera's hatred for Troy, not founded on the consideration of any moral elements, looks superficial and even absurd. Yet, one should consider that for the initiate of this religion, or of any religion, these are simply explanations of life's misfortunes and misery in a more or less rational way - with rational meaning the reference to a relation of cause and effect - which further confirm the existence of a reality beyond human perception. The aim, at this stage

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<sup>96</sup> Adkins (1972) makes many interesting points in his discussion of the relation of the values of Homeric society to the perception of the gods, yet he insists on seeing the ideas of ἀρετή and τιμή merely as a negative obsession that prevents the existence of morality.

<sup>97</sup> Particularly interesting is Burkert's (1996:13) response to the 'opium thesis' concerning religion's function; according to this thesis religion simply fulfils 'human wishes in a fantastic, unrealistic, and possibly detrimental way' providing 'the illusion of happiness': Burkert asks 'is illusion dysfunctional? The discovery of endorphins [...] rather points to the positive biological function of illusive happiness to overcome dramatic crises of stress and pain'.



at least of religion, is not the verification of divine justice itself, but rather of divine existence through divine justice.<sup>98</sup>

The essence of the Homeric gods is their power and their immortality. They do correspond to some order, but this is the order of nature and life, which is inconsistent and incomprehensible in its ways. It is indeed inevitable that some form of justice be attributed to the gods, however elementary; but justice is not, after all, the quality upon which the gods' superiority is based - at least the notion of justice to which we are accustomed. The order that the gods impose and support entails morality, as already noted, but part of this order is the gods' unquestionable superiority. The justice of the gods, being the result of their own superiority, entails that they have the right, if so they wish, to disregard man's need of their support and be indifferent to him.

It would appear, then, that the gods' supposedly selfish concern for their τιμή is only a reflection of the belief that improper behaviour is offensive to divinity and results to destruction; or, reversely, of the belief that a destruction must originate in some offence towards divinity - a belief clearly seen in the case of Achilles' inference concerning the plague (A 62-67). Anything can constitute an offence towards the gods, since disaster can appear at any time and with no apparent reason. More important still, principles of conduct

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<sup>98</sup> Dodds (1951:52, n.18) is certainly right to stress that there is a difference between the offence of perjury or hospitality as an offence against divine τιμή and 'a concern for justice as such', for the gods obviously do not appear to be interested in the concept of justice itself. As happens with morality, or with the word δίκη, we are not yet in a period of conceptualisation, and ideas are perceived in the particular form they attain in the particular society rather than as abstract and absolute principles. But being premature and non-conceptualised does not mean not existing at all. The point here is to see whether the Homeric world had any notion whatever of divine justice, not to prove what is obvious, namely, that it did not have our notion of divine justice. As noted (187), I would regard the absence of a belief in afterlife as decisive; it is worth noting, however, that Agamemnon's statement at Δ 160-62 recalls the belief of a later age, see, e.g. Solon 13 West 29-32.

among men themselves appear under the protection of Zeus's own τιμή, an essential link between man and god being thus provided. If the individual lesser deities provide the explanation to life's multilateral quality by creating an almost chaotic nexus of causes and effects, with their conflicts and quarrels often accounting for life's very self-contradictory demands on man, the superior power of Zeus and the hierarchy it entails seem to restore order;<sup>99</sup> at the same time, this order of Zeus extends towards man in a way that human impropriety and impiety towards the god are seen as one and the same thing.<sup>100</sup> Our wish to find a more disinterested reaction of the gods results basically from our own preconception on how divine justice should be understood or even administered.

Athena and Hera, Poseidon and Aphrodite are 'perfectly within their own rights'<sup>101</sup> when reacting because of their offended τιμή; in fact, they are expected to react in a way. The situation is definitely more complicated when it comes to Zeus, for now the issue of human interrelations is involved as well: by protecting his own τιμή, the god protects those who behave properly, and those who behave properly both observe the limits of society and are pious towards the god. But the god does not always respond as expected. More than anyone else, he is the god who can disregard possible offences and therefore seem particularly unjust. The lesser gods, even when appearing to act in a self-centred or

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<sup>99</sup> Chantraine (1952)

<sup>100</sup> Cf. Rutherford (1986)147: 'Homeric morality is upheld, however capriciously, by the gods'.

<sup>101</sup> Lloyd-Jones (1983) 4. In this point I agree with Lloyd-Jones that the idea of divine justice exists in the poem, and order essentially related to the gods, even if this is an inscrutable order which, further, is different from what we would believe; see also Lloyd-Jones (1987) 310. However, elsewhere Lloyd-Jones seems to imply a more general concern for justice on the gods' part, thus proving himself somehow inconsistent. More important, and this is where I disagree, he interprets the whole Iliadic plot in terms of divine justice; the issue will be discussed presently. Gagarin (1987:293) opposes to Lloyd-Jones's view on the gods' rights to act at will by arguing that the gods' superiority may entitle them to retaliation, but that this is after all not an act of moral basis, moral and immoral being defined, for Gagarin, on the basis of the degree of self-interest involved in the motivation of an act.

capricious manner, are always after their τιμή, but Zeus may seem occasionally rather indifferent, absorbed as he is with the accomplishment of his plan - in fact, during the poem, the god never appears to be concerned with the violation of any of the principles with which he is connected.

Leaving aside for the moment Zeus's role in the poem as Ξείνιος, it is worth looking at his function as ἱκέσιος and Ὀρκιος. ἱκεσία does not actually become an issue in the poem, and consequently Zeus's relation to it is not particularly evident.<sup>102</sup> There are only two rather vague references at Ω 156-157 and Ω 569-570, while perhaps slightly more direct is the allegory of the Λιταί at Ι 502-514, who are presented by Phoenix as the daughters of Zeus. As Hainsworth comments, 'the poem [...] ignores the role of Zeus as protector of suppliants';<sup>103</sup> even the case of Chryses, with which the poem opens, and which proves of great significance for the plot, avoids a reference to such a capacity of the god. Instead, it is Apollo, as we saw, who listens to the priest's prayer.

As far as oaths are concerned Zeus's role is more clear, but rather ineffective. The practice of taking an oath, and actually by calling a superior power as a witness, must have been very old; equally old must have been the belief that, if an oath is violated, the powers that have been invoked will bring punishment.<sup>104</sup> This seems to be suggested by the rituals

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<sup>102</sup> For ἱκεσία, see pp. 27-28.

<sup>103</sup> Hainsworth (1993) on Κ 454.

<sup>104</sup> For oath-taking as an important principle of Homeric ethics see p. 29; see also Burkert (1996)171: 'the use of witnesses to guarantee a shared mental world, and the use of ritual to create realistic signs, to affix an ineradicable seal by the imprinting function of awe. At both levels reduction of complexity is met by a "surplus" from the supernatural sphere. Unseen partners share the knowledge, and nonobvious causality wields coercive power. Both are accepted in an atmosphere of absolute seriousness'.

that accompany an oath,<sup>105</sup> and the deities that are connected with it.<sup>106</sup> Naturally enough, since Zeus is the supreme power of the known order, and since a violation of an oath implies the violation of this order, Zeus is connected with oaths as the power that prevents or punishes their violation.

This is not what happens in the poem, though. At Γ 268-301 an oath is taken by Trojans and Greeks alike just before the duel between Paris and Menelaus; as soon as the oath is taken, the wish of the soldiers is heard - both the Greek and the Trojan soldiers, as the poet says, implying the common wish and belief: Ζεῦ κύδιστε μέγιστε, καὶ ἀθάνατοι θεοὶ ἄλλοι, | ὀππότεροι πρότεροι ὑπὲρ ὄρκια πημήνειαν, | ὧδέ σφ' ἐγκέφαλος χαμάδις ῥέοι ὡς ὄδε οἶνος, | αὐτῶν καὶ τεκέων, ἄλοχοι δ' ἄλλοισι δαμεῖεν (297-301). The lines seem actually like a formula used in similar cases in the poet's age, certifying thus the belief in the connection of Zeus and oaths. Yet, the poet continues by immediately showing Zeus's refusal to fulfil this prayer - a refusal that could be also seen as indifference: "Ὡς ἔφην, οὐδ' ἄρα πῶ σφιν ἐπεκράϊαινε Κρονίων (302).<sup>107</sup> The result of the duel is ambiguous; at the most crucial moment, when Menelaus is about to attack Paris, Aphrodite intervenes and saves her favourite hero. The next scene is on Olympus, Zeus himself wondering whether he should finally end this war, or cause the violation of the oath and have the heroes fighting again; Hera's reply proves decisive: how can he cancel all her plans and ignore her wishes. As a consequence Zeus sends Athena to cause the violation of the oath, of which he is himself the witness and the protector.

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<sup>105</sup> See Kirk (1985) on Γ 269-70; Hainsworth (1993) on K 321-23.

<sup>106</sup> See Kirk (1985) on Γ 103-4, and Γ 276-78; Hainsworth (1993) on I 454; Burkert (1996) 175f.

<sup>107</sup> Doubtless, one could take πῶ as implying that Zeus may not be fulfilling the prayer at the moment, but will fulfil it in the future, see Kirk (1985) on B 419-20; but within the limits of this particular poem Zeus never seems concerned with this Trojan impropriety.

It is worth considering at this point that the participation of the gods in the plot can be interpreted in terms of their dramatic function even to its smallest detail. The poet needs Zeus on the side of the Greeks basically, for Troy has to be destroyed; for the moment, however, the god has to support the Trojans, for this is part of his promise to Thetis. Now, the poet wished to present a duel between the two heroes who are directly linked to the cause of the war - a duel which is commonly accepted as being rather inappropriate on the tenth year of the war, but which offers the opportunity for the great scene of the *Τειχοσκοπία* (Γ 139-244) as well as for the presentation of the duel itself. It is not surprising that the duel has no end actually, and that Aphrodite intervenes to save Paris; it is not surprising either that the oath taken cannot be observed, since the plot has to continue, and Troy has to be destroyed. The poet simply has to find a way to come out of this narrative impasse: Zeus has to decide and put in motion the turn of the plot to its previous course.

Similarly, the presence of the lesser gods is essential to the unfolding of the plot: one can think of Athena's role in Diomedes' ἀπιστεία (E), Apollo's in Patroclus' death (Π), or Athena's role again in Hector's death (X). The two factions in which the divine powers are divided seems a necessary mechanism for the war to be constantly ambivalent. If we return to Athena's attitude towards the Trojan women, or Troy in general, it is obvious that the poet cannot sacrifice the original characterisation and disposition of the goddess for the sake of one single episode; still, he cannot sacrifice his wish to present Troy and its people either. The women pray and make their offerings, they promise future sacrifices, but the plot has to remain intact, and the traditional fall of Troy be

accomplished: the goddess has to refuse. However, it is worth noting that the poet is very cautious when narrating the gods' attitudes and reactions. Both Zeus and Athena *refuse* the offerings; the poet is very clear on this. The requirements of the narrative are concealed behind this refusal, but this is ultimately more than a device; for it reflects the belief that the gods can after all be inconsistent.

It is obvious, then, that the reason why we cannot talk of the gods' justice as a permanent and unquestionable characteristic of theirs is that the gods seem to retain the right, if so they wish, to disregard such considerations. The gods are not bound by any obligation towards man, and their occasionally immoral or excessive behaviour is only the natural consequence of their very immortality; immune to the fear of pain, age and death, they can do as they please, certain that their bliss is eternal, not easily threatened. They pursue their aims and interests with extreme passion for they risk nothing when they do so; and they can certainly be immoral and unjust towards man, not particularly respecting or feeling concerned about him, for they are indubitably superior to him.<sup>108</sup>

Such a behaviour on the human level would be regarded as essentially immoral in the sense that all limits seem to be violated, yet the question of the gods' immorality is

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<sup>108</sup> David Hume (*An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, in Westphal (1996) 138) notes: 'Were there a species of creatures intermingled with men, which, though rational, were possessed of such inferior strength, both of body and mind, that they were incapable of all resistance, and could never, upon the highest provocation, make us feel the effects of their resentment; the necessary consequence, think, is that we should be bound by the laws of humanity to give gentle usage to these creatures, but should not, properly speaking, lie under any restraint of justice with regard to them ... Our intercourse with them could not be called society, which supposes a degree of equality; but absolute command on the one side, and servile obedience on the other. Whatever we covet, they must instantly resign: Our permission is the only tenure, by which they hold their possessions: Our compassion and kindness the only check, by which they curb our lawless will: And as no inconvenience ever results from the exercise of a power, so firmly established in nature, the restraints of justice and property, being totally *useless*, would never have place in so unequal a confederacy'.

simply non-existent for the heroes. Morality is not the quintessence of the Homeric gods, at least not in their relation to man; the relation between mortals and immortals is well defined as one of inferiority-superiority, and in the gods' wish to act as they like, irrespective of man's own wishes, man acknowledges exactly this relation that underlines his own weakness as opposed to the eternal power of the divine. Moreover, he regards the gods' whimsical behaviour towards him almost as a right which is based on this superiority of theirs. The gods are inaccessible, they are nature and life itself, and man cannot demand their attention, nor press a rightful claim on them. The gods can be just as easily as they can be unjust. This is their way and manner, and this is the order of life as perceived by man, and such a view obviously allows enough space for the innumerable injustices of life itself.<sup>109</sup>

'We think more easily in positive than in negative terms.'<sup>110</sup> Even if all of man's hopes or wishes for justice are after all belied by life, man cannot but believe in the existence of some power of good which observes and guarantees order. He may not rely on the gods' just reaction, but he does his best to ensure their possible favour. Moreover, he apparently cannot avoid believing in a relation between order and the gods. The gods may not appear to be acting for the sake of order, yet they are inevitably related to it, even if vaguely. Everything comes from the gods, evil as well as good, but it is ultimately the good

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<sup>109</sup> See Gould (1985:32f.): 'if god, ..., is made in the image of man (inevitably, as Xenophanes saw), equally inevitably divinity must surpass man in some sense or another, and must reveal the possibility of "otherness"...A god wholly within the compass of man's image of himself explains nothing, offers no reassurance against the fear of chaos'.

<sup>110</sup> Greene (1944) 3.

that we prefer to remember; 'life is bound to optimism - even this may be called a biological necessity.'<sup>111</sup>

What remains to be seen is whether this idea is ever applied to the text, whether this justice is ever relevant to the plot. We have already met the views that Troy is destroyed because of Paris' violation of the laws of ξενία; that Achilles is punished with Patroclus' death for his disregard for the Greek embassy, and that his own death is even a punishment for his maltreatment of Hector's dead body; finally, there also exists the view that both Agamemnon and Achilles are actually punished for their improper conduct to each other.

Of these views I would regard the ones relating to Achilles' suffering and death as too extravagant to accept. Nothing in the poem, in my opinion, points in that direction. Achilles is indeed criticised both for his obduracy and his unyielding wrath, and for his cruel attitude to Hector; the latter assumes even greater significance since it is Apollo who expressly condemns the hero's conduct (Ω 33-54), thus confirming Hector's own words at Χ 358-60: φράζεο νῦν, μή τοί τι θεῶν μῆνιμα γένωμαι | ἧματι τῷ ὅτε κέν σε Πάρις καὶ Φοῖβος Ἄπολλων | ἐσθλὸν ἔόντ' ὀλέσωσιν ἐνὶ Σκαιοῖσι πύλῃσιν. Both Apollo's and Hector's words are very interesting, especially since they demonstrate the gods' concern for human improper conduct in general, and not with regard to a slight on a god's particular τιμή.<sup>112</sup> However, Achilles finally gives up his revengeful and disrespectful

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<sup>111</sup> Burkert (1996) 154; also 142.

<sup>112</sup> The moral character of Ω has been the reason for suspicion, but, as Macleod (1983:8-35) has shown, the book is indispensable to the plot and the atmosphere of the poem. For the relation between Apollo's words and the simile of Π 384-92, see p. 175, n.68.



abuse of the body, obeying Zeus's demand that he should allow Hector's proper burial. The scene of Achilles' meeting with Priam re-establishes the violated order, and Achilles reappears as the dignified and great hero he was at the beginning of the poem.

As for the view concerning Achilles' violation of *ἱκεσία* in I, which is supposedly the reason of the subsequent suffering, it appears that the inference is drawn on the grounds of Phoenix's reference to the *Λιταί*, Zeus's daughters (I 502-14), which reference, nevertheless, may indeed aim at persuading the hero, but does not actually correspond to the reality of the narration:<sup>113</sup> the heroes do not come to Achilles as suppliants, no ritual is followed, and therefore no principle is violated when Achilles rejects their pleas.<sup>114</sup> The rejection of the Greek embassy is an essential part of the plot, the 'vital hinge', as Griffin rightly observes,<sup>115</sup> and the same is true of Patroclus' death: the relation of cause and effect between the two incidents is obvious, yet it is not determined by some form of divine justice.

The story of Achilles is a typical case of *ἁμαρτία*, a mistake for which the hero is morally responsible in the sense that he is consciously deciding to act as he does, and which is the beginning of a sequence of events inextricably linked to each other and leading ultimately to suffering; the final confrontation of the hero with this reality and the subsequent knowledge and the painful acknowledgement of his responsibility challenges the audience to a view of man's tragic existence which demands that he be entangled in

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<sup>113</sup> For the textual problems relevant to I, see Griffin (1995) 19-26.

<sup>114</sup> Gould (1973) does not seem to regard the scene as one of supplication either: he gives all the examples he would classify as characteristic of the principle (80, n. 39), and no reference is made there to the embassy.

<sup>115</sup> Griffin (1995) 19.

the unwelcome consequences of what appeared to be a moment of powerful and proud triumph.<sup>116</sup> We have seen how moira is involved in this pattern as the inescapable order of life which entails predetermination on the one hand, but is largely accomplished by human action on the other. The gods participate and define life, but at the same time the main plot is the result of man's own will. When it comes to the relation of the plot to divine justice, it appears that the principle is simply not applicable. A notion of divine justice would not be incompatible, considering that moira and the gods often correspond to parallel levels of causation (see p.162), nor is it impossible that tragedy should involve divine punishment after all: the fact that the Iliadic plot is not a story of right and wrong, with a clearly defined polarity finding a solution at the end, does not necessarily demand that no issue of divine justice be raised. Still, the absence of divine justice is a conscious choice of the poet, and it remains to be seen what suggests this choice to the poet. But first, it should be made clear that the poem, in its basic plot, cannot, or rather should not, be seen in terms of divine justice.

Achilles' gravest mistake is evidently made at the very moment when he decides to stubbornly insist on his wrath. As Griffin observes, the rejection of the Greek Embassy creates a 'new complexity of the plot' and consequently a 'new complexity of the moral

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<sup>116</sup> Cf. Aristotle's preference for the ἀπλοῦς μῦθος, which relates the change ἐξ εὐτυχίας εἰς δυστυχίαν, μὴ διὰ μοχθηρίαν ἀλλὰ δι' ἁμαρτίαν μεγάλην (*Poet.* 1453a 10). Even if Achilles' behaviour should be regarded as morally reprehensible on the grounds that he disregards the bonds of friendship and loyalty for the sake of his τιμή, I would doubt that this behaviour would provoke any form of divine justice. More important, even if one should opt for this moral interpretation of Achilles' behaviour, the issue is still one of mistake, for the hero does not disregard the others with the intention to cause the harm he finally causes, but rather out of excessive and blind self-absorption and passionate egotism; his wish that the Greeks should acknowledge his τιμή does not necessarily mean that he wishes their total destruction, and the expressed wish that both Trojans and Greeks should be killed so that he and Patroclus should plunder Troy for themselves (Π 97-100) is in perfect harmony with the characterisation of the angry hero, and I would not take it too literally. See also Pack (1939) 353, where, talking of the Oedipus myth as used by Sophocles, relates the ἁμαρτία of the hero with the application of the *fatum condicionale*, 'the protasis admitting free will and responsibility, the apodosis fate and innocence'.

atmosphere: no one is simply right'.<sup>117</sup> The reference to the Λιταί, as well as Meleager's *exemplum* may be seen as hints underlining the significance of the moment, foreshadowing at the same time an unpleasant, but not yet predictable, solution for the plot. Yet, it is already in A, during the quarrel with Agamemnon, that we come across the hero's obstinate character which will prove to have fatal consequences both for the Greek army and for the hero himself.

The interpretation of the dispute between Achilles and Agamemnon is indeed crucial to the interpretation of the whole poem, and, although discussions on it seem to abound, the examination seems inevitable. First of all, it has to be repeated that this is basically a moral issue in the sense that the heroes act upon a distinction between right and wrong; I would take this to be a clear indication of their being morally responsible for their behaviour. Besides, we have also seen (43ff.) that for the dispute the poet does employ a moral language: ὕβρις and ἀναιδείη are both used for Agamemnon, while we also hear of νέμεσις. Once it is accepted that public opinion does not concern only competitive success or failure, but moral behaviour also, and that it can indeed condition one's behaviour, in the sense that one's fear of criticism, αἰδώς, may reflect one's own fear of being morally inadequate, and accordingly that disregard for criticism, ἀναιδείη, may imply insensitivity both to criticism itself and to the code of ethics, it becomes obvious that the terms are definitely not void of moral significance.

It is high time that the use of δίκη and δίκαιος in their relation to the plot were examined. Each word appears only once in this context, both of them being part of the

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<sup>117</sup> Griffin (1995) 7.

same passage, T 172-183. This is the moment of reconciliation between the two heroes. Patroclus is dead now, and Achilles decides to re-enter the war, without however being concerned any more for the violation of his τιμή and Agamemnon's insult; still, Agamemnon does offer him the gifts as promised at I 121-157. Odysseus almost gives instructions to the two heroes on how they should conduct the act of reconciliation:

τὰ δὲ δῶρα ἄναξ ἀνδρῶν Ἀγαμέμνων  
οἰσέτω ἐς μέσσην ἀγορήν, ἵνα πάντες Ἀχαιοὶ  
ὄφθαλμοῖσιν ἴδωσι, σὺ δὲ φρεσὶ σῆσιν ἰανθῆς.  
ὀμνυέτω δέ τοι ὄρκον ἐν Ἀργείοισιν ἀναστάς,  
μή ποτε τῆς εὐνῆς ἐπιβήμεναι ἠδὲ μιγῆναι·  
ἢ θέμις ἐστίν, ἄναξ, ἢ τ' ἀνδρῶν ἢ τε γυναικῶν·  
καὶ δὲ σοὶ αὐτῷ θυμὸς ἐνὶ φρεσὶν ἴλαος ἔστω.  
αὐτὰρ ἔπειτά σε δαιτὶ ἐνὶ κλισίῃς ἀρεσάσθω  
πιείρη, ἵνα μή τι δίκης ἐπιδευὲς ἔχησθα.  
Ἄτρείδη, σὺ δ' ἔπειτα δικαιότερος καὶ ἐπ' ἄλλῳ  
ἔσσεαι. οὐ μὲν γάρ τι νεμεσσητὸν βασιλῆα  
ἄνδρ' ἀπαρέσσασθαι, ὅτε τις πρότερος χαλεπήνη.

The setting is similar to that of a legal procedure or a settlement (see pp. 99ff.); there is an ἀγορά and the gifts are to be put in the middle for all to see; and there is an oath to be taken. But what exactly does δίκη mean here? How can Achilles be short of δίκη? And how is it to be understood in relation to a supper? The meaning of the word seems to be further obscured by the use of δικαιότερος in line 181, which seems to bear a moral rather than a legal sense. It is the very procedural context, however, that determines

the meaning of δίκη: the reference is made to the proper settlement between the two heroes; the supper, an instance of ritual in the Homeric world, seems to seal the act of reconciliation, and in this manner Achilles will have been duly recompensed in a legal sense. Despite Achilles' apparent indifference towards the material aspect of the recompense, it has to be ensured that the settlement has been conducted in full accord with the demands of the code of social and legal propriety, for it is in this way that balance can finally be restored.<sup>118</sup>

The use of δικαιότερος for Agamemnon is even more difficult to explain. In fact, the adjective is used only twice again in the *Iliad*, both times in the superlative degree, and in a context that is not at all illuminating as regards the qualities that allow one to be called δίκαιος (see p. 106): at Λ 831 we hear that Cheiron is δικαιότατος of all the Centaurs and at Ν 6 that the people of the Abioi are also δικαιότατοι; now, we know that Cheiron was the only Centaur not to fight Zeus, in the latter's conflict with the Titans, while the Abioi, whether corresponding to an historical people or not, seem to imply with their name the absence of violence.<sup>119</sup> This is all we can make of these cases.

The opposition between δίκη and βίη or ὕβρις has been noted already (107-109, 175); in the *Odyssey* it forms part of the wider opposition between civilised and primitive societies which is essential in the plot of the poem. One could hardly find such a meaning in this

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<sup>118</sup> This is more than etiquette; for ritual functions as the manifestation or expression of one's regard for another.

<sup>119</sup> The scholia give two different etymologies: α-βίος in which case the word refers to a people who live the blessed life of Hesiod's Golden Race (*WD* 109-26), since τούτοις δὲ αὐτομάτως ἡ γῆ βίον φέρει οὐδέν τι ζῶον ἐσθίουσιν (AbT); and α-βία; a third explanation relates the word to βιός, and while Nicolaus Damascenus (*FGrHist* 90, 104= Io. Stob. Anth. III 1, 200) and Eustathius (916, 20) take the word to mean τὸ χρῆσθαι τούτους μόνους τόξοις and τοὺς ἅμα βιάῳ respectively, Et. Gen. prefers the meaning βιοῖς μὴ χρωμένων.

passage. Still, the opposition can be operative on a legal level, the implication being that the distinctive characteristic of a civilised society is that it enjoys the privilege of principles and laws - even oral laws. Thus, when δίκη is juxtaposed to βίη in the simile of Π 384-92, the antithesis refers to the proper and the improper way of conducting a legal procedure. One could follow Havelock, then, and interpret the lines in the light of Agamemnon's 'act of individuation' in A, where the hero violates with his behaviour the very principles of the procedure which he should have protected in his capacity as a king.<sup>120</sup>

That the adjective could indeed have legal implications is not implausible. As already noted (93, 109), in an oral society such as the Homeric, legality is perhaps closer to morality than is the case in a society in which laws are written down and abiding by these laws may often entail a conflict with morality itself. Δίκαιος obviously does not refer to a general disposition towards justice that would necessarily entail a genuine concern for fairness or for unbiased decisions; nor does it mean law-abiding, in the rather impersonal sense of obeying a law almost blindly, for fear of punishment and even against moral principles; it does refer, however, to adherence to a system that aims at protecting the limits that define the position of the members of a social group, and it is in this way that the word, although referring basically to the existence of procedural norms, has moral implications as well.

However, δίκαιος, by contrast to δίκη, has purely moral connotations in the majority of the cases in which it appears, denoting the person who keeps within his proper limits; if thus seen, the adjective should be taken to refer to Agamemnon's excessive

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<sup>120</sup> Havelock (1978) 133. Cf. Havelock (1978) 129-130, where δίκαι are not seen as principles of justice, but as events that involve justice and become procedures because they are subject to 'management' by officials who do not manage the 'formularies' but protect them.

behaviour towards Achilles, or, to use Achilles' and Athena's term, his ὕβρις. True, nowhere in the poem is the conflict between the two Greek heroes referred to as an ἀδικία, while we hear of ἀτιμία repeatedly (B 239-40, I 110-11, I 648, N 113, Π 59). But this is after all an issue related to the semantic development of the relevant terminology. Δίκη and δίκαιος are certainly very limited with regard to their meaning in the *Iliad*, referring to propriety rather than to justice; ἀδικία, which does not appear at all in the Homeric poems, would denote the violation of limits - a sense that ἀτιμία and ὕβρις definitely evoke. Whether the preference of ἀτιμία for the definition of such a violation should be seen in the light of the legal connotations that δίκη has is difficult to confirm; what one can say with considerable certainty is that the terms are related semantically to one another, and that Agamemnon's behaviour is described in this case too in a more or less moral vocabulary; more important, the context and spirit of the whole utterance seems to bear equally negative connotations, further underlining the hero's moral responsibility for the quarrel and its consequences.

Besides the terminology which suggests that the dispute raises a moral issue, the very construction of the plot and the perspective of life we seem to gain through it seem to further demand this interpretation. A crucial question is whether we should talk of a mistake, a misapprehension, that is, of the situation in which they are involved, in which case they are still morally responsible, but not morally reprehensible also; or whether it is a moral error that they commit, in which case they do not simply distinguish right from wrong, but they act intentionally against what is perceived to be right according always to the Homeric code of ethics. A further, and more important, question that arises concerns the implications this behaviour has in terms of divine justice.

The truth is that to a certain degree Agamemnon's claim is rightful; Adkins is right in this.<sup>121</sup> Agamemnon has the right, as commander-in-chief, to take Briseis or any other prize; although he is condemned for his greediness (A 149, 166-171, 231, B 225-42), he is not condemned because this greediness is not justified by his status, but because he seems to be taking advantage of his status against the rights of others; if a quarrel on material gain seems too superficial and amoral, it has to be repeated that alongside the result that such a behaviour has in material terms, it also entails disrespect, and disrespect entails offence and insult. Agamemnon may not have the intention to dishonour Achilles or any other hero, yet dishonour is the consequence of his blind and egotistical indulgence in his own superiority. What has to be noted is that this is a trait of his very character: neither his martial or strategic abilities, nor his wisdom seem to justify his claim to superiority in the expedition, but this does not prevent him from behaving almost like a spoilt child, who cannot even conceive the existence of limits to his own claims; for superior though he is, there is a limit defined by the claims of others. Obviously, it is Agamemnon's very character that causes the dispute, and it is also his character that underlies his disregard for the moral dimension of his decision to take Briseis: the fact that he seems so deeply self-absorbed is certainly typical of him, but not necessarily typical of the Homeric society in general.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Adkins (1960a) 51.

<sup>122</sup> One can think that Achilles is criticised by Aias for his indifference towards his φίλοι (I 628-42), or that Sarpedon and Hector are particularly sensitive to their responsibility and sense of obligation for their people (M 310-21; Z 441-46). Agamemnon, by contrast, shows such feelings only retrospectively, when disaster is imminent - another instance of his lack of wisdom.



Achilles' behaviour is also excessive: proud and self-assertive as he is, he cannot accept that, despite his actual superiority, he should be patronised, disregarded and insulted in such a way by Agamemnon, merely on the grounds of his own lesser rank in the expedition. Self-absorption prevails in Achilles too (see Σ 98-111), yet his attitude is somehow more legitimate (see I 523), for it is the expected and natural reaction to Agamemnon's insulting conduct. But Achilles' excessive character is in its turn the cause for the unwelcome events that follow after his rejection of the embassy. The reason that the hero provides for his insistence is simple: Agamemnon is not sincere (I 312-13). A noble demand indeed, especially when we consider that it comes from the hero who regards himself as an ἐτώσιον ἄχθος ἀρούρης (Σ 104), once his companion has been killed, and who is ready to get killed himself because of his pain; yet, under the particular circumstances, this demand cannot but prove fatal. Once Achilles rejects Agamemnon's gifts and the Greeks' pleas, the plot is gradually built in such a manner that his recently justified withdrawal becomes a cold-hearted indifference open to disapproval: the Greeks will criticise his obstinacy (I 628-642; Λ 664-667, 762-764) and so will Patroclus at Π 30-35; at Ξ 139-142 it is Poseidon who accuses Achilles, but more important, after Patroclus gets killed, Achilles himself will criticise his own behaviour, in grave pain and with a deep sense of responsibility (Σ 98-111; Τ 56-64) - carefully avoiding, though, saying that he was not justified to get angry in the first place. The plot is evidently constructed with extreme care so that right and wrong should be fused and confused, creating an unquestionable tragic effect.

Such a complex plot can be comprehended in its entirety only if we accept that it pertains to an essentially moral issue. Both heroes act consciously, opting for what they

perceive to be right. Nestor's intervention is a hint that this may not be true after all, yet the quarrel has already entrapped the heroes in their own passions, and reasoning with them is simply impossible. The conflict in the poem is a moral conflict, external as well as internal, and it is doubtful whether an equally compelling plot line could emerge, were the issue one of mere success.

The whole issue is presented in a most realistic manner by the poet: the heroes' reaction to each other, Nestor's conciliatory tone, the Greeks' silent and distant attitude. More important, the poet seems to be consistent in his purpose, which is to offer an insightful view of human life and nature. The Greeks' silence seems indeed to be essential to this end: the two central heroes are in this way isolated, and their personal responsibility is brought into sharp relief. With no clear moral comment being expressed in the poem, the perspective of the audience oscillates back and forth through the narrative in an attempt to grasp the moment which defines the plot and the eventuality of fate. Not being a typical story of right and wrong, the poem seems to demand that a moral commentary should be avoided, since it would certainly obscure the complex questions that are finally raised. The poet draws actually no moral; he only presents the way in which human nature functions, and the way man is driven by his passions, those passions that define after all his fate.

However, the fact that we have to do with a moral issue does not necessarily entail that the idea of divine justice should be relevant as well. The conflict between Agamemnon and Achilles does not raise any issue of divine justice at all. No god is personally slighted by the event, no principle related to the gods has been violated. This is a matter that refers purely to human interrelations, and no question of propriety that would

have the gods involved is raised. Athena comes to Achilles' side after Hera's admonition and talks of Agamemnon's ὕβρις (A 213), yet the word need mean no more than the evidently excessive behaviour of the Mycenaean king as felt by Achilles: as long as such behaviour is not directed against the gods, it is not an issue asking for divine justice. The support of the two goddesses is irrelevant to the quarrel itself and as the poet informs us Hera sends Athena to Achilles because she was actually concerned for both heroes, ἄμφω ὁμῶς θυμῶ φιλέουσά τε κηδομένη τε (A 196).

As for Zeus, he could certainly avoid intervening and he would perhaps do so, were it not for Thetis: she helped Zeus once, and he has to honour and help her now in return. This certainly proves two things: first, that the intervention of the god is not suggested by any concern of his for the propriety or the moral cause of the heroes, and second, that the heroes themselves actually know that they are involved in a conflict with no moral implications that could concern the gods; their conflict is based on the external principle of τιμή, and the only moral sense that its violation implies is, as I said, the disregard of clearly set limits - a disregard that both heroes prove capable of. Achilles asks for the help of Zeus, knowing that he is favoured by the gods because of his origin, and not because of his moral superiority - either of the particular moment, or of his character in general.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Lloyd-Jones' (1983:11ff.) approach is totally different. He rightly interprets the quarrel as a matter of morality, yet he sees the solution to the plot as related to divine justice: 'both Agamemnon and Achilles receive rough justice for their injustice to each other and the rest of the Achaeans perpetrated during their quarrel' (27). He further relates Zeus with δίκη as the 'established order' which the god preserves 'by punishing mortals whose injustices disturb it' (27) and although such a relation may indeed be true, it remains beyond doubt that its presence in the poem is not as powerful as to justify the conclusion that the solution of the plot is related to this order.

The fact that behind Achilles' favour with Zeus there is no concern for justice is further suggested by the god's constant confirmations that the god's plan is to honour Thetis, and through her Achilles too; nowhere in the poem does the god express any condemnation of Agamemnon's behaviour, nor does he ever justify Achilles' wrath. He simply fulfils the promise he gave to Thetis. Zeus's participation in the plot is necessary; not because justice has to be restored, but rather because he has to fulfil Achilles' will (see pp. 154ff.); besides the fact that divine participation is a vital element in human life, and consequently in the plot, it is the supreme god's ability to transform his will into an inescapable future and his peculiar relation to moira that demand his compelling presence in the plot.

The potential for divine justice may indeed exist in the poem, even in relation to the quarrel itself; since the idea exists that gods may indeed punish human impropriety, it would not be impossible for the poet to construct a plot which would provide such a view on life. Yet, the poet seems to wish otherwise. Just as he isolates his heroes from their environment, he consciously suppresses this possibility, for his focus is on man himself, on the consequences of his actions not as a result of divine punishment, but instead of his own weakness. The polarity between the human and the divine that permeates the poem demands that the gods be often presented as indifferent; by minimising the role of divine justice, the poet emphasises even more the man's tragic struggle against himself, against his own life and his own fate. The heroes, and more than anyone Achilles, undergo a development in their character that cannot be disregarded by any means. Through suffering they gain knowledge, even if only too late, and thus their whole existence seems to be fulfilled and justified. The conflict between right and wrong that develops within oneself,

would not have been perceived as sharply, had the poet employed the gods as powers of justice and guarantors of propriety. In the matter of the dispute there is finally no right and wrong; consequently, there is no place for divine justice.

The poet's conscious choice to suppress the idea of divine justice becomes even clearer once we consider the case of the Trojan war. This is certainly a case in which right and wrong are succinctly defined: Paris' impropriety is undoubted, and besides seducing and abducting Helen, he has also disregarded the principles of ξενία which are under the protection of Zeus himself. References to Zeus's just involvement in the war do exist in the poem (see p. 180); being part of the heroes' own utterances, they seem to reflect fairly accurately the passionate reaction that Paris' behaviour caused. For the audience who know the final outcome, the Trojan destruction may easily be interpreted as the expected consequence of the gods' just punishment; for after all, the belief in divine justice, like the belief in moira, is often a *post eventum* appreciation of life that aims at 'making sense'.

However, this idea exists only in the background of the poem, and divine justice is never realised as such, in the confines always of the plot. Paris' offence, another case of ἀτιμία of one hero to another, is mainly presented as a conflict with terrible consequences for the heroes themselves and those around them, a conflict which is basically a matter demanding settlement between men alone. The gods participate not as forces who favour those who are right, but rather as individuals who get involved out of some personal interest. Even Zeus, whose τιμή is after all immediately related to the offence, is simply absorbed with the fulfilment of his promise to Thetis.

That Paris' behaviour is basically presented as an offence against Menelaus is also clear in the way Hector accuses him at Γ 39-56: what he did insulted a noble Greek, and the consequences concern the human level; Menelaus is ἀρηΐφιλος (52) and along with Agamemnon they are ἄνδρες αἰχμηταί (49), who are involved now in a war, a πῆμα, as Hector says, (50) for the Trojans. Menelaus himself accepts that the beginning of the war is his conflict with Paris and Paris' own ἄτη (Γ 99-100); the war is a matter of τιμή to be settled among mortals, a matter that demands the Greek revenge, if Menelaus' τιμή is to be re-established (Γ 351-354). The terminology is evidently one that pertains to the sphere of human relations.

By transforming the theme of the Trojan war from one of divine justice to one of a plain ἀτιμία by one hero to another, and thus bringing it closer to the main subject of the plot, the poet succeeds once more in focusing on man himself, his own responsibility for misery or happiness, his reaction to his responsibility. Achilles especially, and Hector to a slightly lesser degree, realise the cruelty of their own passions, their limited perception of life's seemingly inconsistent demands, as they are entrapped in a complex system of thought concerning τιμή and ἀρετή and αἰδώς on the one hand, passion for life and despair at its incomprehensibility on the other.

There is a realism in the Iliadic viewpoint, which seems at times to reach the limits of pessimism. Life is seen as a continuous exchange based on the principles of the Homeric code of ethics: mutual recognition of τιμή, τίσις if τιμή is neglected; everything is seen from this perspective. Impropriety and failure to meet these social demands entail

consequences that are naturally expected: if one's wife is abducted, conflict is the inevitable result; and if no solution is reached by peaceful means, a war seems very probable. What seems to concern the poet is life itself, life in its course, as an inescapable reality which man creates and has to face thereafter; and he sees that whatever man's convictions may be, whatever his wishes or expectations, life is uncertain, hardly ever permitting one to talk of causes and effects. Nothing ever reassures man that gods will help him, if he behaves properly, even if at times behaving improperly may cause their anger, and often he has to find his own way out of misery to success and glory. For the gods are distant and they can be indifferent; for their essence is their immortal power.

A device that helps the poet highlight the distance between the divine and the human is the bifocal view of life that results from the discrepancy between the heroes' utterances and the poet's narration (see p. 149). The impression created in this way is one of two levels of narration, which seem actually to correspond to two levels of truth. This time the issue is certainly not divine responsibility, and whether man can identify or not the powers that determine his life; rather, the heroes seem to express an idea which can appear as totally inconsistent with the narration, and actually in conflict with it. A simple and common way for the poet to express this differentiation is the use of the adjective *νήπιος* for a hero, emphasising man's naturally limited knowledge (B 38; Π 686; Σ 311). But the differentiation is also evident in the way certain episodes are unfolded before the audience; the heroes, on the basis of their opinions rather than on real knowledge, often appear to reach false conclusions about the reason behind the facts, until the reason is given by the poet in the third person narration, presented as a truth which remains imperceptible by the heroes.

When Paris is saved by Aphrodite and the duel between him and Menelaus receives an uncertain end, the Greeks are sure that, if the Trojans violate the oath they have taken, Zeus will be angry, he will punish them ( $\Delta$  155-168, 234-239) - an opinion expressed later as a fear by the Trojan Antenor (H 348-353); yet, Zeus seems to pay no attention, concerned as he is with the fulfilment of his plan. At  $\Delta$ 13 Zeus himself talks of Menelaus' victory; but instead of punishing the Trojans, he seems to be rather calm, teasing Hera and pretending to wonder, should he cause a fight, or should he end the war altogether? Facing the indignation of both Hera and Athena, he finally sends Athena to cause the Trojan violation of the oaths which he was supposed to protect ( $\Delta$  70-72). If the Greeks tend to believe that Zeus will sooner or later be on their side because they were wronged, and if the Trojans fear that Zeus will punish them, this is only the assumption of the heroes; it is what they want to believe, or what they fear; yet the poet presents divinity distanced and living according to its own principles. This he makes clear by showing in parallel the divine and the human world.

That the distance which the poet keeps from his heroes is a conscious device cannot be doubted. Clay sees the device as resulting from the poet's wish to prove himself superior to his heroes as regards his own knowledge; being closely associated with the Muses (B 248-86, 488-92, cf. Hes. *Theog.* 22-34), he needs to emphasise his differentiation from the common man in terms of εἰδέναι.<sup>124</sup> However, I would prefer to see that this device aims more at our perception of man's limited knowledge and comprehension of the divine than at our appreciation of the poet's privileged position. More important, the fact

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<sup>124</sup> Clay (1983) 11-23.



that the heroes often prove wrong does not prove the absolute injustice of the gods, but rather their unpredictability and inscrutability. At the same time, the antithesis between the divine serenity and ever-lasting happiness and the human miserable and limited condition becomes even starker.

Besides, one should consider the possibility that by having his heroes proclaiming their belief in divine justice the poet can at times express what he cannot *in propria persona*. This is especially the case of references to divine justice as regards the outcome of the Trojan war. At Γ 351-54 Menelaus prays to Zeus to help him to take vengeance on Paris, referring to the latter's violation of ξενία. Agamemnon also expresses the conviction that Zeus will after all help the Greeks, even if for the moment he appears to be against them (Δ 158-68). But of greater importance are Menelaus' words, first at Γ 365-368, where he calls Zeus ὀλοώτερος θεῶν (365), and certainly at N 620-639: there he talks of Zeus's μῆνις against the transgressors of ξενία and ends with an invocation to Zeus, an exclamation of wonder and despair, as he sees that the god who is thought of as the wisest of gods and men, helps the Trojans - οἶον δὴ ἄνδρεςσι χαρίζεται ὑβριστῆσι, | Τρωσίν, τῶν μένος αἰὲν ἀτάσθαλον (633-634).

When connecting man's life with the gods, the poet himself sees only incessant ploys and plans, deceits and favours, and above all he sees the importance of Zeus's plan. In both of the main subjects we hear of Zeus's promise, seeing that this is the only reason behind Zeus's actions. Zeus nodded to the Greeks, as he nodded to Thetis. The importance of this promise lies in its inevitable fulfilment. This seems to be the point on which the poet puts all the emphasis. Having stripped Zeus of every special characteristic that would

imply a concern for special fields of behaviour, and making him thus almost neutral to external stimuli that do not directly concern his personal τιμή, the poet seems to prefer the image of Zeus simply as the powerful god who can realise his plans at all costs and under all circumstances. The reason behind Zeus's plan does not seem to be of any interest, either for the poet, or for man in general. What is important is the result, the inevitable plan that man has to face in the best possible way. This plan remains unpredictable, or even imperceptible by man. By canceling all the traditional functions of Zeus as Ξείνιος, Ἰκέσιος and Ὀρκίος the poet underlines even more the fact that the gods' essential characteristic is their unpredictable and inscrutable power, which along with their immortality define the limits between the human and the divine.

### *3.3 Human Responsibility*

Up to now, we have come to the conclusion that in the *Iliad* fate is of immense importance, either when connected with Zeus or when independent. There may be no steady principle behind it, it may be seen as defined by chance, yet what is important is that it gives its name to facts, and the element that is most emphasised is its inevitability. Man is subject to it, his whole life seems to depend on the demand of an order imposed from without and against which he can do nothing. Furthermore, man is subject to the gods' unpredictable behaviour. Deceitful and playful, driven by their passions, gods can easily control human lives, while man seems to be a prey to their selfish and superficial characters. Even Zeus, the ultimate cause of everything, is not steady in his behaviour, and

even if he is not motivated by his own feelings to the extent that the lesser gods are, following a steady and established plan, still the result that man has to face is uncertainty. What remains to be seen is man's reaction to all these factors, the consequences they have in his life in practical terms. Is his freedom restricted, or is he still regarded as responsible for his life? What is believed to be his role in life, his share in the outcome of events?

The belief in the existence of divinity is expressed through a connection of everything in life with the gods. Divine participation is an element of the narration, simply because the gods are regarded as the cause of every situation, of every event. Their intervention in human affairs may be the result of one's prayers, as happens with Apollo, who responds to the prayers of Chryses ( A 43, 458), or simply a personal decision on their own initiative, based on the feelings of the moment, as happens with Hera at B 155-56; it may also be 'external' referring to a god's control over a fight, for example, by his actually participating in it (e.g. Athena's intervention in E, or Apollo's in Π), or 'internal', referring to a god's responsibility for one's feelings, thoughts or dreams (e.g. Zeus's dream to Agamemnon at B 5-15, or Aphrodite's control over Helen's feelings at Γ 390ff.). Whatever the case, divine intervention is inevitable, a part of life itself.

One could certainly say that divine intervention is nothing more than a literary way of presenting facts, or even simply a device that helps the development of the narration. When, for example, Aphrodite appears to Helen and persuades her, first kindly, but then by threats, to go to Paris (Γ 390-420), we have a literary scene involving both the divine and the human elements and presenting the goddess's power in action, which, however, raises the question of the realism of such a scene; at the same time, the episode functions as a

way of bringing Helen and Paris together, of presenting the couple that stands as the cause of the war and of showing Helen's ambivalent feelings. Similarly, Hera's intervention at B 155-56 evidently helps the poet with the plot: the Greeks are ready to leave and the poet has to find a way to keep them at Troy, for this is what history, and fate as well, demand; by using Hera, he accomplishes his purpose, while at the same time he offers a characterisation of the goddess whose fervent wish to destroy Troy defines her behaviour in the poem. The poet uses the gods' presence or absence according to his narrative needs: Zeus is absent in N, so that Poseidon can intervene; Athena and Apollo avoid getting involved in the duel between Hector and Aias in H, so that the duel may end with no actual winner.

However, behind the literary or narrative functions of such scenes, behind this concrete presentation, one may detect the belief in divine power, even in an abstract form, the belief in the identification of cause and divinity. Even if Aphrodite seems too human to be true, she represents the force that leads man to a certain behaviour, and thus to a certain life. Thus, although we often have the impression that references to divine intervention should not be taken too seriously as a realistic presentation of divine essence, we should accept that these references are an undoubted proof of the pious belief in the important role of divinity in human lives. When at K 503 Diomedes decides that he and Odysseus should leave after having killed Rhesus and before anyone else wakes up, the decision is presented as the result of Athena's intervention, although it could be also seen as the thought that is naturally expected of an experienced soldier; yet the presence of Athena stresses the relation between god and man, and even if there is no real belief that Athena actually talked to Diomedes, man's dependence on divinity is projected and we are

reminded of his humble position in the world's order. Even chance events, such as missing one's target, are interpreted as the result of divine intervention, confirming divine presence,<sup>125</sup> while of a similar effect and function seem to be also the scenes where we have almost a 'miracle', a supernatural, in a way, change, such as the healing of a hero's wounds.<sup>126</sup>

Divine intervention certainly underlines man's natural weakness, even if implicitly. Before god man can do nothing; man is the most miserable creature, οἰζυρώτερον . . . | πάντων ὅσα τε γαῖαν ἔπι πνείει τε καὶ ἔρπει (P 446-47); his limited strength, in physical terms, his limited knowledge and perceptive ability highly differentiate him from god, being thus the reasons of his frustrating helplessness. In E, in an episode of a rather comical character, an extravaganza in the presentation of the war, Aphrodite gets hurt by Diomedes, and runs to her mother Dione for consolation (330-430); Dione's words stress the difference between man and god: νήπιος, οὐδὲ τὸ οἶδε κατὰ φρένα Τυδέος υἱός, | ὅττι μάλ' οὐ δηναῖος ὅς ἀθανάτοισι μάχεται (406-7). Soon the order of nature, based on the law of strength, and reflected in this relation between superior and inferior, is re-established and confirmed when Diomedes faces Apollo (431-44); the scene ends with Apollo's compelling lines reminding Diomedes that οὐ ποτε φύλον ὁμοῖον | ἀθανάτων τε θεῶν χαμαὶ ἐρχομένων τ' ἀνθρώπων (441-42).

But, as already noted, apart from his limited strength, man's limited knowledge is an equally important indication of his weakness. Knowing only partly the truth that lies

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<sup>125</sup> See also E 290-96, O 461-70, Ψ 382-87, Ψ 862-67.

<sup>126</sup> See E 115-22, E 311-17, E 506, 13, O 231-42, Π 527-29.

behind the life he lives, man reaches all too often conclusions that prove disastrous, thus being led to make mistakes. Having no real control over life, he acts with ἀφραδία and ἀτασθαλία. Agamemnon's mistake lies exactly in his inability to control his selfishness and in his blind confidence in Zeus, which, however, proves to be only a false supposition. When εὐφρονέων Nestor gives his advice to both Achilles and Agamemnon, we hear that the two heroes are equally wrong, in terms of social behaviour (A 254-84). It is Agamemnon, though, who is later blamed, for his behaviour proves to be fatal for the Greeks - a result of his own limited knowledge and perceptive ability.<sup>127</sup>

It often happens, then, that man finds himself powerless and alone, at the mercy of gods' decisions - either when seeking their help, or when facing their enmity, or even when the gods are simply absent. More important, man knows that he cannot totally and unreservedly rely on the gods, for their actions and reactions are largely based on their feelings, and their feelings can certainly be unsteady; Athena may have loved and protected Troy in the past, yet now she hates it and wishes for its destruction; Zeus may have promised his help to the Greeks, yet now he stands against them. Against life's uncertainty, against the gods' strength and capricious behaviour man stands upright, determined to face life, for this is all he can do. He does not adopt a fatalistic approach to life, pathetically accepting the inevitability of what is to come, and thus the futility of standing against the gods' decisions. Being aware of his inherent weakness, he never allows it to become an obstacle in his life. Quite the contrary; the very uncertainty with which he is constantly faced functions as a motive, his weakness almost as a challenge for an endless fight, an endless attempt to reach a better end, to have a better control over his

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<sup>127</sup> See E 648-51, Z 352-53, H 109-11, K 350.

life. Misery or failure can only be temporary, and man always tries to find a way to escape. He knows that the gods' decisions cannot change - at least not easily - still, he keeps trying and hoping. The Greeks continue their fight, even if they know that Zeus is on the side of the Trojans (I 45-49, Λ 310-19, Λ 345=48, O 500-13, P 629-47),<sup>128</sup> and Hector decides to face Achilles, although he senses the imminence of his death (X 297-305). Besides, even if man cannot achieve his purpose, he can at least pursue a glorious death, for αἰὲν ἀριστεύειν is always in the mind of the noble hero (Z 208-9, Λ 783-84).

It is clear, then, that human participation is as essential and important as divine participation is, not in order that the gods' plans be accomplished, but in order that man's life be better lived, as far as this is possible. It is necessary and inevitable at the same time that man should have his own share of responsibility for the life he leads; however obvious and important divine action, man seems able up to a point to construct his life, even if only in its small details.

The significance of man's share in the events is perhaps more evident in the cases where the divine and the human element act together, aiming at the same purpose. When a god takes part in human affairs, supporting a hero, in no way is the hero's quality affected or questioned. Athena helps Diomedes in E, and every one may recognise the divine presence in the hero's ἀριστεία, yet he is always regarded as a brave and powerful warrior, and he never seems to lose his self-confidence. Actually, it seems, as Janko notes, that a god's help confirms in a way the hero's martial excellence.<sup>129</sup> Besides, it is important that

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<sup>128</sup> For a similar Trojan attitude see E 218-22, Z 84-85, Θ 55-57.

<sup>129</sup> Janko (1992) on N 434-36.

in most of the cases the gods simply help - ἀρήγειν - and do not have total control over a situation.<sup>130</sup> It is only in crucial moments that divine participation goes even further, that is when a situation is definitely beyond human control and only a supernatural help can lead to a solution.<sup>131</sup>

What normally happens is that god and man have each his proper share in the action, and although the result may be defined by divine rather than by human will, man also participates, even if unconsciously, in its fulfilment and in his survival; for just as the gods' participation is necessary in order that man should achieve his end, man's participation is essential too in order that life be advanced. A god's help is not enough, and this is what Nestor seems to imply when talking to Agamemnon at B 367-68: γνώσεαι δ' εἰ καὶ θεσπεσίη πόλιν οὐκ ἀλαπάξεις, | ἦ ἀνδρῶν κακότητι καὶ ἀφραδίῃ πολέμοιο - even if the gods act in favour of the Greeks, one should be sure that they are not cowards and that they know how to fight. Besides, the Greeks never seem to take Zeus's promise for granted; they keep worrying and fighting, for they know that real life may often belie man's expectations and hopes. It is in this sense that Athena criticises Diomedes at E 809-13: she offers all her support to him, yet he does nothing, and in this way there can be no result. Μένειν, lack of action, is condemned ( Δ 242-49), and man has to think for himself of the best possible solution, despite all the difficulties, and even if he is supported by the gods.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> See E 470, E 506-8, E 511, Θ 216, Ξ 361-62, Ο 254—57.

<sup>131</sup> See A 193-98, Γ 373-82, Η 268-72, Ο 236-42.

<sup>132</sup> See I 111-13, Ν 741-44, Ξ 61f., Ρ 712-14.



Man, then, often finds himself alone, and often he has to decide on his own. Doubtless, most of the times a god is to be found beside him, controlling, as noted, even his thoughts, decisions, or feelings, yet the poet does not fail to remind us that the gods may also be absent. A quite strong image reflecting this belief may be seen at the very beginning of the poem: Agamemnon and Achilles are getting involved in the conflict, the balance between them being kept by Nestor; for a moment the heroes are alone with their passions, and Nestor's advice passes actually unheeded; Achilles, though, is in the end helped by Athena (A 197-217),<sup>133</sup> a foreshadowing perhaps of the future honour he will receive from the gods, while Agamemnon, the one who will eventually be blamed, stands totally alone. Driven by the nature of his character, and thus in contrast to Achilles who is controlled, he does not realise the limits of his knowledge, he does not make the right assumptions and he decides completely on his own to act as he acts. This is doubtless a crucial moment in the poem, and as Agamemnon's destruction is foreshadowed at A 205 and 342-44, the fact that he decides alone and freely, according to his temper and his subjective opinions, seems imposing; and it is interesting that the poet avoids involving Zeus, who is in Aethiopia (A 423-24), so that when Agamemnon relates his mistake to Zeus at T 86-89, he should look even weaker, his loneliness being stressed even further. Similarly absent are the gods when Achilles decides to insist on his wrath (I 315ff.), and when Hector decides to stay out of the Trojan wall and fight (X 99=130).

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<sup>133</sup> Athena is sent by Hera, as we have seen (209), who shows concern for both of the Greek heroes. Athena's attitude, however, seems to betray some degree of favour towards Achilles, which could be justified by the fact that Achilles should not after all feel that the goddess is equally concerned about his opponent. Whatever the case, Agamemnon's loneliness remains.

Doubtless, we should consider that, although the heroes appear to decide and act freely, they are actually bound to fate. It is Hector's fate that keeps him outside the wall, μοῖρα πέδησεν (X 5), while Zeus's plan, as developed at Θ 473-77, seems to imply that Achilles will join the war only after Patroclus is dead; as for Agamemnon, he seems to be subject both to his own nature and to the code of excellence that demands the confirmation of his τιμή. The question that emerges, then, is, if man follows fate willingly or not, consciously or unconsciously, how can we talk about his freedom?

There are actually two ways of looking at this question: from man's viewpoint, that is from the inside of life; or from a distance that permits us to see man as part of a whole world, of a process that is often accomplished without his knowing. If we look at life from a distance, man is certainly the most miserable creature (P 446-47), and Glaucus' comparison of man's life to the leaves that are brought down by the wind, while new ones are born (Z 146-49), presents man's helplessness in a most successful and vivid way. Man is destined to die; he may also be destined to suffer (X 60-65, Ω 527-30), while he may also be a prey to the gods' playful character, to their mood of the moment and their unpredictable decisions. He is bound to situations that have to be, he is bound to his human and thus weak nature, his character and his social status. As noted, Agamemnon may seem free when deciding to take Briseis from Achilles, but this is after all the behaviour his social status requires of him in order that his personal τιμή as commander-in-chief be saved; and it is the behaviour he alone can have, self-confident and proud as he is. Sarpedon may seem free when choosing a glorious death (M 310-28), but he does so for there is no alternative for him, tied as he is to this common fate and to the obligation to his people. When Achilles finally appears to have the privilege of a choice between two lives

(I 410-16), this very privilege is undermined, since it is fate that he will have to face in the end. It would appear then that man seems free, he may feel free, yet he is actually not.

However, looking at life from a distance and from its end is one thing, living it in its course is another. The limits in man's life may be various and strong, yet they are largely, and fortunately, unknown and imperceptible. Man knows not his fate, nor can he predict divine participation. If he is led by his fate, if he is tossed about like a plaything by the gods, he is never sure of that, he can only confirm it in the end; in the meanwhile he has to live, to make decisions for himself and for his people, to think and act. Despite all difficulties, despite even an imminent death, man always hopes and fights; knowing his own weakness does not prevent him from always trying for the best. It is on this level that we can talk of free will, if we look at man as an individual, having his own personality and life, his duties and his fears. It is in this way that Agamemnon, or Sarpedon and Hector, appear to be deciding freely.

One is tempted to see Achilles' double fate as a poetic invention that aims at emphasising exactly these two aspects of life; for although it stresses fate's inevitability, it also presents man as being capable of a choice. The code of excellence seems to leave no place for choice; if a hero wants to be honoured, he has to obey. When Achilles breaks this code, disappointed by its fake rewards and pointing out that happiness is not to be found there, he is ready to choose an alternative life - and so he does; his re-joining the battle after Patroclus' death is not suggested to him by any concern for this code; liberated from its bonds, he freely decides to fight and die for the sake of his dead friend. It is worth noting how different Hector's decisions are, which, although freely made, are of a more

certain course. Doubtless, in either case the result is the same, as any sense of freedom collapses before fate's commands. Yet, on the human level both heroes are free when deciding, and Achilles is even more so, since he dares to stand against his social destiny.

If man is free, he is inevitably responsible as well for all the consequences of his behaviour. As already noted, man has a share of responsibility even when he is supported by a god; human action is necessary even for a divine plan to be fulfilled, and if this proves that man may at times be used by the gods, it also shows that on the human level man's behaviour is judged and criticised, approved or disapproved of. Doubtless, when a hero's attempts are brought to an end by a god, or his hopes are belied, man always mentions the gods' responsibility for the unpleasant outcome. Yet, it seems that such references function not as a justification, but rather as an explanation; when at N 222-30 Idomeneus refers to Zeus's helping the Trojans, he does not try to avoid responsibility, but simply to explain the Greeks' helplessness, to provide a reason why they cannot win despite their brave fighting. When Achilles talks of Agamemnon's ἄτη at T 270-73, or says that Zeus took his mind away at I 77, he certainly does not wish to justify the Mycenaean king; rather, he explains how he could have made such a mistaken movement. Mentioning divine participation in such cases simply reinforces the belief in divine presence; it does not relieve man from responsibility.

Agamemnon's and Paris' behaviour are of a particular interest at this point, for although they are responsible for the Greek defeat and the Trojan war respectively, they seem to use divine participation as an exculpatory justification of their behaviour. Agamemnon's famous apology in T begins with a denial of responsibility, ἐγὼ δ' οὐκ

αἴτιός εἰμι, | ἀλλὰ Ζεὺς καὶ Μοῖρα καὶ ἠεροφοῖτις Ἑρινύς, | οἳ τέ μοι εἰν ἀγορῇ φρεσὶν  
 ἔμβαλλον ἄγριον ἄτην (86-88), and follows with a presentation of the workings of πρέσβα  
 Διὸς θυγάτηρ Ἄτη, ἣ πάντας ἀᾶται, | οὐλομένη (91f.). Paris, on the other hand, replies to  
 his brother's accusations of idleness rather light-heartedly: μή μοι δῶρ' ἔρατὰ πρόφερε  
 χρυσέης Ἀφροδίτης· | οὗ τοι ἀπόβλητ' ἐστὶ θεῶν ἐρικυδέα δῶρα, | ὅσσα κεν αὐτοὶ δῶσιν,  
 ἐκῶν δ' οὐκ ἄν τις ἔλοιτο (Γ 64-66). Neither of the two heroes seems to feel deeply  
 concerned with his responsibility, to feel deep and sincere remorse for his behaviour. Paris  
 is just a shallow figure in the poem, the only person apparently who could be so careless as  
 to cause such a war. He does not accept his mistake, but more important he also insists on  
 being the cause of further trouble, unwilling as he is to yield to the demands of Greeks and  
 Trojans alike and give Helen back (Η 361-64). As for Agamemnon, he agrees to give  
 compensation to Achilles, for he realises that this is the only way for Achilles' wrath to be  
 appeased - or seems to agree, under the demands of the Greek leaders and the army which  
 is devastated. Yet, he never accepts totally his mistake, not even when he faces Achilles at  
 Τ 77ff.; he only talks of Zeus and ἄτη, while the reference to moira and Erinys seems to  
 imply simply the inevitability of what happened; as he says at Τ 90, ἀλλὰ τί κεν ῥέξαιμι;  
 θεὸς διὰ πάντα τελευτᾷ.<sup>134</sup> If Paris is the beautiful young prince, whose beauty makes him  
 shallow, vain and irresponsible, Agamemnon is the ἄναξ, the superior commander among  
 the Greeks, whose pride and self-confidence make him narrow-minded and self-centred.  
 Avoiding responsibility by talking of the gods' participation is well in accordance with  
 their characters, without, however, proving that divine participation may have such an  
 exculpatory role, or that on the human level man's behaviour can be so easily justified.

<sup>134</sup> See M. W. Edwards (1994) ad loc.

In order that it becomes clearer that divine participation does not relieve man from his own share of responsibility, it would be helpful to look at the reaction that the Greeks and the Trojans have to Agamemnon's and Paris' behaviour respectively. Both heroes, led by their passions and limited ability of perception, behave in a way that has terrible consequences for both armies; and they are criticised for that. Agamemnon is certainly judged in a discreet and indirect way, through the Greeks' insistence that he should recognise Achilles' τιμή - the code of excellence does not permit an open criticism of the commander of the Greek army. The first negative comment comes from Thersites, who is ἀμετροεπής, never able to control his words (B 212) and always criticising the kings, disregarding the principles of proper behaviour (B 213-14). Thersites' description by the poet is far from flattering, and Odysseus, when reproaching him for his improper words, calls him the worst of men among the Greek army (B 248-49). This character, who is known for his social impropriety, is the only character suitable overtly to blame Agamemnon. When Nestor later talks of Agamemnon's ἀτιμία towards Achilles (I 110-11), he is certainly more careful and tactful in his words, always cautious not to hurt the king's vulnerable pride; yet he knows and makes clear that it is Agamemnon's behaviour that caused Zeus's support of the Trojans. The Greeks all know that Zeus is to be found behind the sudden Trojan victory, that when helping the Trojans the god honours Achilles; yet they never seem to believe that Agamemnon's mistake was caused by the god - by contrast to what Agamemnon himself says. Even when Achilles says that Zeus must have deluded Agamemnon (I 377), this is no more than a *façon de parler*.<sup>135</sup> More important, though, even if Zeus were indeed the cause of Agamemnon's folly, what is of interest on the human level is not the cause, but the result. As noted, the tendency to regard divinity as

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<sup>135</sup> See Kirk (1990) on Z 234-36.

the ultimate cause does not serve as a justification on the human level, but as a confirmation of divinity's existence; it comes naturally out of the conviction that god is always present, always involved, if wishing so, in human lives; but never does it seem to have an impact on the way social life is lived, or social obligations are met.

Seen as a fact of life, Agamemnon's ἀτιμία and Achilles' wrath are nothing but a conflict between two leaders, which has to be settled, so that order and balance can be re-established. As Odysseus says to Agamemnon at Τ 182-83, οὐ μὲν γάρ τι νεμεσσητὸν βασιλῆα | ἄνδρ' ἀπαρέσσασθαι, ὅτε τις πρότερος χαλεπήνη. What is important, then, is not whether Zeus caused Agamemnon's ἄτη or not - which he obviously did not, since according to the poet he was in the land of the Aethiopians (Α 423-24) - but that once Agamemnon has made a mistake he has to find a way to redress it. Besides, ἄτη is nothing but a passion; it is used of Agamemnon's anger (Α 412), as well as of Paris' love (Ζ 356, Ω 28, cf. Ξ 216-17) and Patroclus' extreme and blind self-confidence and delusion (Π 685). Certainly, passions are also believed to be caused by the gods,<sup>136</sup> yet man is believed to be able to control these passions, as the expression ἴσχειν θυμόν seems to imply (Ι 255-56). Moreover, once Agamemnon accepts in public his mistake and states his willingness to recompense Achilles for his ἀτιμία, and the embassy is thereafter sent to Achilles, Agamemnon is no longer regarded as responsible for Zeus's lack of support; now it is Achilles and his unyielding wrath that are tacitly blamed (Λ 664-67, 762-93); only Patroclus, Achilles' loyal friend, still finds fault with Agamemnon's behaviour (Π 273).

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<sup>136</sup> See Hainsworth (1993) on K 507-13 and on Α 199.

As for Paris, it is true that the war is attributed to the gods not only by Paris, but by other heroes too. Priam talks of the gods (Γ 164-65, X 59-65), and so does Achilles too (Ω 547-48). Athena also attributes the war to Aphrodite's playful and deceitful character (E 349, 422-25), and similar is Helen's reaction to the goddess, when she complains to her that she has used the Spartan queen selfishly out of her love for Paris (Γ 399-412). When at Z 349 and 57-58 Helen talks of Zeus and the gods, who decided this war, we cannot avoid linking these lines with the explanation given in the *Cypria*: could it be actually that the god caused the war in order that some plan of his should be fulfilled? The poet avoids giving an answer. It seems that more important is the mere fact that the war has been caused, it has been going on for nine years now, and Troy is in real danger. As Hector says, the whole problem is caused by Paris' improper behaviour towards two very powerful kings, a conflict similar to that between Agamemnon and Achilles (Γ 46-53). A noble man dishonours another noble man, and this is a matter to be settled on the human level by men themselves. The one responsible for the problem must be found and he then must put things right. The only difference between the case of Agamemnon and that of Paris is that the latter does not make amends for his impropriety. The conflict is led therefore to no solution, and the war breaks out. Paris, then, is accused and hated by both Greeks and Trojans (Γ 319-23, 451-53). Even his elder brother blames him for all the trouble he caused to Troy (Γ 39-57, 87, Z 281-85, 326-31); even Helen, although talking of the gods, and although responsible herself, does not fail to accuse Paris for his shallowness and impropriety (Z 350-53); when she talks of herself, she accepts the improper character of her actions (Γ 241-42), yet she presents herself as being used by the gods (Z 349, 356-58) or as simply following Paris (Γ 174-75, cf. Γ 447).



Homeric man is only interested in the obvious and tangible results of one's behaviour, in the consequences it has on life, which he has to face. What the Greeks see is that Agamemnon's behaviour led to a defeat, a difficulty which makes them fight as best they can. Similarly, what the Trojans see is that Paris' behaviour caused the war, which they have to face with all their might, if destruction is to be avoided. Whether Paris was used or stimulated by a goddess is of no interest after all; they hate him just the same and they blame him for all the trouble he caused.

It is beyond doubt that man may ultimately be not as free or as responsible as he is believed to be. Paris may be simply the external and superficial cause of the war, the real and deeper cause being the gods' will; or if we choose to see no plan defining the war, we may see Paris being used by the gods for the sake of some apparently trivial game. In either case, the hero is proved to be totally weak, yet the war is a fact of life, Paris is related to it directly, and he is inevitably hated and blamed. If Paris cannot avoid divine interference, he cannot avoid the consequences of divine interference either; and if he is chosen, because of his character, as the cause of the war, he is also chosen as the one responsible for it. Paris is probably a poetic and literary construction, an invention that explains the war in human terms, and he certainly stresses, as a construction, the idea of man's weakness. However, as noted, this is the idea we have of life when we observe everything from a distance. All these considerations have no actual impact on man's way of living, thinking, acting and reacting. Life moves with a speed that can hardly allow such thoughts before a decision is made, before a word is spoken; and man moves along with it. Remorse is all Achilles feels, although Patroclus' death was defined by fate; honour is all

Agamemnon is after, although he is reminded by Nestor of Achilles' special favour from the gods; and Paris lets himself be driven by the passion of love, forgetting the laws of propriety to which he is bound. If man is unable to grasp the meaning or the mechanisms of life, if he cannot foresee the consequences of his actions, still there is no excuse for him; he has to put up with what he has made of life, however unpleasant or difficult that may be. The code of Homeric ethics and the pre-mature legal system are always there to check him, a sufficient proof of a society whose members are believed to be, or should be anyway, responsible and accountable for their behaviour.

*The Odyssey*

The *Iliad* is generally accepted to be the older of the two poems, one of the main reasons being that the *Odyssey* appears to have been aware of the *Iliad*, while the reverse does not seem to be equally true.<sup>1</sup> Whatever the chronological relation, it is beyond doubt that the two works are radically different from each other in more than one aspect as far as their content and their perspective are concerned. The *Iliad* is usually seen as the epic poem *par excellence*, capturing in the most succinct manner the heroic spirit and atmosphere that befits a grand poem of its kind. The *Odyssey*, on the other hand, is regarded as the predecessor of the later genre of the novel: less heroic in a way, and certainly more prone to the narration of marvellous, surrealistic adventures, it seems to retain a relation to the world of the *Iliad* only as long as this is necessary in order that it can belong to the same tradition.

The most striking difference, then, between the two poems is that they appear to represent two distinct poetic genres, or rather two sub-genres of epic poetry. This could well have to do with the different audience for which each poem was composed and performed, the different geographical area or the different tradition to which each poem belongs, or simply the different purpose of each poet. Each poem's generic identity seems

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<sup>1</sup> See p. 10, n.6.

to define to a considerable degree the development of the plot; a typical example, the Iliadic preoccupation with the glory of the warrior is less intense in the *Odyssey*, while the fantastic or fictional element has undoubtedly a very limited appearance in the *Iliad*.

Once this generic difference has been perceived and acknowledged, there appear other differences between the poems, of a more idiosyncratic quality, if I may say so. If nothing else, the *Odyssey* is always referred to as the poem in which one can discern a development of moral thought, both with regard to its theology and to its presentation of human interrelations. This idea of a linear development will be presently questioned, in the context of the poem's concept of divine justice. It is necessary to note, however, at this point that the difference between the two poems is more one of perspective; although we are accustomed to interpreting oral poetry as essentially self-effacing, we have to consider that, however discreet the poet's presence in the poem, the very choice of his subject and the very construction of the plot are after all the reflection of a conscious purpose; whether the outlook projected in a poem could be said to belong to the poet himself or to the audience for which he composes the poem is obviously of little importance; what concerns us here is that an oral poem can indeed have its own identity.

The difference of perspective that I have mentioned will perhaps become clear at this point if we consider briefly the way that the plot of each poem unfolds - a more detailed discussion being left for the end of the chapter. We saw that in the *Iliad* the presence of fate and the absence of divine justice conduce to our perception of the heroes' tragedy, with Achilles' case being certainly the most prominent. A conflict is necessary for

the development of the hero's character,<sup>2</sup> but in the *Iliad* the internal conflict is more important than the external: the hero becomes trapped not simply by the decrees of fate, or by the workings of the gods, but also, and perhaps most significantly, by his own decisions; he aims at doing what seems to be right, only to discover in the end that life has proven him wrong. Suffering, another necessary element for this development of character, is largely caused by man himself, and fate is fulfilled by man's action as much as it is fulfilled by the action of the gods. The tragic quality of such a plot is beyond doubt: man is both great and small, admirable and deplorable, struggling against the limits of his knowledge and his mortality. Divine justice can scarcely have a place in such a plot, which aims at putting the emphasis on the tragic aspect of human responsibility.

None of these elements can be said to exist as exactly the same in the *Odyssey*. The conflict now is external and manifest, a conflict between the rights of Odysseus and the wrongdoings of the suitors. Good and evil being thus clearly defined, there are certainly not many opportunities for evoking human tragedy in the Iliadic fashion. The focus this time is not on the hero who falls gloriously, but on the hero who survives and by doing so confirms his powerful existence. Schein has seen in this difference the possibility of a redefinition of the idea of κλέος: if in the *Iliad* κλέος demands death, in the *Odyssey* it is the νόστος of the hero, his very survival that raises him to the eternal realm of epic.<sup>3</sup> Such an interpretation obviously views the poems in a relationship of intertextuality that could

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<sup>2</sup> I am referring to the hero in general, at this point, and not simply to Achilles. See Rutherford (1982) 146-147; Nethercut (1976) detects the difference of the *Iliad* from other epics in the fact that the typical journey of the hero of folk sagas into a land of mystery, whence he returns having acquired knowledge, is now transformed into an internal and psychological journey that Achilles has to go through: Patroclus' death is the occasion for Achilles' own internal death, which will lead to knowledge and re-birth.

<sup>3</sup> Schein (1996) 10-14; see also Clay (1983) 107-12, 184-85.

be seen even as evocative of a latent antagonism; the possibility cannot be disregarded, yet I would tend to believe that the development of the character through suffering is more important than the final aim itself, and therefore the definition or redefinition of κλέος is only of secondary importance.<sup>4</sup>

The opportunity for suffering and knowledge in the *Odyssey* is found in the hero's adventures. No external conflict exists here in the sense that it exists on Ithaca; the hero develops through a series of experiences from a self-confident, if not arrogant, warrior, inquisitive and daring, to a wiser and more cautious wanderer, whose power now lies in his knowledge rather than his presumption.<sup>5</sup> Again tragedy is absent from this part of the poem, which seems to indulge in the presentation of the fantastic and extraordinary. In the scheme of such a plot, fate will prove of minor importance, and the glorious divine justice of the *Odyssey* will appear to be the consequence rather than the basis of the very construction of the plot.

#### 4.1 *Moirai*

In the *Iliad* *moira* is basically related to death. Apart from the relationship that the concept of fate seems to bear to the event of death, the very subject of the poem appears to suggest such a frequent application. Besides, the heroes who feature as the main characters of the plot, such as Hector and Achilles, are heroes who were indeed killed in the Trojan

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<sup>4</sup> See Macleod (1983) 5.

<sup>5</sup> Rutherford (1982) 150ff.

war, or at least this is what tradition claims, and the poet cannot possibly overlook his tradition. In the whole of the poem, it is only once that moira appears to have positive connotations, in the case of Aeneas' survival of the war; otherwise moira denotes either death or a lamentable portion, individual or not.

In the *Odyssey* moira has a totally different function. Doubtless, it retains its relation to death, but only occasionally, and mainly in its capacity to suggest the common human fate of death rather than an individual lot, while the main events of the plot that are said to have been defined by fate refer now to particular instances of life itself. Thus we hear that Odysseus was fated to return to Ithaca (ε 41-42, 113-15; ε 286-90, cf. ε 344-45), or, if seen from a different perspective, that he was not fated to return before a predefined period of ten years (ψ 314-17; cf. α 16-18, β 170-76), and that part at least of his adventures were also a demand of fate (ε 206-7); and we hear that the hero's fate also demands his confrontation with the suitors (ν 306-7). The two main story lines of the poem, then, are both related to moira. At the same time, moira defines events of no direct relation to the plot: we hear that Menelaus was not fated to return to Sparta unless he sacrificed to the gods while in Egypt (δ 475-80); we hear again of Troy's fall, which was to happen once the wooden horse would enter the city (θ 509-13); and we hear of Agamemnon's unpleasant and unexpected murder (γ 269, ω 28-34).<sup>6</sup>

More important, and as is obvious, I believe, from the above references, moira is not used as indicative of a negative event, minor exceptions being always expected. Up

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<sup>6</sup> There are certainly many more references to moira or to events that are presented as predefined, yet these are references in which the gods are also involved, and I would wish to keep them separate for the moment.

until the moment of Odysseus' return to Ithaca, moira is the welcome decree that defines this very return. Although the event could be seen in its negative aspect as a decree that keeps the hero away from Ithaca for ten years, the truth is that the poet avoids putting a stress on this aspect, the hero's adventures being presented for the most part as the result of his own personal wish to wander and explore. Possible difficulties are also presented as caused by Odysseus himself, or by his companions, while the impression of resistance or conflict has only to do with Poseidon's persistent wrath and persecution. It would appear, then, that moira in the poem is not presented as an obstacle to the hero's wishes, or as a vague restraint against which he has to struggle in order to gain his freedom, but rather, coinciding with his own plans, it has a more positive quality and, as a consequence, a less interesting potential in terms of the narrative or of characterisation. Moira in the *Odyssey* is more discreet.

This could be seen in association, first of all, with the gods' participation in the poem; the gods of the *Odyssey*, by comparison to those of the *Iliad*, do not appear as frequently to be intervening in the plot, nor do we find here all of the Olympians being concerned and involved with Odysseus' fortune; instead, we have only Poseidon and Athena, the one opposing and the other protecting the hero, and only for a brief moment do we hear of Helios whose wrath causes the death of the companions. More important, despite their different aims, Poseidon and Athena do not come in conflict with each other as the Iliadic gods do, who, being divided in two factions, pursue each some interest of their own; now, Athena refrains from interfering for as long as her uncle is persecuting Odysseus (v 341-43), and Poseidon's action comes to an end as soon as Odysseus reaches Scheria, allowing Athena the freedom to intervene - for fate demands that, once Odysseus



reaches Scheria, he will return to Ithaca ( $\zeta$  286-89). As for Zeus, he is now more distant and even more dignified than he is in the *Iliad*, and with Hera being significantly absent, he can be seen in all his majesty in a more consistent fashion. What is more interesting is that the plot is not in this case related to his will; his consent is necessary, no doubt, but the course of events do not form part of a plan of his; standing aloof, he simply sees that everything happens as it should, giving instructions and dispensing favours to the lesser gods.

With the participation of the divine being so limited, and so very different, and with Zeus's will being absent, the impression of predetermination seems to be weaker; the gods are still here, all-powerful and ready to interfere, but their actions can hardly be said to have the power of moira; even if these actions do agree with moira's decrees, neither Poseidon's nor Athena's will can create the impression of an ineluctable course for the plot. Besides, with the conflict between right and wrong being clearly defined, and with Athena supporting Odysseus' rights so fervently, the plot appears again to unfold in total harmony with the hero's wishes and plans, all supernatural opposition being limited to the minimum. Before further examining how moira functions in the general scheme of the plot, it is necessary to look at the way it appears in the text; the relation to the gods is inevitably an issue also to be discussed. I will begin by briefly noting the differences in the application of the relevant terminology; these are only of minor significance, yet they are worth mentioning in passing.

As noted in chapter two (70), all three basic meanings, share, propriety, and fate, are present in the poem; there are slight differences, as one would expect, but these do not

seem to be so radical as to suggest an important change or development of the idea of fate. The meaning of 'share' presents no particular interest at this point,<sup>7</sup> so I proceed with the two remaining meanings.

The expressions *κατ' αἶσαν*, *ὑπὲρ αἶσαν* are absent from the poem, *κατὰ μοῖραν* being the standard way to denote propriety; only once do we have *ἐν μοίρῃ* at χ 54. The opposite is *οὐ κατὰ μοῖραν*, with *παρὰ μοῖραν* occurring again only once at ξ 509.<sup>8</sup> The adjectives *αἴσιμος* and *ἐναίσιμος* are also found in this sense, their negative being again *ἐξάσιος*. The obvious formulaic character of *κατὰ μοῖραν*, evident already in the *Iliad*, seems to explain the gradual loss of the original meaning of order in a social sense, which can be detected in the application of the expression to almost any situation that is described as being fitly or properly accomplished.<sup>9</sup> For the most part, though, the expression retains its reference to an act of speech which was properly made. At the same time, the greater frequency of the expression has to be noted.<sup>10</sup> The expressions are evocative of the overall atmosphere of the poem and along with the more extended use of terms which denote propriety in general, such as *δίκαιος* or *νοήμων*, they are responsible for the consequent emphasis on proper behaviour throughout the poem.

Of the terms that appear in the *Iliad*, *πέπρωτο* is now totally absent, while *μοῖρα* seems to be used even more extensively. When implying predetermination, *moira* can refer

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<sup>7</sup> Dietrich (1965:222ff.) argues for a more technical use of the word *μοῖρα* in the *Odyssey*; this difference, along with the greater frequency of this application in the poem, are for Dietrich indicative of a further diminution of the goddess's status.

<sup>8</sup> For the occurrences of the expression, see p. 72, n.39

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, γ 456f., π 385; see p. 74.

<sup>10</sup> For all of the variations referring to propriety we have fourteen occurrences in the *Iliad* against the twenty-eight of the *Odyssey*.

again either to death or to life, but, as already noted, the references to death are now definitely limited when compared to those of the *Iliad*. This is certainly expected, since the *Odyssey* revolves round the theme of return and revenge, and has only a small interest in death.<sup>11</sup> The suitors' death is referred to as their αἴσιμον ἦμαρ at π 280, and ascribed to μοῖρα only at χ 413, that is only after they have been slaughtered by Odysseus, although the event is foreshadowed repeatedly from the very beginning of the poem;<sup>12</sup> both utterances belong to Odysseus, and while χ 413 could be seen as a reference to moira's order which demanded that the suitors should die, π 280 looks more like a formulaic way of saying that their death is close - a statement that Odysseus makes not because he knows of fate's decrees, but because he is confident of his victory, supported as he is by Athena. More interesting are Athena's words at β 283-84, spoken to Telemachus: οὐδέ τι ἴσασιν θάνατον καὶ κῆρα μέλαιναν, | ὅς δὴ σφί σχεδόν ἐστιν, ἐπ' ἦματι πάντα ὄλεσθαι. Κῆρ, the word denoting mainly the fate of death (see p. 67), assumes the power to evoke predetermination in the context of this utterance, with Athena confirming the inevitability of what is to come.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Dietrich (1965:213) explains moira's limited reference to death in the *Odyssey* as a result of the gradual fusion of the original goddess with the Olympians: 'Moira becomes more and more impersonal, so that with a few exceptions it is virtually impossible to detect in her new functions the original figure. More important still, Moira now, as it were, enters into a definite relationship with the gods in which she is often reduced to an expression of the will and the purpose of the gods....Connected with this development is the fact that Moira becomes less frequently connected with death, and then always, with one minor exception, this connection is made explicit by the addition of θάνατος or φόνος'.

<sup>12</sup> There is a slight difference in the way the events of the *Iliad* are anticipated so as to evoke moira's power on man: we have there a prospective use of moira, which puts a different degree of emphasis on the restraints that moira imposes on man.

<sup>13</sup> Κῆρ is related to the suitors' death quite frequently, see, for example, β 165 (Halitherses' prophecy), π 169 (Athena speaking), ρ 82 (Telemachus), σ 155 (the poet); κῆρ appears in these cases mainly as an event that is caused by a human agent, and being combined with θάνατος or φόνος it refers to death rather than to fate; however, ω 414 is of interest: Ὅσσα, Rumour, wanders the city of Ithaca, bringing the news of the suitors' death, μνηστήρων στυγερόν θάνατον καὶ κῆρ' ἐνέπουσα.

In keeping with the poem's minor concern for death, the application of μοῖρα itself in the sense of death is limited: we find the formula μοῖρ' ὀλοὴ κατέλῃσι τανηλεγέος θανάτοιο four times (β 100, γ 237-38= τ 144-45= ω 134-55), and then we have μοῖρα combined with θάνατος once (ρ 326) and once again in a rather strange collocation with φόνος (φ 24). The fairly common μόρσιμον ἦμαρ of the *Iliad* appears only once (κ 175), and the same happens with αἴσιμον ἦμαρ (π 280). Rather more frequent, always proportionately, is the use of μόρος, which retains its association with death, the only exceptions being the expression ὑπὲρ μόρον, used three times in all (α 34, α 35, ε 436) and Heracles' reference to the descent to Hades, a fate common to him and Odysseus (λ 618-19); otherwise, μόρος is combined with θάνατος at ι 61= λ 409= υ 241, while we find the adjective ὠκύμορος referring to the suitors in an hypothetical sentence by Athena at α 266, and the locution κακὸν μόρον combined with the verb ἀπόλλυσθαι at α 166.<sup>14</sup>

Perhaps the most interesting difference between the two poems is that in the *Odyssey* we have a more frequent use of the word θέσφατον (-α),<sup>15</sup> which should be seen in association with the equally frequent use of the verb ἐπικλώθειν (-εσθαι) for a decision of the gods. The verb is totally absent from the *Iliad*, and it is worth noting that now the image of the spinning woman is related to αἴσα and the Κλωῶθες (η 197). The latter have often been seen as a reference to an old figure of popular belief, a deity of birth and fertility, whose capacity of weaving man's life was related at some point to moira; the

<sup>14</sup> Cf. φ 133.

<sup>15</sup> Against the two occurrences of the word in the *Iliad* ( E 64, Θ 477), we have five occurrences in the *Odyssey* (δ 561, ι 507, κ 473, λ 297, υ 172), while we also find the adjective ἀθέσφατος as an attributive to the wine that caused Elpenor's death (λ 61); ἀθέσφατος is interpreted as 'boundless' and therefore as equivalent or parallel to ἐξάσιος by Dietrich (1965:273), following H. Fränkel's interpretation (*Festschrift für Jakob Wackernagel*, Göttingen 1923, 281).

view has not received general acceptance, however, and the idea is mostly seen as another instance of the poet's love or technique of graphic representation and imagery, as is the case with Zeus's scales or jars.<sup>16</sup> Whatever the case, the plurality of the figures certainly recalls the Μοῖραι of Ω 49, and it does seem plausible that there is a latent personification of the concept; the frequent association of moira with the gods seems also to suggest that fate is seen in general more as related to than as independent of the gods. It remains to examine the evidence of the text itself.

The same tension that we witnessed in the *Iliad* between moira and the gods is present in the *Odyssey* as well. On the one hand, moira is thought to be the cause of unpredictable and inexplicable changes or difficulties and the reason of man's inextricable link to them. On the other hand, the gods are believed to be responsible for almost everything in life, happiness as well as misery,<sup>17</sup> and Zeus in particular is said to know μοῖραν τ' ἀμμορίην τε καταθνητῶν ἀνθρώπων (υ 76),<sup>18</sup> and to distribute ὄλβος among people ὅπως ἐθέλησι (ζ 188-89), or as Helen tells Menelaus at δ 236-37, ἀτὰρ θεὸς ἄλλοτε ἄλλω | Ζεὺς ἀγαθὸν τε κακὸν τε διδοῖ· δύναται γὰρ ἅπαντα. So, are the gods responsible for moira too? Is moira another decision of the gods, which is somehow distinguished from all other divine decisions? Or should one believe that moira is a totally distinct and independent power?

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<sup>16</sup> See Dietrich (1965) 289-94, where the various views on the old popular belief are also presented; Dodds (1951:20, n.29) takes Κλωῆες to be different from the Μοῖραι of Ω 49, for the former can be seen as 'personal fates, akin to the Norms of Teutonic myth; Greene (1944:16) sees the figure of the spinning woman/women in general as a 'more vivid way of asserting the determining influence of heredity, though it links each individual directly with Fate, not with his forebears'.

<sup>17</sup> See σ 133-34, 142, cf. α 267= α 400= π 129, γ 231, ε 169, η 214= ξ 198≅ ρ 119, υ 195, ψ 210. To these examples one can oppose Zeus's well-known words at α 32ff, where the god makes clear that mortals have their own share of responsibility for their misery.

<sup>18</sup> See also α 348-49, ο 488f., υ 201-3.

The same basic scheme that we found in the *Iliad* is here relevant too. Zeus enjoys a privileged relation to moira, because of his superiority, while the lesser gods, although related to it, cannot be identified with it unless seen collectively and under the power of Zeus; at the same time moira retains much of its independence, and in this way the lack of concern for a consistent system of thought on the part of the poet is confirmed. One crucial difference, hinted at already, is that now the relation tends to be somehow closer than it was in the *Iliad*. Alongside the rare Διὸς αἴσα of the *Iliad* (I 608, P 321), which we find at ι 52, we also have the expressions θεοῦ μοῖρα (λ 292), θεῶν μοῖρα (γ 269, χ 413), δαίμονος αἴσα (λ 61). And, as already noted, we find the verb ἐπικλώθειν (–εσθαι) having as a subject Zeus (δ 207-8), the gods (α 17f., γ 208, θ 579f., λ 139, υ 195-96) or the vague δαίμων (π 64); the image of weaving one's life, and especially at the moment of one's birth, is directly connected with fate in lines η 197-98, ἄσσα οἱ αἴσα κατὰ Κλωῆθες τε βαρεῖται | γεινομένω νήσαντο λίνω, ὅτε μιν τέκε μήτηρ, a variant of the Iliadic ἄσσα οἱ Αἴσα | γιγνομένω ἐπένησε λίνω, ὅτε μιν τέκε μήτηρ (Υ 127-28, Μοῖρα κραταιή at Ω 209-10). It does not come as a surprise, then, that we hear, for example of Troy's fall in terms of αἴσα at θ 509-13, and as a result of divine action at θ 579-80: referring to Ἰλίου οἶτον, Alcinous explains, τὸν δὲ θεοὶ μὲν τεύξαν, ἐπεκλώσαντο δ' ὄλεθρον | ἀνθρώποις, ἵνα ᾗσι καὶ ἔσσομένοισιν ἀοιδῆ.<sup>19</sup>

Along the same lines, the word θέσφατον, is, as I said, more frequently used. Lines ι 532-33 are worth looking at in comparison to κ 473-74: in the first case the Cyclops invokes Poseidon, his father, and asks for Odysseus' punishment; and if fate demands the

<sup>19</sup> Cf. also λ 436-39 and μ 190.

hero's return to Ithaca, εἴ οἱ μοῖρ' ἐστὶ φίλους ἰδέειν καὶ ἰκέσθαι | οἶκον εὐκτίμενον καὶ ἐὴν ἐς πατρίδα γαῖαν, let him at least - and the prayer goes on; in the second case, Circe uses a variant: εἴ τοι θέσφατόν ἐστι σωθῆναι καὶ ἰκέσθαι | οἶκον ..., with θέσφατον having obviously replaced μοῖρα. Finally, nothing could be more explicit than Penelope's words at τ 592-93: ἐπὶ γάρ τοι ἐκάστῳ μοῖραν ἔθηκαν | ἀθάνατοι θνητοῖσιν ἐπὶ ζείδωρον ἄρουραν - two lines that could be seen as a clearer and more explicit expression of the idea evoked by Zeus's Jars (Ω 527-33).

What all these references prove is that there is some direct link between moira and the gods, almost as if moira is not simply fulfilled, but more importantly defined by the gods. Alongside this idea there exists the more vague perception of the relation which acknowledges the existence of a link, which link, however, remains indefinable and obscure. This is, for example, the aforementioned case of υ 75-6, where we hear that Zeus εὖ οἶδεν ἅπαντα, | μοῖραν τ' ἀμμορίην τε καταβνητῶν ἀνθρώπων, but whether knowledge of moira necessarily entails responsibility for it as well is not clear. Similarly, when Odysseus finally reaches Ithaca, Athena comes to him (ν 221ff.); the hero complains about her absence during his adventures (314-21), and the goddess replies: αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ τὸ μὲν οὐ ποτ' ἀπίστεον, ἀλλ' ἐνὶ θυμῷ | ἦδε', ὃ νοστήσεις ὀλέσας ἅπο πάντας ἐταίρους (339-40), 'but I simply did not wish to oppose my uncle, Poseidon'. No comment is made on the causal relation between the goddess's knowledge or premonition and the action she takes to ensure that Odysseus will finally reach Ithaca.

Even more complicated seems to be Poseidon's relation to moira: the god is angry because the hero has blinded his son Polyphemus; he actually fulfils his son's prayer,

which demands, as we saw, that even if Odysseus' return to Ithaca is fated, the hero should ὄψε κακῶς ἔλθοι, ὀλέσας ἄπο πάντας ἑταίρους, | νηὸς ἐπ' ἀλλοτρίης, εὔροι δ' ἐν πῆματα οἴκῳ (ι 534-35).<sup>20</sup> At ε 206-7, however, Calypso, trying to persuade Odysseus to stay with her at Ogygia, informs the hero of the difficulties he is to find before him on the way to Ithaca: εἴ γε μὲν εἰδείης σῆσι φρεσὶ ὅσσα τοι αἴσα | κήδε' ἀναπλήσαι, πρὶν πατρίδα γαῖαν ἰκέσθαι, while at ν 306-7, Athena warns her protégé of the suitors: εἶπω θ' ὅσσα τοι αἴσα δόμοις ἐνὶ ποιητοῖσι | κήδε' ἀνασχέσθαι· σὺ δὲ τετλάμεναι καὶ ἀνάγκη. The situation becomes even more complicated as we proceed in the poem. At λ 100 Teiresias' prophecy is given: the hero will reach Thrinacia, where he will find Helios' cattle; if he lands there, he should avoid harming the cattle; if the cattle are harmed, a terrible journey awaits Odysseus and his companions, the latter will be destroyed, and the hero will return to Ithaca only much later, on a foreign ship and having lost all his companions; and when he finally reaches his destination, he will find suitors devouring his property and wooing his wife; and those he will kill (104-118).<sup>21</sup> What is the relation between αἴσα, Polyphemus' prayer, Teiresias' prophecy and Helios' punishment? Is this a coincidence, do the individual gods act towards the fulfilment of a plan, and if they do so, is this a conscious decision, a proof of their obedience to some superior force or order? Besides, how is Athena's support in the second part of the poem to be understood in relation to fate? Does Teiresias' prophecy imply that Odysseus' revenge is part of fate, or is the assault accomplished successfully simply because of the goddess's help?

<sup>20</sup> For Poseidon's wrath see α 19-21, 68-75; ε 282-96, 339-41, 365-70, 375-79; ζ 330-31; η 270-75; ν 125-138, 341-43.

<sup>21</sup> For ambiguity as an essential element of prophecy see Clay (1983) 150-54, where it is also observed that Teiresias and Circe cause each a different reaction by Odysseus; the former results in the hero's 'resignation to the impenetrable will of the gods', while the latter's 'objective information' incites the hero's restlessness and determination.



Much of the confusion is removed if we apply Jørgensen's principle (see p.146): most of the above mentioned examples come from Odysseus' own account of the adventures, a fact that, as Jørgensen himself has shown, can account for the obvious inconsistencies. Similarly, the references to the gods' or more particularly to Zeus's capacity to define moira as expressed by means of explicit verbal associations of the two are mostly part of the heroes' utterances, relating moira with the divine in a most indeterminate way, and thus admitting both moira's non-human origin and the gods' superior power. The poet of the *Odyssey* exhibits the same sensitivity as the poet of the *Iliad* and does not allow his heroes more certainty than real life allows. There are certainly cases in which it is the poet himself who refers to a similar relation; at α 16-18, for example, the poet begins his narration, the starting point being the moment ὅτε δὴ ἔτος ἦλθε περιπλομένων ἐνιαυτῶν, | τῶ οἱ ἐπεκλώσαντο θεοὶ οἶκόνδε νέεσθαι | εἰς Ἰθάκην, while at ε 41-42 Zeus himself, when sending Hermes to Calypso, and bidding the goddess to release Odysseus, concludes ὡς γὰρ οἱ μοῖρ' ἐστὶ φίλους ἰδέειν καὶ ἰκέσθαι | οἶκον ἐς ὑψόροφον καὶ εἶν ἐς πατρίδα γαῖαν.

Obviously, the relation remains ambivalent and frustrating, and the references to an implicit link between the two abound, especially since a large part of the poem is narrated in the first person, reflecting the heroes' own assumptions about the causation of life.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Dietrich (1965) interprets the greater frequency of such references as indicative of moira's gradual loss of her personality and subsequent subordination to or identification with the Olympian gods; moira assumes now a more moral sense, as it is now part of Zeus's or the gods' moral order. True, there is indeed a possibility that moira becomes gradually accommodated or assimilated to the gods, a fact that is reflected in the frequent locution μοῖρα θεοῦ or θεῶν and so forth; of interest is also the appearance of the Κλωθές at η 197: if, as Burkert says, abstracts are personified at some point to denote the qualities and attributes of the gods, the presence of three goddesses could be seen to imply that the function of predetermination is related to the gods even more. However, I would avoid relating moira's moral connotations to this development, and I would certainly avoid relating this change to moira's loss of divine status.

Yet, it is equally important to note that, as happens in the *Iliad*, the confusion is a natural consequence of the concept itself, which the poet is not interested at all in eliminating. In fact, it would appear that the *Odyssey*, although definitely a much more complex poem than the *Iliad*, is structured in such a way as to allow us to see even more clearly the way in which moira and the gods bear the possibility of different perspectives for the poet and consequently for a shift of emphasis according to the needs of the narrative. Both fate and the gods are necessary to the poet, who, however, uses them at different moments, and certainly without being interested in relating the two forces in one or the other way; for both fate and the gods serve as equally valid explanations of life, yet apparently they do so each on a different level, since each force has different implications and thus is capable of creating a different effect on the audience.

A crucial difference between the two poems is the absence of Zeus's will from the *Odyssey*; in its place, since some divine power must after all be responsible for the development of the plot, we find Athena, whose role is established from the very beginning of the poem: she is the one who reminds Zeus of Odysseus' unfortunate situation, persuading her father that the hero should be helped at last to return home. Zeus later (in the poem) admits that both Odysseus' return and the revenge on the suitors are the result of Athena's own plan: οὐ γὰρ δὴ τοῦτον μὲν ἐβούλευσας νόον αὐτή, | ὡς ἦ τοι κείνους Ὀδυσσεὺς ἀποτίσεται ἐλθών; (ε 23-24= ω 479-80). The way in which Athena's plan is intermingled with the decrees of moira reminds us of the *Iliad* (see pp. 134ff.), although now fate seems to bear a different type of moral connotation, with Odysseus' revenge being rightful and justified. What is more interesting to note at this point is that

Athena's support covers only part of the plot, namely the present; her absence from Odysseus' narration is conspicuous, the cause of the hero's own complaint (ν 316-21).

The most important reason behind this absence is certainly the fact that the adventures belong to a world of folktale and fiction in which the goddess obviously has no place. Divine support, always necessary in epic as well as in folk tales, is provided by Leukothea (ε 333-53) and Hermes (κ 275-306), but this is after all not the unquestionable support of a god who appears to favour a hero in a special way; rather, it is the necessary supernatural aid in this preternatural world of witches and one-eyed giants.<sup>23</sup>

With Athena and her plan being absent, the poet has no other means of imposing a will on his plot but to employ moira. The folktale character of the adventures hardly allows us to regard moira in this case as the explanation that the poet himself gives to events of the past; rather it would appear that the idea is used with a degree of poetic licence. If moira demands that Odysseus should stay away from Ithaca for ten years, no one can object to this irrational demand, nor can anyone doubt its inevitable fulfilment. But this is all the poet needs from moira. And this is actually all that moira can offer. Thus, the focus is not on moira and its workings; the idea may prove convenient for the construction of a more or less coherent plot and in order that the impression of an inevitable course be given

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<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, Poseidon is easily accommodated in this world, by becoming Polyphemus' father; apart from providing the poet with a force of opposition, he seems to be a significant connecting link between the two worlds. Athena's absence from the adventures has been interpreted by Clay (1983: *passim*) in terms of the goddess's wrath for the hero: the goddess felt threatened by Odysseus' extreme cunning and therefore ὕβρις, almost transgressing the limits between mortals and immortals. Clay's thesis is very interesting indeed, yet for all that it is rather far-fetched; for, as far as I see, there is no reference to Athena's wrath in relation to Odysseus, explicit or implicit, nor would I regard Odysseus' behaviour hybriotic in any sense - at least, not in a sense that would agree with Homeric theology. The arguments that Clay employs are certainly not unquestionable, yet what is relevant here is that the idea of ὕβρις as presupposed by her thesis in the sense of a provocation of divine wrath does not seem to be supported by Homeric theology.

and certain axioms be put, but its presence is discreet, kept almost to the minimum, and hardly ever of great concern. Of great significance for moira's limited power to cause the tension that we find in the *Iliad* is, as noted, the fact that the hero's will coincides with it.

Thus, the references to it seem like stepping stones of the plot, regular reminders of the plot's solution: at the very beginning we hear of the gods who weave the hero's return at a certain point in time (α 16-18), while the details of this event are given at ε 33-42; we also hear at ε 286-90 of the conditional decree that, once Odysseus reaches Scheria, his return to Ithaca is certain; and during the hero's narration of his adventures we hear of the fulfilment of παλαίφατα θέσφατα twice, at ι 507-12 in regard to Polyphemus, and at ν 172-78 in regard to the Phaeacians;<sup>24</sup> finally, we hear at κ 330-32 that Circe had been actually warned by Hermes of her meeting with Odysseus. Teiresias' prophecy, creating a sense of predetermination, and being of unique authoritative power, seems to link Odysseus' past with the future.

Moira, an impersonal and non-active order, is again fulfilled by the gods. Whether the gods are responsible for it or not, the action belongs to them. Thus, the references to Zeus's or the gods' intervention seem to imply man's subjugation to life and weakness to react, but also to offer a more tangible, and thus more comprehensible presentation of the forces that are to be found behind life.<sup>25</sup> The plot is thus enriched, becoming all the more

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<sup>24</sup> The Phaeacians' ending is also mentioned at θ 564-71, where Alcinous recalls that his father Nausithous had often anticipated the punishment that would come from Poseidon.

<sup>25</sup> I am not referring at this point to the heroes' references to the gods in general or to a vague god or δαίμων, but to the action of Poseidon, Zeus and Athena; true, Poseidon's action falls largely in Odysseus' narration, but this seems to be an inevitable difficulty the poet had to overlook, the result of his decision to have his hero narrate his adventures himself.

elaborate. For, once the gods are used in the plot, they are not simply abstract forces defining life; they are given human characteristics and human feelings, and are involved in life as they pursue their personal and self-centred aims. Therefore, Poseidon may be fulfilling moira, but he also fulfils his promise to Polyphemus (ι 536); and Zeus is not only the god who leads Odysseus towards his fate (ε 33-42), but also the god who fulfils Helios' request that Odysseus' companions should be destroyed (μ 385-419). If it is moira that demands this destruction, still, it must be caused in some way and by one of the gods, and Zeus seems to be most appropriate for this.

The question of the gods' relation to moira seems, therefore, irrelevant: the gods may be seen as an explanation of moira's own fulfilment, but also as a totally independent force, which offers possibilities of a different kind for the development of the plot in terms of action and reaction. This is evident in the way the three gods of the poem, Zeus, Poseidon and Athena, are presented; the ambivalence of their relation to fate proves exactly the lack of any concern on the poet's part to establish a more coherent system.

In the few instances when Zeus actually participates in the plot, his relation to moira is vague; in fact, it appears that any interpretation of his behaviour could be valid. When in ε he sends Hermes to Calypso, ordering the goddess to release Odysseus, he gives a brief account of the course Odysseus will take from Ogygia to Scheria, and then to Ithaca, saying that the hero's fate has defined that he should return home rich with gifts he will have received from the Phaeacians (ε 33-42). Hermes transfers the message to Calypso (ε 43, 105-15), who is, however, unwilling to obey (ε 118-44); but she has to, for, as Hermes says, she should be careful not to cause Zeus's wrath (ε 146-47). Should we

believe that Zeus has actually decided Odysseus' moira, which he now simply fulfils, demanding the obedience of the gods? Or that he simply states moira's orders and makes sure that they will be obeyed, using, even if indirectly, the threat of his wrath?

This episode picks up the sequence of the opening scene of the poem. When the moment comes that Odysseus must return to Ithaca ( $\alpha$  16-18), the gods happen to hold a meeting, from which Poseidon is absent ( $\alpha$  22-27). Athena brings up the question of Odysseus: he is held captive by Calypso at Ogygia, unable to fulfil his wish to return home; why should Zeus be so angry with him ( $\alpha$  48-62)? Zeus replies that he is not angry himself, but Poseidon is, whose son Polyphemus was blinded by Odysseus; but now they can seize the opportunity of Poseidon's absence and help the hero ( $\alpha$  64-79). Athena devises a plan ( $\alpha$  84-95), and thus Hermes is sent to Calypso. Calypso sets Odysseus free ( $\epsilon$  263-68), but while the hero is sailing towards Scheria, Poseidon happens to be returning from Aethiopia; he becomes furious with the gods' change of mind during his absence, for he knows that when Odysseus reaches Scheria, the return to Ithaca is certain - this is his moira; unable, though, to change what is fated, he is determined to make Odysseus' journey as difficult as possible ( $\epsilon$  282-90). And the hero is found in real danger, until he is saved by another deity, Leukothea ( $\epsilon$  333-53).

It is obvious that, if seen in relation to moira, the whole episode of the gods' decision on Odysseus' return raises a series of questions. All their decisions are in accordance with moira; even Poseidon's actions are set within the limits of moira's commands. Should one believe that the gods fulfil a decision they made a long time ago - a decision to which Poseidon objected at some point and which they could not therefore

accomplish while he was present? Later on, when Odysseus meets Athena and complains that the goddess never helped him in the past ten years (v 316-21), she does not reply that she could not disobey moira, but simply that she did not wish to object to Poseidon (v 339-43). Is then Poseidon's absence from α up until ε necessary if the gods are to help Odysseus?<sup>26</sup> Or is it that they simply obey moira, and they would have to do so even if Poseidon were there, but then things would be somehow more difficult? If Odysseus' return to Ithaca is fated and imposed on the gods from the outside, why is it described as φίλον μακάρεσσι θεοῖσι(α 82)? Is there a possibility that, if the gods object, it will not be fulfilled? Is this why Poseidon talks of a change of mind (ε 286-88)? Also, if moira defined that Odysseus should return to Ithaca after ten years have passed, why does Zeus attribute Odysseus' failure to return to Poseidon's wrath? How can Poseidon determine Odysseus' course and subsequent absence from Ithaca? How can it be that Zeus appears so weak before Poseidon's wrath, especially since Poseidon himself accepts his own inability to prevent Odysseus' return, for Zeus has consented to it and has given his promise (v 132-33)?

It is fairly obvious, I think, that when using the gods, the poet does not care to analyse their relation to moira. The idea that the gods participate in human lives is deeply rooted in his thought, and he exploits this idea according to the needs of his narrative, and more important, irrespectively of the questions it raises with regard to moira. The obvious ambivalence of this relation in this episode is the result of the fact that the purpose of the

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<sup>26</sup> Clay (1983:46-52) argues that Poseidon's absence is indeed necessary, but not the most significant condition for the plot to be set into motion; the decisive event is the ending of Athena's wrath.

episode is certainly not to prove moira's connection with or differentiation from the gods, but rather to set the plot in motion and establish the role of the gods in Odysseus' life.

Odysseus is all alone in Ogygia, captive of a goddess. The time comes when moira demands his return. But the difficulties that prevented his return for so long still exist. It takes an external action for this situation to change and the poet attributes this action to the gods; Calypso is the only other alternative, yet a change of mood that would lead her to decide on her own to set Odysseus free would be very sudden and certainly inexplicable. Athena's intervention is necessary. At the same time, the gods' council allows us to see the relationship between Odysseus and the gods, a relationship that defines the whole of the plot, which is thus foreshadowed.

In the first part of the poem, until the moment of Odysseus' return to Ithaca, Poseidon's wrath enriches the plot, as new trouble is caused by the god on different occasions, while the episode at Thrinacia and the momentary participation of Helios is a further opportunity for the poet to avoid monotony;<sup>27</sup> Athena, on the other hand, is the necessary force for the development of the plot after Odysseus reaches Ithaca. Equally interesting, though, is that Athena's love for the hero suggests a special link between them, which is actually emphasized by the goddess herself (v 296-99): they are both renowned for their cunning and wisdom, and it is beyond doubt that this element of Odysseus' character proves of the utmost importance for his survival and final victory, as well as for

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<sup>27</sup> One can also think of the 'interlude' that we have in Demodocus' second song (θ 266-366), which transfers us for a moment to a divine world which recalls the *Iliad*, but is totally absent from the *Odyssey*. For the way in which Demodocus' song adapts what is most probably a traditional subject in epic to the particular subject of the *Odyssey* see Garvie (1994) on θ 266-366.



the plot. By presenting Athena at the beginning of the poem, the poet establishes this relation and foreshadows the sequence of the plot; but he also allows himself to construct the Telemachy (α-δ) and thus confirm Telemachus' role in the poem too.

As for Zeus, his presence is inevitable: he is the god who can demand the fulfilment of Odysseus' fate, obliging to obedience both Poseidon and Calypso, but he is also the god whose consent is necessary before Athena can realise her plan of helping Odysseus, both in regard to the hero's return and in regard to his revenge on the suitors. This role is evident in all of the cases where the god appears in the plot: at μ 385-88 he decides the destruction of Odysseus' companions, because they harmed Helios' cattle; at ν 140-45, 154-58 he allows Poseidon to turn the Phaeacian ship into stone, since the latter feels dishonoured by the Phaeacians' behaviour; at ω 478-86 he advises Athena to avoid a conflict between Odysseus and the suitors' relatives, and aim at a reconciliation instead. Thus, despite his limited participation in the poem, Zeus is always the father of mortals and immortals, ultimately responsible among gods for life's order.

It is evident, then, that the gods' action may be necessary for the fulfilment of fate, yet it is developed on a different level from that of fate; and it is on that level in which the gods exist and act that the poet has the opportunity to pursue a plot of more suspense through conflict. What remains to be seen is how the poet uses moira and the gods as independent of each other in order to create different perspectives. We have seen (155ff.) that in the *Iliad* the poet similarly prefers the differentiation of moira from the gods, for in this way the heroes' own responsibility for life assumes a tragic dimension. In the *Odyssey* tragedy is avoided, yet the differentiation is equally effective with regard to the emphasis

put on human responsibility. For the hero, or for man in general, it is doubtless of little importance whether it is fate or the gods that cause his trouble; he always strives for happiness, hoping to surpass all difficulties, of whatever origin these may be. But for the poet, as well as for his audience, there is a significant difference.

The different potential that the idea of fate seems to have results from its being impersonal and indefinable. Moira is an order, the order of nature and life, as defined by the well established limits of the portion that is distributed to each man or god. Inevitability is one of its essential characteristics, not simply because the idea refers to a predetermined course of events that can by no means be avoided, but also, and perhaps more important, because this order entails a regular sequence of action and reaction; seen in terms of fate, this order entails that once the cause appears the effect will follow inevitably and all too swiftly. Fate, then, implies an order of things against which man can do nothing. More important, he has done nothing which could have provoked this fate. His responsibility is confined to the way he responds to what would seem in a different context to be a chance event. The first beginning that sets life in motion is not necessarily defined by man. The relation between fate and man remains cold and cruel to a large degree, impersonal and irrational. The emphasis in this case is put on man's inability to escape from the course that has already been defined for him, on his powerlessness before the unpredictable and inevitable commands of life.

By comparison to this order the gods' action seems totally rational. As noted above, the gods provide the action that moira certainly lacks, and in this way the mechanisms of life appear more easy to comprehend. This entails that even if at times moira should be

interpreted as a decision of the gods, this decision takes the shape of a rational development that is in full accord with the gods' anthropomorphic character. Thus, Zeus's inexplicable hatred for the Atreidai may be equated with moira (λ 436-39, cf. ω 28-29, 34), but, besides referring to an inescapable reality, it also presents life in terms of human reasoning. Moreover, this entails that the use of the gods implies, at least to the audience, an idea of greater human freedom, which is certainly associated with man's incessant struggle and hope. A total and absolute identification of moira and the gods on all levels and in all aspects of life would remove all hope from human life. While moira is irrevocable, the gods can be propitiated, can change their mind, can intervene at a crucial moment and offer their help. It is this *belief* in gods' flexible behaviour that helps man live life whatever the circumstances.

Exactly as happens in the *Iliad*, then, the poet uses the gods' participation separately from and independently of moira, for this enables him to shift the emphasis from man's powerlessness before life to man's own responsibility either for his happiness or for his misery. The importance, then, lies not in whether a fact is fated and in how this fate is related to the gods' action, but in the aspect the poet chooses to stress when talking of fate or the gods. During the hero's adventures moira is, as I said, only discreetly used and without the compelling force it has in the *Iliad*; the idea is employed, it would seem, almost in a casual way that does not bring any tragic connotations to the fore; the poet simply informs us that what is to happen or what has happened should be attributed to moira. Yet, it would not seem impossible that the poet should use moira as the reason for Odysseus' endless struggles; the idea may be latent, but it is never developed. Instead, the hero stands against a series of situations which he will finally survive, at times caused by a

god, at times caused by the hero himself. The hero is in this way allowed all the freedom to develop, and the emphasis is not on whether the hero's development will coincide with moira, but on the way that this development takes place, and on the qualities that the hero exhibits during his struggles. Throughout the adventures Odysseus' character as πολύτροπος and πολυμήχανος are emphasized, anticipating at the same time the confrontation with the suitors.

Of extreme interest are the cases of Odysseus' companions, Aegisthus and the suitors. The link between these three examples lies in the fact that, although all three are vaguely connected at some point with moira, the stress is actually put on man's responsibility for his life - or death. In all three examples man is warned against his imminent destruction, the result of his own behaviour, but despite this warning he acts foolishly and improperly to his own cost.<sup>28</sup>

The end of Odysseus' companions is never actually attributed to fate in a direct and explicit manner. We are informed of it at the very beginning of the poem, yet the poet talks of the companions' own foolishness, αὐτῶν γὰρ σφετέρησιν ἀτασθαλίησιν ὄλοντο (α 7). The warning comes when Odysseus visits Teiresias in the Underworld. Part of the prophecy concerns the companions: if they avoid harming Helios' cattle, they will return safe to Ithaca; but if they do harm them, destruction will come upon them (λ 110-15). The same words are later repeated by Circe (μ 137-41), when she sends Odysseus off her island

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<sup>28</sup> Warnings exist in the *Iliad* as well; one can think of M 200ff, where an eagle, sent by Zeus and holding a snake, appears among the Trojans; Polydamas warns Hector that they should retreat, but Hector refuses to do so. Different is the warning implicit in Phoenix' story about Meleager at I 524-605: although this is not a divine omen, it is a form of warning not heeded at the appropriate moment; destruction follows, while for the audience this entails irony.

and warns him of the trouble he will have to face. For Odysseus this is still a warning; as for the audience, which have been informed already of the end of the companions (α 7-9), a sense of inevitability is certainly created, yet one could hardly talk of fate at this point.

The impression of fate's cruel presence is created rather by Odysseus' own narration of the episode to Alcinous in μ. The narration is built up carefully so as to evoke the impression of an irrational and inescapable event: every detail seems to lead gradually to the wrong decision. The hero narrates how his companions insisted on their getting off at the island, despite Odysseus' expression of fear for an imminent danger (271-94); how the winds were unfavourable and prevented their leaving the island until Odysseus' companions were starving (325-32); and how at a crucial moment the gods made Odysseus fall asleep (338): it was then that his companions decided to disobey their commander's orders and eat Helios' cattle. Odysseus' reaction, or rather dramatic narration of his reaction, on realising what happened further reinforces the atmosphere of an irrational power; as Teiresias' prophecy is still to be fulfilled, the hero talks of ἄτη (371-73), finding no other explanation.

The case of the companions seems to be indicative of the way the poet mingles fate with human and divine action, each idea being employed for the sake of a distinct and particular effect.<sup>29</sup> We have already seen that Polyphemus' prayer at ι 528-35 involves the companions' end as well. Lines ι 534-35 are actually a variant of those of Teiresias at λ 114-15. Yet, if the poet needs Polyphemus' prayer and Poseidon in ι in order to construct the plot, and if he needs Teiresias' prophecy in λ to justify the hero's descent to Hades, he

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<sup>29</sup> See Clay (1983) 5-6.

does not need them in  $\mu$ , where he uses Zeus instead (312-15, 371-73), or the vague δαίμων (295) or θεοί (338); what he needs at this point of the plot is to evoke the idea of fate as perceived or as projected by the hero himself. This is evident in the function of a detail that the poet, or rather Odysseus, adds at  $\mu$  266-69 ( $\cong$  272-76): Odysseus says that he has been warned not to stop at Thrinacia, because there is some danger waiting for them there; in fact, neither Teiresias nor Circe have given such a warning; but this little detail enhances the impression that the companions' reaction was caused by some δαίμων ( $\mu$  295), an irrational force that wished their destruction. The reason for this emphasis, however, has nothing to do with the companions themselves, for if it did, there is no obvious reason why the poet should avoid connecting their end with fate elsewhere in the poem. The poet needs fate at this point in relation to Odysseus alone - to Odysseus in his double identity as the victim and the narrator at the same time of moira's workings. Thus, on the one hand, moira is used to remind his audience of the role that fate has in the hero's life, creating thus the impression that the hero will inevitably be left alone; on the other, it is employed by the poet as a 'literary' means of suspense used by the hero himself.<sup>30</sup>

In a strange way, then, fate seems to fall upon Odysseus more intensely than on the companions. For the companions the poet prefers to put the stress on the aspect of their own responsibility. Therefore, despite the fact that divine forces are said to prepare their destruction, suddenly these forces are withdrawn from the narration, and the companions

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<sup>30</sup> Rutherford (1986:153) sees here a complex problem with no solution, 'an important part of Homer's legacy to tragedy: the omens ignored, the warnings inadequate, defied or recalled too late'. This is true; the case of the companions is the only one in the poem which has the power to suffocate both the heroes and the audience; everything leads to their destruction, and their foolishness is certainly mitigated or justified by the absence of any alternative. What I wish to stress, however, is the way in which the poet manipulates the concept so as to present the companions both as the victims of an inscrutable fate and as responsible agents provoking their own destruction.

are left all alone to decide what to do; and they decide on their own to take the risk and violate their promise to Odysseus, in full knowledge of the consequences this decision may have (μ 340-52). Interestingly, the poet does not confine himself to narrating their act of disobedience and impropriety, but enhances the idea of their responsibility by providing Eurylochus' exact words, which conclude with the ironical expression of a wish: βούλομ' ἅπαξ πρὸς κῦμα χανῶν ἀπὸ θυμὸν ὀλέσσαι | ἢ δηθὰ στρεύγεσθαι ἐὼν ἐν νήσῳ ἐρήμη (350-51). The subsequent decision by Helios and Zeus that the companions should be destroyed comes naturally and not at all unexpectedly.

The story of Aegisthus and Agamemnon is used as a parallel to that of Odysseus and the suitors: both Odysseus and Agamemnon face a threat as soon as they return home, yet, whereas Odysseus manages to overcome the danger, and moreover take a revenge, Agamemnon's fate is to be killed by Aegisthus and Clytaemnestra. Two points of comparison, then: the end of the heroes, and the end of their usurpers. And while the end of each hero is defined by moira, the end of Aegisthus as well as that of the suitors is the consequence of their own behaviour. In the gods' council at α 26-95 Zeus explains how Aegisthus died ὑπὲρ μόρον (34) and through no responsibility of the gods: for he paid no attention to the gods' warnings that he should neither marry Clytaemnestra nor kill Agamemnon; Orestes' revenge was inevitable (35-43). And Athena replies: may everybody who acts in the same insolent and improper way find a similar death (45-47); and the discussion then moves to the case of Odysseus. Later on, though, when Nestor relates Agamemnon's death to Telemachus, he refers to the gods' fate, μοῖρα θεῶν (γ 269), as the

cause behind Aegisthus' and Clytaemnestra's decision. The inconsistency is obvious, but it should be seen in terms of the effect each idea creates.<sup>31</sup>

It may be supposed that the attribution of Aegisthus' and Clytaemnestra's act to gods' fate by Nestor emphasises the old man's pious character, which is evident in all of γ; it certainly creates the impression of Nestor's acknowledgement of the gods' superiority and acceptance of his own humble position. Similarly, the event is attributed to moira by Achilles, who also interprets life *post eventum* and is not concerned to define its ultimate cause with accuracy (ω 34). Interestingly, though, moira is mentioned neither in Menelaus' narration, nor in Agamemnon's own account; the Atreidai do not wish to talk of moira, and their account puts a special stress on Aegisthus' responsibility; Aegisthus' insolence is thus seen on the human level as an act that demands, and receives, revenge. The case of Aegisthus is mentioned in α exactly in order that the parallel with the suitors may be drawn.

The responsibility of the suitors for their own end is beyond doubt. It is emphasised by constant references both to their impropriety and to their indifference towards divine warnings. It is true that the very fact that Teiresias foresees the course of events after Odysseus will have reached Ithaca (λ 115-20) creates the impression that the suitors' death and thus Odysseus' final victory are part of the latter's moira.<sup>32</sup> However, even if fate has

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<sup>31</sup> Line γ 269, ἀλλ' ὅτε δή μιν μοῖρα θεῶν ἐπέδησε δαμῆναι, presents an obvious difficulty: μιν could refer to either of the three characters mentioned above, that is Agamemnon, Clytaemnestra, or Aegisthus; the sequence seems to suggest that the pronoun refers to Aegisthus: τὸν μὲν ἀοιδὸν ἄγων ... κάλλιπεν... τὴν δ' ἐθέλων ἐθέλουσαν ἀνήγαγεν; however, as Adkins (1960a:28f., n.14) remarks, Clytaemnestra is 'more prominent throughout the whole passage; the poet is very interested in her (good) character, and hence is more likely to comment on her fall than that of Aegisthus'; this solution would be further supported by the antithesis that exists between Clytaemnestra's previous propriety (266) and the final act.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. also ν 306-7.



indeed defined these facts, it is important that the poet prefers not to stress this aspect: the references to fate are considerably fewer as we approach the solution of the plot.

The absence of moira from the second part of the poem seems to be related to the construction of the plot. If the end of the story were fated, and since fate would not be a force against which Odysseus would have to struggle, but a force that would lead him to success and happiness, the poem would lack the sense of conflict it now has, and everything would seem incredibly easy - and very unrealistic. In the first part of the poem the impression of action and reaction is created by the struggle of Odysseus against moira and to a greater extent against the gods' wrath, resulting in a journey full of difficulties for a whole ten years; the same impression can be retained in the second part only through the confrontation with a different power, since moira this time, if it really exists, is on the hero's side; hence, the confrontation of two human forces, one represented by Odysseus, the other by the suitors. Athena's role is certainly a guarantee of Odysseus' victory, yet it doubtless lacks the sense of inevitability that moira definitely has.

What is worth noticing in these three examples is that, although moira is of great importance in the poem, the question of its relation to the gods proves pointless, since the two forces are not actually related in the plot, but rather function on two different levels. Moira and the gods correspond to two different, yet parallel lines of action, that lead to the same end, without the one rejecting or cancelling the other. The poet simply chooses to adopt the force that best suits his aims each time, without being interested in establishing a relation between them. Moira is an irrational demand of life, irrevocable and inevitable. But the gods have a wider field of action, and this allows the poet to construct a more

elaborate plot and to develop the idea of human responsibility. Thus, apart from man's struggle against his irrational and unpredictable fate, which entails his final subjugation, we also see man in his relation to the gods, the way in which he himself causes their reaction and participation, the degree of his own responsibility for the course of his life.

But another observation seems to emerge out of this examination: that moira, however cruel and powerful, does not determine the whole of one's life. *Μοῖρα*, or fate, is the portion that each person has in life, and as such it is individual for each person. Yet, this does not entail that life is predefined in all its details and all its aspects. Moira explains basically the irrational element of life, the unexpected and inexplicable changes or difficulties, one's own death being the most characteristic example. In other words it functions when man can not be deemed responsible for an event, which he can not control.<sup>33</sup> This is when man needs this force as an explanation. And this is perhaps another reason why the poet avoids an explicit connection of moira with the companions or the suitors: had he stressed the role of moira, their responsibility, even if not totally relieved, would certainly not have the importance it now has.

The view that moira does not define all of life leaves enough space for man to decide and act freely, and proves that the belief in fate does not entail a deterministic or fatalistic idea of life. No plan is to be found behind moira's demands. In a way, moira may be seen as a chance event, its distribution having no rational basis, and aiming at no particular end. Moreover, although man never knows his personal moira, he never gives up, for the belief in the gods enables him to hope that, by behaving properly, he may gain

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<sup>33</sup> See Garvie (1994) on η 196-98.

their support and help.<sup>34</sup> And although his expectations may often be belied and his struggle prove fruitless, still a large part of his life can be formed by him. Odysseus can by no means avoid his fated absence from Ithaca for ten years, but during these ten years he is responsible for the outcome of his adventures. And after he comes to Ithaca, he is responsible for the outcome of his conflict with the suitors, just as the suitors are responsible for provoking Odysseus' revenge.

It has become clear, I believe, that in the *Odyssey* the concept of moira itself does not differ from the concept as found in the *Iliad*.<sup>35</sup> What differs is the way in which each poem uses this concept for the accomplishment of its narrative aims. While in the *Iliad* moira seems to dominate the whole plot, and a sense of inevitability is always present along with the idea of man's limited powers of perception, knowledge and action, the *Odyssey* prefers a partial only use of the idea. This is largely the result of the poems' different subjects, and consequently of their different perspective.

The *Odyssey* narrates the adventures of Odysseus and his final triumphant victory and re-establishment of status; as noted, moira in the poem entails his absence from Ithaca for ten years, but also his safe return and happiness; thus, it is not only an opposing force against which man stands helpless, but also a force that, after a particular moment, coincides with the hero's plans and leads to their fulfilment. Fate, then, only partly functions as a cause of action and reaction in the *Odyssey*; in the rest of the work this effect is created by humans and gods alone. In the *Iliad*, on the other hand, fate demands

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<sup>34</sup> This is certainly an attitude related to the human perception of divine justice; see p. 61, n.4, and pp. 167ff.

<sup>35</sup> Dietrich (1965: 327ff.) insists on the difference; see p. 247, n. 22.

death, and death is the only case in which the gods prove unable to intervene. One after the other the heroes succumb to this fate: first Sarpedon (Π 433-505), then Patroclus (Π 786-857), and then Hector (X 5-366), while Achilles' own imminent death is left untold, lending a tragic end to the poem. Man's powerlessness and helplessness before life's irrational demands are obvious, and his hopeless struggle seems to emphasise it even more. Fate is a constant danger, a threat, an imminent destruction.

However, the impression of fate's importance in the *Iliad* is also caused by the imposing character of Zeus's plan, which is connected, or rather combined with moira. In the *Iliad* the poet seems to be employing the idea of Zeus's plan, just as he employs Athena's plan in the *Odyssey*; it would be impossible for the whole plot to have been defined by moira alone; this would have been too cruel for man, but it would also limit the poet's opportunities for a more elaborate plot. Thus, Hera and Athena can ignore Zeus's orders and, despite his threats, attempt to intervene (Θ 350-96); had that intervention succeeded, it would have overturned Zeus's plan. Similarly, after Hera has seduced Zeus and the god falls asleep (Ξ 292-353), Poseidon seizes the opportunity and, with Hera's admonition, manages to change the course of the battle, even if only temporarily (Ξ 361-552). In the end, though, Zeus's plan is never reversed; the lesser gods are obliged to obedience, even if this takes the threat of Zeus's wrath (Θ 5-27, 399-408, 447-56; O 14-33).

However, the poet's choice of Zeus and not of some other god is what actually creates the compelling impression of predetermination in the poem (see pp. 117ff.). Zeus has the unique privilege of a special relation to fate; he is the only god that is directly

connected with moira, because his authority and power allow his decisions to assume the quality of inevitability, which so characteristically defines the concept of fate. Certainly, as happens in the *Odyssey*, this relation seems quite ambivalent: one could choose to see Zeus as the power behind moira, or simply suggest that the god merely combines and adopts his plan to moira's demands. Whatever the case, though, it remains a fact that moira and Zeus are closely linked, and their demands are carefully combined into one single plan.

The examination of the Iliadic plot has shown that Zeus's plan and moira form actually two different lines of action. Zeus's plan entails the fulfilment of Thetis' request (A 522-27): he causes a temporary destruction of the Greek army so that Agamemnon may realize his mistake in dishonouring Achilles, the favourite of the gods - a plan that could be said to be actually accomplished by the end of I; Achilles' rejection of Agamemnon's gifts subverts tradition itself, and now the poet moves smoothly towards the idea of moira. With the Greek army still facing the trouble caused because of Achilles' wrath, we follow the poet's narration towards the fulfilment of the moirai of Sarpedon, Patroclus and Hector, blended together as they are and forming one continuous plot.

The two forces obviously aim at different ends, yet the shift from Zeus's plan to moira is extremely smooth, almost imperceptible, and the result is that throughout the poem we feel the force of an unquestionable and coercive power that determines the course of events; everything comes out as Zeus has planned and as moira has demanded; man struggles against this irrevocable course, without ever being able to reverse it.

Obviously, the two poems, by putting a different stress on moira and using it in a different way, raise different issues. In the *Iliad* moira is necessary if the heroes' death is to be explained, but at the same time it stresses man's weak nature and dependence on irrational forces, yet also his tragic grandeur as he strives against life. The *Odyssey*, on the other hand, needs moira in order to explain life's - or the plot's - difficulties, but allows considerable space to man, proving that, even if man is inextricably tied to certain events of life, he is largely responsible for his happiness, as well as for his misery. Zeus's words at α 32ff. exactly stress this aspect of moira, while at the same time they seem to foreshadow its limited role in the poem.

Yet, it remains a fact for both poems that moira is an indispensable part of life, even if its relation to the gods is never actually clearly defined. Man may be always trying to stand against life, but he also knows his limited powers; more important, he is not afraid or ashamed of confessing his limits when believing in supreme powers that define and control his life. What man needs to find in the concept of fate is the explanation of his own weakness totally to control his life, the reasoning which justifies the existence of such an irrational order that demands suffering and death, and it is of little importance or interest whether the explanation he accepts is fully consistent with his ideas on the gods or not.

## 4.2 *Divine Justice*

Divine justice is a point at which the two poems seem to be crucially different. Even for those who see the Iliadic gods as essentially unjust, the *Odyssey* seems to offer a new perspective and a new morality altogether in the archaic age. The chronological relation between the two epics is thus seen as indicative of a development in moral thought, a further step being taken somehow later by Hesiod in his *Works and Days*.<sup>36</sup> I would like to question this idea of linear development; believing that the difference between the poems is largely conditioned by their different subjects and perspective, and also that the religious ideology supporting the *Odyssey* is the same as that of the *Iliad*, I would wish to redefine the issue by asking not why the *Odyssey* develops towards a more moral perspective, but why the *Iliad*, although aware of this perspective, disregards or at any rate suppresses the possibility.

A vital difference between the poems, and one which supports the argument for the Odyssean morality, is the fact that the more recent poem exhibits a greater concern for the code of ethics as described in chapter two. The ethics of the poem are not different from that of the *Iliad*. The two poems share the principles of piety towards the gods and respect for the elder, one's guests or suppliants, as well as oaths; a new element is now the concern for beggars, which is in line with the poem's wider view of life: the poet seems comfortable enough to present us with details about the lower classes alongside the traditional account of the deeds of the ἀγαθοί. The idea of τιμή is again of utmost

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<sup>36</sup> See pp. 168ff. For the view that Hesiod actually precedes the Homeric epics, as expressed by M. L. West, see p. 169, n. 60.

importance: disregarding another's τιμή can have terrible consequences. If in the *Iliad* Achilles' wrath is caused by Agamemnon's ἀτιμία to the hero, and the whole war by Paris' ἀτιμία towards Menelaus, in the *Odyssey* the same subject is to be found in the suitors' offensive behaviour which violates the principles of ξενία and thus dishonours Odysseus and his home.<sup>37</sup>

This difference in emphasis on proper behaviour is evident in the extended use of the adjectives θεουδής, δίκαιος, νοήμων, ἐπιεικές, ἐναίσιμος, or negatively of the descriptions ἀτάσθαλος, ὑβριστής, ὑπέρβιος, ὑπερφίαλος, ἀφρονέων.<sup>38</sup> The poet seems indeed to be concerned more with the qualities that cause impropriety than with the event of impropriety itself and its consequences. There is a polarity resulting, therefore, between characters of an essential moral attitude, who display characteristics of proper behaviour in all aspects of Homeric ethics, and characters of immoral attitude, whose behaviour is improper again in its entirety, a polarity which is sharp and distinct and is used repeatedly and on different occasions throughout the poem; the antithesis between Odysseus or his οἶκος and the suitors being the central subject, we also hear of the Cyclops and the Phaeacians, and slightly more faintly perhaps of Aegisthus and Agamemnon.

More important, proper behaviour seems to be especially favoured by the gods, since, according to Eumaeus, οὐ μὲν σχέτλια ἔργα θεοὶ μάκαρες φιλέουσιν, | ἀλλὰ δίκην τίουσιν καὶ αἴσιμα ἔργ' ἀνθρώπων (ξ 83-84). In this way the outcome of Odysseus' conflict with the suitors can be easily interpreted as an example of distribution of divine justice: the

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<sup>37</sup> See ξ 163-64, π 431, σ 144f., τ 498≡χ 418, φ 99f., χ 425.

<sup>38</sup> Of equal significance is the greater use of the expression κατὰ μοῖραν; see p. 240, n. 10.



gods support the hero against his insolent usurpers and help him re-establish his status and his kingship. The lines which are believed to capture this new perspective, however, are α 32-43, the programmatic speech of Zeus,<sup>39</sup> in which the god denies responsibility for human misery: men accuse the gods, but the truth is that οἱ δὲ καὶ αὐτοὶ | σφῆσιν ἀτασθαλίησιν ὑπὲρ μόρον ἄλγε' ἔχουσιν (33-34) - and the god continues with the example of Aegisthus. Ὑπὲρ μόρον is taken in this case to mean the violation of propriety and order rather than of fate's predetermined course,<sup>40</sup> as is evident from the combination with ἀτασθαλίη, and Zeus is believed to offer a 'divinely sanctioned concept of justice'<sup>41</sup> which demands that foolish and excessive behaviour should be punished - although whether the gods participate in this punishment or not is not actually mentioned.

Despite all that, it seems that any idea of divine justice in the poem is still quite limited and non-articulate. I would not wish to doubt the importance that propriety and justice have in the poem, yet I would tend to believe that the emphasis on moral attitudes and conduct should not be necessarily confused with the idea of divine justice; what we actually have is two distinct aspects of moral thought, the one pertaining to human behaviour, the other to an almost metaphysical sanction that guarantees morality; although the two are usually related, as they are indeed in both of the Homeric poems to a certain degree, the relation as found in the *Odyssey* is not yet such as to allow the gods to be called just - at least, no more than the Iliadic gods.

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<sup>39</sup> Dodds (1951) 32.

<sup>40</sup> Cornford (1912) 13-14.

<sup>41</sup> Bradley (1976)140.

Therefore, I would not see the emphasis on the idea as a proof of a development in Archaic Greek thought, for even this limited concept is not a new element, but it already exists in the time of the *Iliad*, even if the poet prefers not to employ it there for some reason; the difference seems to lie in the narrative requirements of each poem: divine justice, just like fate, projects a certain attitude to life, and by doing so it helps in the accomplishment of the poet's narrative aims. The use of this idea in the *Odyssey* certainly emphasises the role of propriety in human life, but this is because propriety is a crucial issue in the poem's development, and not because propriety is now an elaborate concept by contrast to what happens in the *Iliad*, nor certainly because the poet is interested in exalting divine justice and order in the way that the Hesiodic *Works and Days* seems to do.

What I would regard as an essential difference, however, is this new concern for beggars and more generally for the lower classes. In the *Iliad* morality is seen as a necessary mechanism for stability among equals, the stress being inevitably put on the ideas of ἀρετή and τιμή. In the *Odyssey* justice or morality is proven to be essential even between superior and inferior, the powerful and the powerless, and although it is again the proper respect of limits that is commended, the limits are now defined both horizontally and vertically in social terms. The suitors' ὕβρις is basically directed towards Odysseus; this is the violation that causes their destruction; their negative characterisation, however, is largely the result of their indifference for the weak and powerless, surpassing as they do the limits of their own vital field at the cost of another.

Before examining the gods' behaviour, it is necessary to look at the uses of the word δίκη and its derivatives. There is an interesting difference to be noted, which does not

actually relate to the semantics of the word, but rather to the different ratio between the legal and the moral application of the relevant terminology. In the *Iliad* the word was found mainly in legal contexts, or in any case bearing moral connotations only very subtly. The adjective δίκαιος is there limited to three occurrences, while the adverb δικαίως does not appear at all. In the *Odyssey*, by contrast, it is the adjective that is most frequently employed; the legal aspect of the word is now limited.

When used in a legal context, δίκη is again associated with the standard terminology that we met in the *Iliad*. Thus we hear of the ἀγορά (μ 432), the θέμιστες (λ 569), the σκῆπτρον (λ 569) and we also find the reference to the δικασπóλος (λ 185-86). Similar also is the restriction of this legal sense to the noun δίκη, although this time we find only the plural δίκας (ι 214-15, λ 570), and the verb δικάζω (λ 545, 547, μ 433). Δίκας refers again to a settlement or a decision between two opposing parties, while δικάζω means ‘adjudicate’.

As noted in chapter two (106), the moral use of the word is first of all detected in the meaning, ‘sign, mark, or characteristic’, as found in the expression δίκη (ἐστί) + genitive, in which case it denotes the ‘manner’ or ‘way’ characteristic of the noun in the genitive, e.g. βασιλῆ γὰρ ἀνδρὶ ἕοικας. | Τοιούτῳ δὲ ἕοικας, ἐπεὶ λούσαιτο φάγοι τε, | εὐδέμεναι μαλακῶς· ἢ γὰρ δίκη ἐστὶ γερόντων (ω 253-55). This use of the word is also restricted in the *Odyssey*. From this meaning of the noun the adjective δίκαιος and the adverb δικαίως derive, implying the person who behaves according to the manner

expected of him, that is properly.<sup>42</sup> A more thorough examination is necessary at this point, and, purely for methodological reasons, I will present the relevant examples in three groups.

A οὐ μὲν σχέτλια ἔργα θεοὶ μάκαρες φιλέουσιν,  
ἀλλὰ δίκην τίουσι καὶ αἴσιμα ἔργ' ἀνθρώπων σ 83-84

ὣ φίλοι, οὐκ ἂν δὴ τις ἐπὶ ῥηθέντι δικαίῳ  
ἀντιβίοις ἐπέεσσι καθαπτόμενος χαλεπαῖνοι σ 414-15= υ 322-23

οὐ γὰρ καλὸν ἀτέμβειν οὐδὲ δίκαιον  
ξείνους Τηλεμάχου υ 294f.= φ 312f.

χαῖρε δ' Ἀθηναίη πεπνυμένω ἀνδρὶ δικαίῳ γ 52

ὅ τ' οὐκ ἐθέλουσι δικαίως  
μνάσθαι οὐδὲ νέεσθαι ἐπὶ σφέτερ', ἀλλὰ ἔκηλοι  
κτῆματα δαρδάπτουσιν ὑπέρβιον, οὐδ' ἐπι φειδῶ ξ 90-92

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<sup>42</sup> Havelock (1978:182) interprets the use of δίκη + genitive as denoting not a characteristic, but what one is supposed to do or feel, the genitive being of reference and not of possession; the interpretation explains the semantic development in a way that puts the proper stress on the fact that δίκη is not yet an elaborate concept, either in its legal or in its moral sense, and therefore it means no more than a behaviour which is accepted or expected.

B Νέστορ', ἐπεὶ περὶ οἶδε δίκας ἠδὲ φρόνιν ἄλλων γ 244

τῶ νῦν μνηστήρων μὲν ἕα βουλήν τε νόον τε  
ἀφραδέων, ἐπεὶ οὐ τι νοήμονες οὐδὲ δίκαιοι β 281-82

καὶ τότε δὴ Ζεὺς λυγρὸν ἐνὶ φρεσὶ μῆδετο νόστον  
Ἄργείοις, ἐπεὶ οὐ τι νοήμονες οὐδὲ δίκαιοι  
πάντες ἔσαν γ 132-34

ὦ πόποι, οὐκ ἄρα πάντα νοήμονες οὐδὲ δίκαιοι  
ἦσαν Φαιήκων ἠγήτορες ἠδὲ μέδοντες ν 209-10

C ἦ ῥ' οἷ γ' ὕβρισταί τε καὶ ἄγριοι οὐδὲ δίκαιοι,  
ἦε φιλόξεينوι, καὶ σφιν νόος ἐστὶ θεουδής;

ζ 120-21= ι 175-76= ν 200-1≡

ἦμὲν ὅσοι χαλεποί τε καὶ ἄγριοι οὐδὲ δίκαιοι,  
οἷ τε φιλόξεينوι καὶ σφιν νόος ἐστὶ θεουδής θ 575-76

ἄνδρ' ἐπελεύσεσθαι μεγάλην ἐπιείμενον ἀλκὴν  
ἄγριον, οὔτε δίκας εὐ εἰδότα οὔτε θέμιστας ι 214-15

ἦ γάρ σευ κλέος οὐρανὸν εὐρὺν ἰκάνει,  
 ὥς τέ τευ ἦ βασιλῆος ἀμύμονος, ὅς τε θεουδῆς  
 ἄνδρασιν ἐν πολλοῖσι καὶ ἰφθίμοισιν ἀνάσσω  
 εὐδικίας ἀνέχησι, φέρησι δὲ γαῖα μέλαινα  
 πυροὺς καὶ κριθάς, βρίθησι δὲ δένδρεα καρπῶ,  
 τίκτη δ' ἔμπεδα μῆλα, θάλασσα δὲ παρέχη ἰχθύς  
 ἐξ εὐηγεσίης, ἀρετῶσι δὲ λαοὶ ὑπ' αὐτοῦ.

τ 108-14

In all of the above examples the connection of *δίκη* or *δίκαιος* with propriety is obvious, while in some of them we also find a connection of propriety with the gods. Thus, *δίκαιος* and *δικαίως* seem often to refer to proper social behaviour, in a way similar to that of the expressions *κατὰ μοῖραν*, *κατ' αἴσαν*, *κατὰ κόσμον*; and this seems to explain the connection of *δίκη* with *αἴσιμα ἔργα* at ξ 84. We have already noticed (108) the relation to customary principles which are denoted by the words *θέμις* and *θέμιστες*.<sup>43</sup> Thus, ξ 90-92 may easily be paralleled to σ 275-77, since they refer to the suitors' insolence, which is against all social principles, and which is described as greediness, *δαρδάπτουσιν ὑπέρβιον*, or lack of *φειδῶ*. But even an appropriate proposal may be regarded as *δίκαιον* (σ 414= υ 322), just as mockery or an expression of irony is *οὐ καλὸν οὐδὲ δίκαιον* (υ 294= φ 312), while Peisistratus' characteristics of *δίκαιος* and *πεπνυμένος*, in which Athena rejoices, refer simply to his table manners (γ 52-53).<sup>44</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Cf. γ 45, κ 73-74, ξ 56f., π 91, ω 284-86; also the contrast between *ἐναίσιμοι* and *ἀθέμιστοι* at ρ 363.

<sup>44</sup> As Havelock (1978:182-83) remarks, the reference is not made to a universal rule, but to a rule about specifics; however, this only relates to the non-conceptualised character of Homeric morality, and proves nothing with regard to the absence of morality itself. It is the character in its entirety which is approved of, even if it appears at times that the reference is made to trivial details. See also p. 38, n. 32.

In the second group a further element is added: the connection of propriety with wisdom.<sup>45</sup> The basic unit οὐ τι νοήμονες οὐδὲ δίκαιοι is used for the suitors, who are also called ἀφραδέες, as well as for the Greeks, who are said to have been punished by Zeus for their behaviour; finally, it is used slightly varied for the Phaeacians, when Odysseus, unable to recognise Ithaca, covered as the island is in Athena's mist, supposes that the Phaeacians have actually deceived him (ν 189-96).

The case of the Greeks at γ 132-34 doubtless hints at the gods' reaction to human improper behaviour and their consequent concern for justice: their interference aims at punishing an act of impiety,<sup>46</sup> and thus re-establishing order. Therefore, it could be suggested that the suitors' similar characterization at β 282 implies a similar reaction of the gods: the very end of the poem, with the suitors' slaughter and Odysseus' final triumph, as well as Zeus's consent and Athena's support, exactly proves the existence of divine justice in the poem. Worth noting at this point is that β 282 belongs to Athena-Mentor, and is followed by a programmatic statement by the goddess: οὐδέ τι ἴσασιν θάνατον καὶ κῆρα μέλαιναν, | ὅς δὴ σφι σχεδόν ἐστιν, ἐπ' ἡματι πάντασ' ὀλέσθαι (283-84).

At the same time β 281-82 draw attention to the suitors' foolishness, for this is the reason behind their improper behaviour; they are foolish not because they cannot sense a possible divine punishment, but because they cannot foresee the consequences of their behaviour on the human level; in other words, they cannot understand that their insolence will inevitably be avenged sooner or later. Just before Athena's words to Telemachus, an

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<sup>45</sup> See Garvie (1994) on θ 209; Macleod (1983) on Ω 157; Cairns (1993a) 126-130.

<sup>46</sup> For the improper behaviour of the Greeks see S. West (1988) on α 325-27.

omen sent by Zeus is interpreted by Halitherses as a warning to the suitors: Odysseus will be back soon, and if they do not change their way of behaving, they will definitely be destroyed (β 161-76). Athena simply informs Telemachus that the suitors' end is near as a result of their inability to realise their insolence and pay attention to Halitherses' warning - and thus the poet is able to foreshadow the plot.<sup>47</sup>

There is a slight, but important, difference between the Greeks' and the suitors' behaviour: the Greeks' punishment by the gods is inevitable and expected, for they are guilty of impiety, of disrespect and dishonour to the gods; the suitors' behaviour, on the other hand, offends and dishonours Odysseus, which means that the dispute belongs primarily to the human sphere and is to be settled basically by men themselves. If the Greeks' foolishness refers to their neglect of the gods, just as happens with Odysseus' companions (μ 377-83), the suitors' foolishness refers to their inability to foresee Odysseus' revenge, just as happens with Aegisthus (α 35-43). The difference, then, lies in the motivation behind divine response: in the first case, we have the typical reaction of the gods to an offence to their τιμή, in the second, a more general concern for justice, or at any rate propriety. This last idea has been seen to exist in the *Iliad* as well (175, n. 68), but here it is applied to the main plot of the poem, reflecting the polarity between right and wrong; for, as noted above, this is a polarity that does not concentrate only on one insult or

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<sup>47</sup> The lines remind us of A 214-16, where Athena reassures Achilles that Agamemnon will offer valuable gifts to him soon, thus paying due honour. It is worth noticing how the same poetic device assumes a distinct function according to the subject of the particular poem.



offence, but rather corresponds to a polarity between totally good and totally bad characters.<sup>48</sup>

The gods' relation to justice is evident in the examples of the third group - although σ 83-84 from the first group is also relevant. First of all, a new element related to the idea of propriety appears - and actually an element that might have connotations of a more internal quality: at ζ 120-21 (= ι 175-76= ν 200-1≅ θ 575-76) propriety is connected with the fear of the gods through the use of the adjective θεουδής. It is very tempting to see in the word a hint at divine justice: the person who fears the gods fears their punishment; his behaviour is consequently conditioned by this fear. However, the adjective does not exactly denote the fear of divine punishment which is inflicted on man as a general rule following impropriety of any form; the second component of the adjective is δέος, fear combined with respect for someone superior, and it appears therefore to denote piety or a proper attitude of regard. Seen contextually, the word implies what seems to be the disposition of someone, which is approved of in all its aspects - another instance of the aforementioned polarity.<sup>49</sup> The importance of such an outlook on life is obvious at τ 108-14, where we have an image of prosperity as the result of a king's εὐδικία and εὐηγεσίη, which are themselves the result of his being θεουδής. There is an implicit link between

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<sup>48</sup> The suitors are indeed guilty of violating the principle of ξενία, and therefore of offending Zeus himself. The truth, however, is that their offence is not presented in this light by the poet, but has to do with their attitude in general. One could say that the god's punishment comes in the end even if indirectly through human agents - an interpretation that could be applied in the *Iliad* as well.

<sup>49</sup> Havelock (1978:191) talks of the 'moralities' of the poem as the identification of conservatism and propriety with good things, and excess and extravagance with bad things. Burkert (1996:31) refers to the adjective θεουδής as a 'mark of moral distinction' and talks of the fear of gods as an essential feature of religion, providing examples from Akkadian, Jewish and Christian texts. Worth noting is that the same idea is implicit at Π 388: ἐκ δὲ δίκην ἐλάσσωσι, θεῶν ὄπιν οὐκ ἀλέγοντες.

human behaviour, divine response and human happiness, yet the passage, more than the idea of divine justice, seems to evoke an idea of omnidirectional propriety.<sup>50</sup>

The antithesis between δίκας and θέμιστας on the one hand and ἄγριον on the other, reflected also in the antithesis between δίκαιος, φιλόξεινος and θεουδής, and ἄγριος and ὑβριστής has already been discussed as indicative of a distinction between a primitive and a civilised world, between ἄγριον and ἀθεμίσιον (108).<sup>51</sup> If θεουδής implies due respect for the gods, and δίκαιος the propriety commended by the oral laws of Homeric ethics, with ξενία being a characteristic example, relevant also to the plot, ὑβριστής seems to denote in this case an insolent and offensive behaviour, which results from the absence of principles or laws. It is worth noting that ζ 120-21 refer to the Phaeacians, who prove to be righteous and pious, and certainly φιλόξενοι, and ι 175-76 to the Cyclopes, who represent the exact opposite: Polyphemus claims to have no fear for the gods (ι 275-78), and is according to Odysseus ἀθεμίσια εἰδώς (ι 428, cf. ι 106, 189). It seems, then, that ν 200-1 could refer indirectly to the people of Ithaca, as if implying that the suitors, who are frequently accused of ὕβρις,<sup>52</sup> have broken all laws of civilisation.<sup>53</sup> But do they necessarily entail that their destruction should be connected with the gods?

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<sup>50</sup> This propriety leads to happiness, but it also leads to κλέος (108); it is interesting that this optimistic impression of a king is compared to Penelope, the archetype of the loyal wife; if for a woman loyalty is part of her ἀρετή, for a man, and a king, ἀρετή seems to lie in εὐδικία and εὐηγεσία, cf. Π 542 and γ 244; once more, we have the themes of the *Iliad* adapted to the plot of the *Odyssey*: morality and competitiveness are not incompatible. One can compare τ 108-14 with δ 689-695, where δίκη θείων βασιλῆων is used obviously in the sense of one's characteristic manner, with no apparent moral implications.

<sup>51</sup> See Cairns (1993a) 112, n.195.

<sup>52</sup> See, for example, α 227, γ 205, υ 169.

<sup>53</sup> See Garvie (1994) 15.

The contrast between a human, civilised society of laws and limits and the primitive, subhuman or superhuman world of the adventures seems to be essential to the plot. Although it would appear that it relates basically to the hero's adventures, it is in fact successfully integrated into the remainder of the plot, becoming almost the issue between Odysseus and the suitors. It forms part of the hero's development which entails that he should gradually realise the importance of δίκη; this is primarily the principle of respect of established limits, which becomes further relevant in the form of laws, the proof for a society's awareness and acknowledgement of these limits. The two aspects seem indeed inextricably linked in the poem, and although the references to legal procedures are limited, it is obvious that law and legality are seen as the extension or projection of morality. When Odysseus finally reaches Ithaca, a supposedly civilised society of laws, reality belies his expectations and action is necessary for order to be restored.

To conclude about δίκη, before I proceed: δίκη, and even more so δίκαιος and δικαίως, are part of the moral vocabulary, which is used in the *Odyssey* much more extensively than in the *Iliad*. The terms are conducive to the whole atmosphere of the poem, which demands a sharp antithesis between propriety and impropriety, which helps the poet to bring into relief the suitors' guilt against Odysseus. However, the terms are related to the gods only indirectly; the expression δίκη θεῶν appears only once at τ 42, and it denotes simply the characteristic manner of the gods - in this particular case, their superior power which enables Athena to shed her φάος περικαλλές on the thalamus. Otherwise, we hear that the gods favour δίκη (ξ 84), so that, if a connection between the two should be drawn, one could only suggest that the manner of the gods, the order that they impose on life, is a moral order; but this is an idea, as already noted (191ff.), that does

not necessarily imply an unquestionable and pure divine justice. That this is in keeping with the theology of the poem, as implied independently of the application of δίκη, remains now to be examined.

Any act of impropriety and any violence of the code of behaviour is primarily a matter to be settled among men. We have seen in the *Iliad* a case of a legal procedure which aimed at settling a dispute peacefully and at the same time satisfactorily for the opposing parties (Σ 497-508). But when a peaceful settlement seems impossible, violence is the only alternative; the Trojan War is a characteristic example. The case of the suitors' behaviour refers basically to an ἀτιμία, which causes a dispute that needs to be settled; the suitors have dishonoured Odysseus, and Odysseus' reaction is natural and expected, just like Orestes' revenge on Aegisthus for Agamemnon's murder. Revenge, or τίσις, in such cases functions as a means by which order is re-established, but also as an exemplum, that would divert man from improper conduct (ξ 400).<sup>54</sup>

The fact, then, that the suitors are not δίκαιοι has to do mainly, if not only, with their social behaviour, their exceeding their own limits and thus dishonouring the king of Ithaca. Their impropriety entails nothing more than an insult towards Odysseus, an ἀτιμία and an ὕβρις, part of which is to be found in their greedy consumption of the hero's property.<sup>55</sup> The problem caused by this behaviour could certainly be settled peacefully, had

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<sup>54</sup> Τίσις is mentioned in the poem in relation to Aegisthus (α 43; γ 195, 197, 203) and the suitors (α 268, γ 205-6, ε 24, λ 118, ξ 163-64, ρ 539-40, χ 168-69).

<sup>55</sup> The terms αἰδώς and νέμεσις are also extensively used in relation to the suitors' behaviour; see, for example, α 254, β 65, χ 40. The suitors can, and they actually do (β 85-128, ω 125-148), justify their behaviour on the grounds of Penelope's indecisiveness: as long as she gives no clear answer, they can indulge in their role as suitors; that Penelope should avoid an answer for so long is necessary for the suitors' very existence, in narrative terms; everything seems to be properly exaggerated.

the suitors been willing to realise the degree of their insolence; Telemachus' plea for recognition of his rights (β 40-79, 138-45), as well as the warnings of Halitherses (β 161-76) and Mentor (β 229-41) prove that the dispute and the consequent conflict refer basically to a human relationship.<sup>56</sup>

But the suitors pay no attention to warnings or expressions of disapproval. Their unwillingness to comply with the demands of society and follow its principles leads to the natural consequence of their destruction. Their end is not at all different from that of Aegisthus, to which it is paralleled by the poet: in both cases a wronged hero re-establishes order by taking revenge. Yet, although in the case of Aegisthus the gods appear to have been totally absent, or even indifferent (α 32-43), in the case of the suitors the poet creates the impression not only that the gods do indeed participate in the conflict, but also that they disapprove of the suitors' behaviour. And this is the point where the two poems seem to differ.

It is beyond doubt that the impression of a moral attitude of the gods does exist in the poem. Thus, as noted (270f.), Odysseus' final victory can be regarded as sufficient proof of the gods' concern for propriety or even justice; one could suggest that the cases of Aegisthus and Polyphemus have similar implications: a wrongdoer is punished, and thus impropriety proves fatal. Even if the gods are absent in both of these cases, it could be said

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<sup>56</sup> Cf. Halitherses' words towards the suitors' kinsmen at ω 454-62: the emphasis is put on their inability to check the suitors' folly and excess. Just before Halitherses, Medon talks of some god helping Odysseus: οὐ γὰρ Ὀδυσσεύς | ἀθανάτων ἀέκητι θεῶν τάδε μήσατο ἔργα (443-44); the reference confirms the link between Athena's action and the suitors' punishment as seen in the plot itself, but as Dover (1983:38) argues, each speaker aims at a different effect on his audience, Medon speaking in prudential terms while Halitherses in moral terms, both wishing to avoid the kinsmen's vengeance on Odysseus.

that what matters is not what causes the punishment of impropriety, but the very fact of this punishment, the final outcome of the confrontation between good and evil; for it seems that this outcome confirms the existence, even if vague, of order in life. And the poet builds his narration in such a way that propriety can be highlighted, and impropriety condemned.

Thus, in crucial moments of the narration we hear of Zeus's omens, which appear as a consent to Odysseus and, more important, as a disapproval of the suitors. At β 139ff. Telemachus almost threatens the suitors to leave his house, and for this threat he uses the idea of Zeus's punishment; as soon as he finishes his speech, two eagles are sent from Zeus over the ἀγορά (146-154); and Halitherses interprets the omen: indeed, the suitors must change their way of behaving, for Odysseus will soon be back, and then they will be destroyed (161-176). At υ 97-101 Odysseus asks for a sign from Zeus as a confirmation that the gods really wished the hero's return to Ithaca - and thus, indirectly, that they will help him re-establish his status: Zeus's reply comes in the form of thunder from Mount Olympus. And when the moment comes that Odysseus, still disguised as a beggar, takes the bow and tests its strings, Zeus sends once more his thunder, as if confirming that Odysseus' wish for revenge has the god's consent and support, and the hero's plan will be therefore accomplished (φ 409-15).

The use of Zeus's omens obviously enables the poet to highlight certain moments of the plot, while at the same time he can inform the audience of what will happen. Besides reflecting a belief, then, omens and signs can be indicative of the poet's technique of anticipation, and this is a device found in the *Iliad* as well (see p.258, n.28): at Μ 200ff.,

and while the Trojans are victorious, Zeus sends his eagle among them; Polydamas warns Hector that they should retreat (211ff.), to which proposal Hector replies, εἰς οἰωνὸς ἄριστος ἀμύνεσθαι περὶ πάτρης (243); the purpose of this sign is not to warn of imminent divine punishment, although it is indeed a warning, but to create the irony necessary when Hector, facing his death, will finally recall Polydamas' words. One could interpret the signs in the *Odyssey* in a similar fashion: the god warns the suitors of a danger actually, without necessarily implying divine intervention; Halitherses' interpretation seems indeed to be susceptible to such an interpretation. At the same time, φ 409-15, which prove Zeus's consent, can very easily be seen as the consequence of Zeus's consent to Athena's plan: according to the god, it is Athena who has actually planned Odysseus' revenge on the suitors (ε 23-24= ω 479-80); Zeus simply gives his consent, allowing Athena total freedom of action. Still, seen contextually, Zeus's omens assume a moral nuance and reinforce the impression of divine justice.

Similar is the case of the frequent references to the gods' concern for propriety and impropriety, which, in the *Odyssey*, is realised in the gods' help towards Odysseus. According to what was said previously (278), there are actually two ideas concerning divine justice: one which refers to the gods' reaction to an offence against their τιμή, and another which relates the gods to a more general concern about propriety. It is in agreement with the first idea that Nestor relates how Zeus decided a terrible journey for the Greeks after the end of the Trojan War, ἐπεὶ οὐ τι νοήμονες οὐδὲ δίκαιοι πάντες ἔσαν (γ 133f.). We also hear of Ζεὺς Ξείνιος, who μάλιστα νεμεσᾶται κακὰ ἔργα (ξ 283-84; cf. β 66-67); thus, after Odysseus blinds the Cyclops, he calls him σχετίλιος, for not behaving properly to his guests, and goes on to explain the Cyclops' end: τῶ σε Ζεὺς τίσατο καὶ θεοὶ

ἄλλοι (ι 478-79); while of Ζεὺς Ἰκετήσιος it is believed that he καὶ ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους ἐφορᾷ καὶ τίνυται ὅς τις ἀμάρτη (ν 213-14). The second tendency is represented by the interesting view that the gods wander on earth in disguise and mingle with people, so that they can supervise human behaviour: ἀνθρώπων ὕβριν τε καὶ εὐνομίην ἐφορῶντες (ρ 485-87);<sup>57</sup> this idea is expressed as a fear and a warning by one of the suitors: they should be careful when insulting the beggar, for he might be a disguised god, whose wrath they will provoke with their behaviour. Eumaeus also expresses the well-known, by now, idea that the gods do not favour impropriety, but δίκην τίουσι καὶ αἴσιμα ἔργα ἀνθρώπων (ξ 84). After Odysseus kills the suitors, Penelope, not believing that her husband has returned, assumes that it was a god who killed them, ὕβριν ἀγασσάμενος θυμαλγέα καὶ κακὰ ἔργα (ψ 63-64); while Laertes believes that with the suitors' death the gods' existence is confirmed, Ζεῦ πάτερ, ἦ ῥα ἔτ' ἐστὲ θεοὶ κατὰ μακρὸν Ὀλυμπόν, | εἰ ἐτεὸν μνηστῆρες ἀτάσθαλον ὕβριν ἔτισαν (ω 351-52).<sup>58</sup>

I would not consider that we have here two ideas that correspond to older and more recent elements of religious thought - at least not as reflecting two stages of development

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<sup>57</sup> The line is very interesting, since it implies that the gods do not intervene in reaction to a human offence towards their personal τιμή, but out of a concern for human propriety itself, as the noun εὐνομίη seems to suggest. Such an idea could be said to reflect quite accurately the development of moral thought which is often detected in the *Odyssey*. However, I would believe that Π 384-92 express more or less the same idea: Zeus intervenes because men violate the proper way of conduct during a legal procedure, which after all entails a violation of customs as well as the code of behaviour rather than of a well established system. Moreover, one could follow Kullmann (1985) in admitting the possibility that different ideas concerning the type and degree of divine intervention co-existed, without necessarily proving a development of thought. The difference is certainly that ρ 485-87 seems to correspond to the plot of the *Odyssey*, yet, as will become clear in due course, the intervention of the gods in the poem is, I believe, not different from that of the *Iliad*; it is the plot's different emphasis on the polarity between good and bad, which is after all a polarity referring to the human level of action, that demands that this idea should be brought to the fore.

<sup>58</sup> Clay (1983:231ff.) sees that men exert pressure on the gods to act justly, for otherwise they will stop attending to them; the gods' justice proves their existence, which in its turn asks for man's respect and due offerings. As noted (211), the belief in divine justice is also a *post eventum* interpretation of life; still, I would be sceptical with regard to the argument of man's pressure on the gods.



from the *Iliad* to the *Odyssey*. Both ideas exist in the *Iliad* as well ( 175, n. 68), but they are simply not applicable to the plot that the poet wishes to construct. The difference is one of frequency, then, which in its turn is determined by the perspective of each poem. In the *Iliad* the fact that the gods appear as indifferent to human propriety conforms with their frivolous character which is a necessary component of the poem if the difference between the human and the divine should be emphasised, and the morally complex plot of the poem be achieved. In the *Odyssey*, on the other hand, the polarity between right and wrong is, as noted, intense, but more important operative in all aspects of life: the limited presence of the gods, as well as the absence of divine conflict of interest so characteristic of the *Iliad*, also conduce to the intensity of this antithesis; the suitors are so utterly in the wrong, that the gods cannot possibly be on their side; the gods can only consent to their destruction.

It is indeed difficult to say whether we have to do with different traditions or sub-genres of epic poetry, or if the difference should be simply ascribed to the poet's purpose.<sup>59</sup> I would tend to opt for a combination of the two: the choice of a subject is also indicative of the poet's will - even though we do not normally talk of poetic will in oral epic. Whatever the case, there is an obvious difference between the poems as regards the way in which the divine participates in the plot, and it is this difference which often leads to the conclusion of a linear moral development. Being accustomed to the idea of an unprejudiced and absolute divine justice, we find the reference to the τιμή of the Iliadic gods too mundane and humane to accept as a reference to justice; the Odyssean gods, who

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<sup>59</sup> Lloyd-Jones (1983:30ff.) also avoids relating the differences between the poems to their chronological relation and to a schematic idea of moral development; however, he traces the difference in the Iliadic gods' ability to bring both good and evil ideas on man (29, 31), by contrast to the gods of the *Odyssey* who never inspire evil ideas.

support the hero in his conflict with the suitors, are more easily accommodated to our perception of the divine. However, the idea of a more general divine concern for propriety, which is supposedly a basis for a more elaborate moral thought, is an idea which finds an application only to the central theme of the poem, and this is, as I said, greatly conditioned by the theme itself; outside the conflict, the gods often appear in the typical Iliadic fashion, while even Athena and Zeus may prove prone to such characteristics.

That the gods of the *Odyssey* are not different in their behaviour from the gods of the *Iliad* is evident basically in the fact that they may also be driven by their emotions, their reaction to human behaviour being seen as the result of their concern for their personal τιμή and not for some idea of justice; almost instinctively they follow their feelings rather than their reason. Thus, in the opening scene of the poem, in the gods' council, we hear that although Odysseus is the wisest and most pious of the heroes, *περὶ μὲν νόον ἐστὶ βροτῶν, περὶ δ' ἰρὰ θεοῖσιν | ἀθανάτοισιν ἔδωκε* (α 66f.), yet he suffers because Poseidon is stubbornly angry at him - *ἀσκελὲς αἰὲν |.. κεχόλωται* (α 68f., cf. α 20-21). The reason behind the god's anger, that is, Polyphemus' being blinded by Odysseus, is certainly a matter that concerns Poseidon alone, 'a private feud after the fashion of the Olympians',<sup>60</sup> it is a personal dishonour, which no other god feels; but if a personal matter is more important than a general one, and Poseidon's wrath is more important than Odysseus' piety, we can hardly talk of an absolute divine justice. By objecting to Odysseus' homecoming Poseidon does not express his disapproval of Odysseus' character; he simply fulfils his son's prayer, while at the same time he expresses his anger at having been ignored and re-establishes his own status and honour by proving, in a way, his power.

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<sup>60</sup> Lloyd-Jones (1983) 29.

This is even more evident in his relation to the Phaeacians and his reaction to their bringing Odysseus to Ithaca. Alcinous, and along with him the Phaeacians, are especially loved by the gods (ζ 201-3, cf. η 91-4, 110-11, 117-30, 132) and their behaviour towards Odysseus implies a people of propriety and righteousness.<sup>61</sup> Yet, Poseidon decides to punish them for their not honouring him, expressing thus his anger for Odysseus at their cost; and Zeus gives his consent: Poseidon should petrify the Phaeacian ship, ἵνα θαυμάζωσιν ἅπαντες | ἄνθρωποι (ν 157f.). Obviously, the moral qualities of this people meant nothing to the god, and certainly they were not the reason behind his decision. Certainly, both examples of Poseidon's behaviour serve a certain narrative purpose: Poseidon's anger is necessary, along with fate, if Odysseus' absence from Ithaca is to be explained; and the event of the petrification of the ship and the appearance of a mountain around Scheria functions as an *aition*, an explanation as to why no one ever saw or heard of this island again.<sup>62</sup> Yet, it is important that the idea of a possible irrational and selfish divine intervention does exist.

Similar is the case of Athena's love for Odysseus. It seems to have no purely moral basis; it simply reflects the special link between the goddess and the hero, which seems to result from their common characteristic of wisdom (ν 296-99). Probably, the relation had been established long before the composition of our poem, which entails that the poet had to accept it and build his narration according to it. But as happens with Poseidon's anger, it is no more than a feeling that defines the whole of Athena's behaviour. Her love for

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<sup>61</sup> They are in fact portrayed in such a positive manner that they are the only case of morality for Gagarin (1987:288).

<sup>62</sup> See Garvie (1994) on θ 564-70; Hainsworth (1988) on θ 569.

Odysseus is such that she plans the revenge on the suitors and offers her help and support to the hero, seeing that all of the suitors, insolent or not, guilty and non-guilty of impropriety, be slaughtered, and along with them the maids with whom they had slept. Her anger does not seem to spring from a sense of justice or propriety, but simply from her love for Odysseus and her wish to take revenge, even if ultimately this relation is disguised to some degree in the face of the poem's demands.<sup>63</sup>

It is in exactly the same way that Helios' reaction to the companions' behaviour is presented in  $\mu$ . The god is wroth at the offence, threatening to depart for Hades unless a punishment is inflicted by Zeus (376-84). Such threats by a god closely related to some natural phenomenon must have been part of tradition,<sup>64</sup> the theme, however, is successfully adapted to the plot which demands that Odysseus be left finally alone. The theology behind the episode is totally consistent of both poems, and Helios' indifference towards the companions' extenuating argument that the offence was a matter of survival recalls Artemis' punishment of Oineus (l 533-40, see p. 185).

As noted (260, n. 30), the case of the companions raises a complex issue concerning divine responsibility: the gods keep Odysseus and his companions on Thrinacia, until they have no food and no means of survival; at a most crucial moment, Zeus makes Odysseus fall asleep, and the companions have now the opportunity to

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<sup>63</sup> Cf. the gods' disposition towards Menelaus. According to Proteus, Menelaus will not die, but will be sent to Elysium instead, where he will live an eternal and blissful life; this decision is based on no special quality of Menelaus, but rather on his relation to Zeus, indirectly through Helen ( $\delta$  561-69). Again, this may be simply an idea that the poet uses in order to accommodate an interesting story in his narrative, see S. West (1988) ad loc.; but it remains a fact that the gods are presented as behaving irrationally and with no steady principles whatever.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. *h. Dem.*

disregard their previous oath and eat indeed Helios' cattle. Rutherford reasonably asks: is the reference to Zeus's ἄτη (μ 372) 'a convenient excuse' or should we see 'a malicious deity at work, or a more complex theological paradox, by which the gods, like Jehovah in the Old Testament, lead their human victims into sin?'<sup>65</sup> I will not attempt to solve the paradox; I would like, however, to focus on a detail that will hopefully illuminate the character of the Odyssean gods even more: the detail of the gods' irrational quality.

There are indeed a considerable amount of references to divine intervention which appear to follow simply a reasoning of its own, being therefore unpredictable and frustrating. At δ 181-82 Menelaus ascribes Odysseus' troubled journey to an irrational resentment of the gods, τὰ μὲν που μέλλεν ἀγάσσεσθαι θεὸς αὐτὸς, | ὅς κείνον δύστηνον ἀνόστιμον οἶον ἔθηκεν, just as Penelope does at ψ 210-12. The same verb ἀγαμαι is used at ε 121-22 to describe the gods' reaction to Eos' love for Orion, until, as Calypso says, Artemis killed Orion in Ortygia (ε 123-24). And Odysseus regards both the Trojan War and Agamemnon's death as the result of Zeus's hatred (λ 436-39). Even if these references may not always correspond to the truth, one may detect in them the idea that life's irrational quality is the result of the gods' irrational and unsteady behaviour, the result itself of their human characteristics and weaknesses.

The idea is common in the *Iliad*; it was earlier attributed to two factors basically, which are closely interrelated: the polytheistic system, which can indeed account for the multiple injustices of life itself in terms of divine response, and the gods' own superiority which endows them with the right to show their cruel indifference to mankind; a third

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<sup>65</sup> Rutherford (1982) 153.

factor, the absence of a belief in afterlife,<sup>66</sup> seems indeed to be what hinders Homeric theology from reconciling the other two characteristics with a more moral concept of divinity. Although the basic plot of the poem cannot be supported by this idea, it is inevitably present in other episodes, confirming the gods' power - and along with that the poems' affinity.

This inconsistent way of presenting the gods proves that any idea of divine justice that can be detected in the poem is not totally developed, nor is it articulate enough to fully justify the unreserved or unconditional use of the term. What we find in the poem is rather man's natural tendency to connect divinity with propriety, to assume, or even believe that the gods favour order, and along with it, the principles a society has set for its preservation. Although the gods can be forces of good as well as evil, it seems that their primary function is to maintain order in life. Thus, they punish impiety, for it disturbs the order reflected in the idea of their superiority to man. And when it comes to relations between men themselves, they preserve order by punishing impropriety - or at least, so man wants to believe, and so the poet tells us.

If justice on the human level is understood as a fair distribution of reward according to one's merit, an idea of divine justice would demand that justice be always administered, even in cases when human justice does not function for some reason. Divine

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<sup>66</sup> The only cases of retribution after death are those of Tityos, Tantalos and Sisyphos (λ 576-600); Tityos is punished for committing adultery with Leto, Zeus's wife (576-81) while the reasons for the punishment of Tantalos and Sisyphos are not given, probably because they were supposed to be known to the audience. The accounts in tradition vary, the common element being again the reference to an offence to a deity. In the *Iliad* we have indeed two interesting passages, Γ 278-79 and Τ 259-60, where perjury is said to be punished in the underworld by Zeus, Helios, Ge and Erinyes - again an offence against divinity. That the belief existed in the background is not impossible; but it is an idea that is of little importance for the plot.

justice, at least to a modern reader, seems to imply a world order which is maintained through the reward of righteousness and the punishment of unrighteousness, even if this entails the necessity of the belief in afterlife, where violated order is thought to be re-established. But this is obviously not the case in the *Odyssey*; even if the gods chastise impropriety in the poem, they do not always reward propriety, and this entails an only partial function of justice.

Such an idea doubtless agrees with the Homeric view on life and man. Man is a feeble creature, and misfortune can come to anyone, irrespective of his behaviour; the gifts of life are distributed by the gods on no rational basis, and life seems to be a circle, an alternation of happiness and misery, which man has to face with endurance and humility ( $\sigma$  130-37, cf.  $\zeta$  188-89). Besides, even the cases where impropriety is punished do not imply that divine justice is applied from the outside; the gods simply help man in his own struggle against a particular wrongdoing, and this proves that man can never actually rely on divine justice alone, if he wishes to restore order. Life being thus seen, 'the successful return and revenge of Odysseus is a special privilege, not a general law', since the gods' 'authority in their support of the just cause ... is not their normal or perennial preoccupation'.<sup>67</sup>

Man in his struggle to survive and preserve his social status can always hope and believe in the gods' help; but life is irrational, and uncertain. With no belief in any form of retribution after death, the idea of an absolute divine justice in the world seems impossible. All that remains is man's necessary strife against impropriety and the hope that

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<sup>67</sup> Rutherford (1982) 148.

the gods may offer their support. This is the idea that actually exists in the poem. Homeric man wants to believe that the gods will object to impropriety, but he also knows that nothing can guarantee their intervention.<sup>68</sup> And it is worth noticing that the idea of the gods' concern for justice is usually expressed as a hope and a wish ( $\alpha$  376-80=  $\beta$  141-45,  $\nu$  169-71,  $\phi$  213) or as a fear and a warning ( $\beta$  66-67,  $\rho$  485-87). Even Athena, when Zeus talks of Aegisthus' death, replies in a wish: may everyone who behaves in a similar way meet the same end ( $\alpha$  46-47).

It is clear, then, that any reference to divine justice in the *Odyssey* does not imply an articulate system of thought. Divine justice is limited only to the divine approval, but not necessary reward, of propriety, and the condemnation or perhaps punishment of impropriety, but always expressed as support to a hero, and never imposed independently of man's own actions. When it appears that the gods interfere and re-establish order out of their own volition, they do so because man has been impious and dishonoured the gods themselves; their personal field of honour having been violated, the gods aim at restoring order, which means that man should be reminded of their superiority and of his own obligation to respect.<sup>69</sup>

But if the idea of divine justice in the *Odyssey* springs naturally from man's wish to connect the gods with an idea of propriety, and thus sanction in a way the principles by which he lives, and if fear of the gods is nothing but fear of life itself, the tendency to deny the idea to the *Iliad* should seem even more absurd. The poet makes a conscious choice.

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<sup>68</sup> See Garvie (1994) on  $\zeta$  120.

<sup>69</sup> Such are the cases of the lesser Aias ( $\delta$  503-4), Eurytus ( $\theta$  224-28), Tityos ( $\lambda$  576-81; see p. 292, n.66) and certainly Odysseus' companions ( $\mu$  377-88).



It is true that Paris' insult to Menelaus is actually the only case where an idea of divine justice could be used. This is not only because Paris' behaviour is improper and offensive, neglecting all principles of heroic society, but also and mainly because its consequence is the Trojan war itself and the final fall and destruction of Troy. It was suggested in the previous chapter (211ff.) that the poet's conscious silence with regard to the role of divine justice in the outcome of the war is in accordance with the general atmosphere of the poem, which demands the gods to retain their distance from human affairs - a distance which can easily turn into indifference - while at the same time it succeeds in providing a coherent perspective of human life, which allows the audience to focus on human responsibility itself.

The poet's choice is also evident in the way he employs his heroes. No doubt, if the poet had defined Troy's destruction as a punishment by the gods, directly or not, the conflict between right and wrong, propriety and impropriety, or even good and evil would demand that the heroes should be divided into positive and negative characters, as the example of the *Odyssey* clearly shows. But this is certainly not the impression we get from the poem, and it is certainly not the effect the poet aims at. Both the Greeks and the Trojans may be right and wrong, or proper and improper at the same time. Paris may have been insolent, and his behaviour was doubtless offensive, yet Priam is pious, and Hector, as well as Troy, is much loved by Zeus himself. This equal treatment of the two opposing parties enables the poet to give a detailed picture of Trojan life and of the Trojan attitude and reaction to the war. Ζ, as well as Ω, seem to remind us that in the event of a war both sides are subject to the same pain and misery, as the natural order of life is disturbed, and

both sides prove man's weak and fragile existence. By avoiding a biased treatment of his heroes, the poet succeeds in presenting war as it actually is, equally cruel and unrelenting to all.

Certainly, one could suggest that Hector is an equally important hero to Achilles, or that the story certainly existed long before our poet, who simply re-tells well-known events. Yet, such an observation disregards the importance of a poet's personal and unique contribution to a story. It is of great importance, I think, that the poet chooses not to finish his narration with the end of the war. He often hints at it, as he also hints at the just claims of the Greeks. Thus, it seems as if he is not actually concerned to prove who is right and who is wrong, or whether the Greeks defeated the Trojans rightfully or not, but rather to enlarge a detail of the war and look at it, isolated as it is from the rest of the story, without detecting the lines that define its beginning or its end. While narrating the glorious deeds of the heroes of the past, the poet seems to intrude in their lives, their characters and their thoughts, looking at one single event from both sides.

But things are different in the *Odyssey*. The story belongs to tradition, and all the poet has to do is narrate it in a rational and quite realistic way.<sup>70</sup> The poet needs, therefore, to create an immense tension between Odysseus and the suitors, in order to justify

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<sup>70</sup> As equally important I would regard the poem's folktale origins; as Clay observes (1983:68-69), Odysseus is the typical folktale figure who continually tricks and deceives his opponents, a characteristic which is relevant not only to the wanderings, where it is obviously most naturally applied, but also to the conflict with the suitors, where it is accommodated as easily as this folktale figure is absorbed by the heroic world of the Trojan war. In this way, the gods' justice could also be seen as a generic feature of folktale poetry, according to which the hero is supported in his endeavour by superhuman powers, a feature, no doubt, which has undergone the same assimilation process to the more rationalised heroic background. The outcome of the conflict between right and wrong in the poem is certain and predictable from the very beginning, not only because the subject is known to the audience, but because it is typical of its original genre.

Odysseus' violent reaction and revenge.<sup>71</sup> As a result of this, he emphasises the insolence of the suitors from the very beginning of the poem and in various ways, and the audience is thus negatively predisposed towards them through the whole narration.

In the accomplishment of this aim the idea of divine justice is the means rather than the end; for I believe that by creating the impression that man should be careful not to cause divine wrath, and by emphasising the possibility that impropriety may be punished by the gods, the poet attempts to project the importance of propriety itself as a human factor that may lead to happiness and prosperity: when behaving properly, the only thing one can be afraid of is fate and the gods' irrational gifts of misery. This, in a way, explains why divine justice exists in the poem as a vague impression and not as a totally consistent system: the poet is not interested in proving whether the gods are just or not, whether they preserve order or not; rather he seems to be using an idea of his background in order to enhance the tension between his heroes. If a moral should be drawn from the poem, it seems that it would refer to the consequences propriety has on the human level, and not on the relation of the gods to propriety, which demands man's fear.

Still, the poet does use the idea of the gods' concern, and he does give the outcome of the conflict; but he seems to be using these ideas according to the aims he has set each time. It is at crucial moments of the poem that the poet implies the possibility of divine punishment, as if in order to foreshadow what is to come. At β 282-83, he highlights the suitors' foolishness, showing the actual reason for their destruction: even a divine sign is not enough to make them realise the degree of their insolence. At ν 201-2 the poet in a way

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<sup>71</sup> Cf. Eustathius' (1878.47) characterisation of the poet as φιλοδυσσεύς.

prepares us for the conflict: Odysseus' adventures have not come to an end yet; what the hero has to face is as difficult as the trouble he encountered during the past ten years. And at  $\phi$  413 the poet projects the moment when Odysseus' plan of revenge begins at last to be realised.

But as happens with moira, the poet uses the idea of divine justice only as long as it is helpful to him. The use of this idea certainly enables the poet to stress proper social behaviour. But one should be extremely cautious before accepting that Odysseus' final victory is indeed the result of divine justice, and more important, that the gods of the *Odyssey* are just. The irrational quality of life, as experienced and presented by the poet, explains why a totally consistent system that would talk of divine justice and order is not applicable. It may be that the gods prefer righteousness, but nothing can guarantee that they behave justly themselves, and this is a privilege that only they can enjoy: if man has to be moral because he is mortal and weak, the gods are certainly not subject to the same principle; they have to fear nothing, neither pain nor time, and quarrels can be easily turned into a joyous feast.

### *4.3 Human Responsibility*

In the *Odyssey* we have the story of one single hero, the king of Ithaca who fights at Troy for ten years, until, by the means of his cunning, the Greeks win the war ( $\delta$  271-89,  $\theta$  494,  $\chi$  230); who after the end of the war and during his journey home faces a series of adventures that prevent him from attaining his end; and who, when he finally reaches

Ithaca, has to face the threat of insolent usurpers. The hero is πολύτροπος Odysseus,<sup>72</sup> who succeeds not only in surviving these difficulties, but also in triumphantly re-establishing his status and his kingship. Obviously, such a plot demands a stress on human responsibility, since it actually presents man's struggle and final victory in life.

Doubtless, man is not an absolute master in his life. Whether it be moira, or the gods, he often has to face unexpected difficulties that underline his limited powers of control. The acknowledgment of his dependence on the gods is obvious in the expression ταῦτα θεῶν ἐν γούνασι κεῖται (α 267 = 400 = π 129), but also in the heroes' tendency to attribute everything in life to the gods - either as a vague force, or as separate deities, each with a particular field of power. Thus, we hear that Zeus is ultimately responsible for life, ἀλλά ποθι Ζεὺς αἴτιος, ὅς τε δίδωσιν |.. ὅπως ἐθέλησιν (α 348-49; cf. ζ 188-189) and in a merciless manner (υ 201-3); or that Aphrodite caused Helen's ἄτη (δ 261-64) and Hera helped Iason (μ 72); while the references to θεός, θεοί or δαίμων abound in the poem.<sup>73</sup> It does not come as a surprise, then, when Odysseus says that man is the most feeble creature on earth, οὐδὲν ἀκιδνότερον γαῖα τρέφει ἀνθρώποιο (σ 130), for happiness is not steady, but rather changes easily into misery when the gods wish so (σ 132-34).

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<sup>72</sup> According to Clay (1983:29ff) πολύτροπος is a 'particularised epithet' which can relate either to the hero's wanderings or to his agile mind; among the many πολυ- epithets that are used of the hero (e.g. πολυτλήμων, πολύτλας, πολυπενθής, πολυμήχανος, πολύμητις), this is the only one which is morally neutral and emotionally obscure; being placed at the very beginning of the poem (α 1), it is seen by Clay as decisive for the audience's perception of the hero: Odysseus is not the morally superior hero, but the hero who survives by means of his mental dexterity; cf. Rutherford (1982) 146-147. This is indeed the basic quality of Odysseus, and even in his conflict with the suitors his cunning, along with his wisdom, is of extreme importance. However, there is an indirect relation between wisdom and propriety, for which see p. 277. For a similar ambiguity in the very name of the hero, see Clay (1983) 54ff.

<sup>73</sup> See, for example, for references to θεός γ 231, δ 364, κ 141, 157; to θεοί, α 235-36, δ 360, ε 169, ο 178, ρ 148-149, ψ 258-59; to δαίμων, δ 274-75, κ 64, 161, π 194-955, ρ 446.

Nevertheless, even if divine intervention limits man's actions and power of control, man does not easily resign. The very fact that life is irrational, that nothing is steady and certain, and also that man cannot totally rely on the gods for the fulfilment of his plans, since their actions are often incoherent and unpredictable, demands man's incessant attempt to control life as much as he can. Certainly, there are moments when man is almost paralysed before life, as happens with Odysseus who cannot leave Ogygia, despite his immense wish to return to Ithaca, or when Odysseus has to face Circe, and it takes Hermes' help for him and his companions to escape the goddess's trickery (κ 275-306).<sup>74</sup> This doubtless shows that only up to a point can man actually succeed alone. But what is important is that even in such cases man struggles to survive, despite his knowing that his struggle may prove fruitless. Besides, man's struggle also contains his hope that a possible hostility of the gods can be appeased (θ 570-71); it is only in isolated moments that man appears to be facing irrevocable and inevitable difficulties.

Life, then, demands man's incessant caution and alertness, it is an inexplicable alternation of happiness and misery, and happiness again, which has to be endured, yet not in a passive manner, but rather through man's ability to appreciate what he has and pursue what he has not. The way, then, that man faces life, the decisions he makes, and the behaviour he adopts largely define the course of his life. Odysseus' companions are destroyed because of their impropriety, σφετέρησιν ἀτασθαλίησιν (α 7), just as Aegisthus (α 34) and the suitors are (χ 317= 416). Impropriety is connected with foolishness, since an act of impropriety results from man's inability to foresee the limits of his power and the consequences of his actions. Polyphemus and Odysseus' companions, as well as the suitors

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<sup>74</sup> Cf. also the case of Leukothea's intervention at ε 333-53.

are all characterised as foolish (ι 361, κ 27, κ 231= 257; β 282, π 278), a characteristic which is further stressed when the poet talks of warnings that have been neglected. By contrast, Odysseus is πολυμήχανος and πολύτροπος. During the narration of his adventures, his acts often justify this characterisation, as they also do in the second half of the poem, in his conflict with the suitors. Thus, at ε 219-24 Odysseus states that he is prepared to face any difficulty as long as his wish to return home will be fulfilled; this is certainly the attitude of a determined man, who is unwilling to resign before all hope and strength is removed from him. This determination is obvious in the Polyphemus episode: when Odysseus is found imprisoned in the Cyclops' cave, he does not stay idle, simply waiting for something to happen, but plans their escape in a most cunning manner and defeats Polyphemus by means of his wisdom (ι 408, 414; cf. ι 420, 422, 424, 445, μ 211, υ 20-21).

A first presentation of Odysseus' wisdom and cunning is given by Menelaus and Helen (δ 240-59, 271-89), where no divine intervention is mentioned; this is particularly interesting for it shows not that the hero was actually alone in Troy and without Athena's support, but that what is important on the human level is the result of one's own actions and behaviour. Similar is Agamemnon's reaction to the suitors' slaughter: although Amphimedon talks of divine help towards Odysseus (ω 182), what seems to matter for Agamemnon is Odysseus' own share of responsibility in the outcome of the conflict; thus, he calls the hero πολυμήχανος (ω 192) and attributes the victory to his very ἀρετή - by ἀρετή, certainly, meaning his prowess (ω 193).

This certainly proves that human action is necessary and is doubtless acknowledged as such even when the gods do not act against a hero, but rather in his favour. Such are the cases of double determination, which abound in the poem, since divine participation in the plot is inevitable.<sup>75</sup> In Odysseus' case, from ζ onwards, with the exception of books ι up to μ, it is Athena's intervention which defines the plot - and along with it life. Certainly, there are details when the poet seems to be consciously connecting the facts with the goddess, and purely for narrative reasons: when, for example, Athena causes Nausicaa's meeting with the hero, we see how the poet transforms a folktale motif and a chance event into a divine plan (ζ 1-47).<sup>76</sup> But it remains a fact that the goddess's participation is necessary for the development of the plot. She sees that Odysseus is well received by the Phaeacians, who, then, offer gifts to him and send him safely to Ithaca (ν 310-5); she disguises the hero as a beggar, so that no one may recognise him while he is preparing his plan of revenge (ν 189-93, 398-403); she makes Penelope decide on the bow contest, an event that will allow Odysseus to take more action (φ 1-4); she makes the suitors even more arrogant, in order to infuriate Odysseus even more (σ 158ff., σ 346-48= υ 284,86).

But even if the goddess seems to control these events, Odysseus' action is necessary too; for the impression that we have in the end is that of Odysseus' shrewdness and bravery, which seem to be reinforced rather than diminished by Athena's support. Thus, Odysseus himself, despite his knowing Athena's love and his being certain of her future help, accepts his own responsibility, the necessity of his own participation (ρ 601).

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<sup>75</sup> See, for example, α 305, β 405-6 (= γ 29-30= η 37-38), γ 26-28, δ 274-75, ο 216, 21, π 259-61, σ 153-56.

<sup>76</sup> See Garvie (1994) on ζ 25-40.



From ν onwards we witness the way in which the hero and the goddess act together for the accomplishment of their plan (ν 386, π 282f., 295-98, τ 1-2= 51-52, υ 392-94). It is only in extreme cases that Athena seems to take total control of the situation and intervene in an almost supernatural way (σ 346-48= υ 284-86, υ 345-58, χ 205-6, 255-56≅ 272-73 - contrast θ 192-94).

The importance that the subject of human responsibility has for the poem becomes even more evident when we consider that the heroes' main and recurrently mentioned characteristic is their wisdom - or negatively, their foolishness. The outcome of the conflict on the human level results from Odysseus' cunning and wisdom,<sup>77</sup> and at the same time from the suitors' foolishness that leads them to impropriety. Besides, it seems of great significance that the first speech of the poem belongs to Zeus, who denies total responsibility for man's misery: at times it is man himself who causes his own destruction, even against fate, ὑπὲρ μόρον, by not behaving properly, σφῆσιν ἀτασθαλίῃσιν (α 32-34).

Interestingly, as happens with propriety, the poet distinguishes the heroes as wise and unwise in exactly the same way and in exactly the same analogy. This further underlines the connection between these two qualities: propriety is not simply an inherent disposition or outlook on life, but also, or mainly, a decision for which man is responsible and which may lead either to happiness or to destruction. Propriety, therefore, seems to result from one's ability to perceive and comprehend life and act according to the situation

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<sup>77</sup> For the importance of μῆτις in the poem, see Clay (1983) 89ff.

he is involved in each time; and therefore, wisdom and propriety can determine the life of one single person or even of a whole group.<sup>78</sup>

It would appear, then, that on the human level the punishment or even destruction of a wrongdoer is inevitable: the suitors are responsible for causing Odysseus' revenge, just as happens with Aegisthus. Even if one chooses to see the suitors' end as the result of divine justice, still they are responsible for having provoked the gods' wrath. Thus, in either case man largely defines his life on the basis of his decisions and behaviour. The fact that the poet is quite vague as regards the idea of divine justice is perhaps a proof that he is not particularly interested in it; what matters is to project propriety as a way of living, seen from the aspect of its result: propriety leads to happiness, but the gods' relation to it, either when order is preserved or when it is violated, is never actually explained clearly.

It is true that by comparison with the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey* gives an impression of more human freedom of will, and consequently of more freedom of action. This, I believe, is the result of two main factors. First, in the *Iliad* more gods are involved in the plot, creating the impression that man is often an object, a plaything in the hands of superior powers, who use him for the accomplishment of their own personal plans and the satisfaction of their selfish pride. In the *Odyssey*, on the other hand, divine participation is limited to the actions of Poseidon and Athena; more important, the gods are not opposed one to the other, but their plans develop in different moments of the plot: Athena takes

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<sup>78</sup> See τ 109-14; also the example of Amphinomus (π 398-99) and Leodes (φ 146-47), who are punished since they do not abandon the suitors' company, even though they are not insolent themselves; see Havelock (1978) 169.

over as soon as Poseidon withdraws from the plot, obliged as he is to obey moira. Thus, man's dependence on the gods seems less harsh: man may be weak, but he is not tossed about by the gods for no obvious reason; his problems, when related to the gods, are the result of his own actions.

Second, the different role that moira has in each poem determines the idea about man. In the *Iliad* moira is a compelling power, that allows little space to man for decisions and choices; even Achilles, who appears to have the unique privilege of a choice, is in the end bound to his death in an utterly cruel manner. But in the *Odyssey* the role of moira is limited: it may demand the fulfilment of certain events, yet it does not define the whole of the plot, permitting us to see that man can decide freely and construct his life.

Yet, despite this difference, the two poems seem actually to share the same attitude towards life: however strongly bound to his fate and however limited by his own nature, man never gives up and always hopes, even if this entails a continuous struggle against life; this attitude forms his actions, and even if behind these actions some god is also to be found, man is never relieved from his own responsibility, for what actually matters is the result, and not the cause that lies behind it.

## *C o n c l u s i o n*

Like caryatids  
our lifted arms  
hold up time's granite load

and defeated  
we shall always win.  
*Miroslav Holub*

Both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* focus on man. Through the experiences of single heroes we seem to gain the opportunity for an insightful exploration of life's own potential. Conflicts and wars, suffering and pain are the necessary material of a narration that allows the general to emerge out of the particular. The divine or the unknown 'other', at times in the form of moira, at times in the form of the more personal gods, constantly interacts with the human, providing the explanation as well as the reassurance necessary for life to be comprehended and lived.

Each poem approaches life in a different way. The ideological and theological background is essentially the same for both works, yet the perspective we gain is different each time. This difference may be seen as symptomatic of the different subject-matter of each poem, but at the same time it conveys a different attitude to life in general; form and content are difficult to tell apart, as the choice of the former seems to define the essence of the latter and vice versa. The manner and degree of interaction and interrelation between the human and the divine significantly determine the outcome, further underlining the difference.

The *Odyssey* gives the impression of greater human freedom: moira and the gods are employed only as long as this is necessary for the plot to be advanced, on the one hand, and for the religious explanation to be given on the other; Zeus disclaims responsibility for human suffering at α 32ff, introducing us thus into a divine world which stands detached and aloof; and the hero of the poem is πολύτλας and πολυμήχανος Odysseus, who survives both his adventures and his usurpers by means basically of his μῆτις. Even the idea that the gods do not favour improper behaviour among men further underlines man's own responsibility: the misery or suffering caused by the gods is their reaction to man's own impropriety, and not a whimsical decision made on the spur of the moment.

The atmosphere of the *Iliad* is doubtless more suffocating. Moira looms over the plot and is gradually fulfilled despite the struggle of the heroes, innocent as they are and ignorant of the future, and this double perspective of ours enhances the impression of human frailty and helplessness. The gods' constant intervention in and interference with human affairs, and more important, Zeus's powerful and irrevocable will, further contribute to the atmosphere. Man stands once again alone, this time, however, not against the concrete and definable dangers of life, but rather against life's irrational and incomprehensible elements. His strength and his victory come not through his survival, but through his glorious death, the immortal death which defies this very human frailty.

There is no development of thought between the two poems to be detected. The Homeric world is more coherent than it appears at first sight. The perception of the human and the divine is essentially the same in both works, but whereas in the *Iliad* the gods' immortal bliss is exaggerated, thus bringing human tragedy into sharp relief, in the

*Odyssey* the two exist in a relation of less tension; and whereas the *Iliad* is like a suppressed, silent war cry of pain at the moment of a vanishing triumph, the *Odyssey* is the acquiescent wisdom of the much travelled man who knows that the barrier between the human and the divine is inviolable, and the sense of equilibrium gained through this knowledge. No one would subscribe any more to the view expressed by 'Longinus' that the *Odyssey* is the poem composed in the poet's old age, lacking the power and the passion of the 'youthful' *Iliad*; yet, it is true that the idea seems to evoke the difference between the two poems in a most succinct manner; this is a difference of perspective, of 'philosophy', if I may say so, not necessarily indicative of a development in moral thought. The self-effacing character of epic poetry may account for our insecurity as regards the poet's identity, yet by no means does it entail the absence of identity; and it is the very identity that each poem has that seems to ask for a self-conscious composer; the idea that the poems are simply the haphazard result of successive compositions cannot be disproved, but it cannot be justified either.

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