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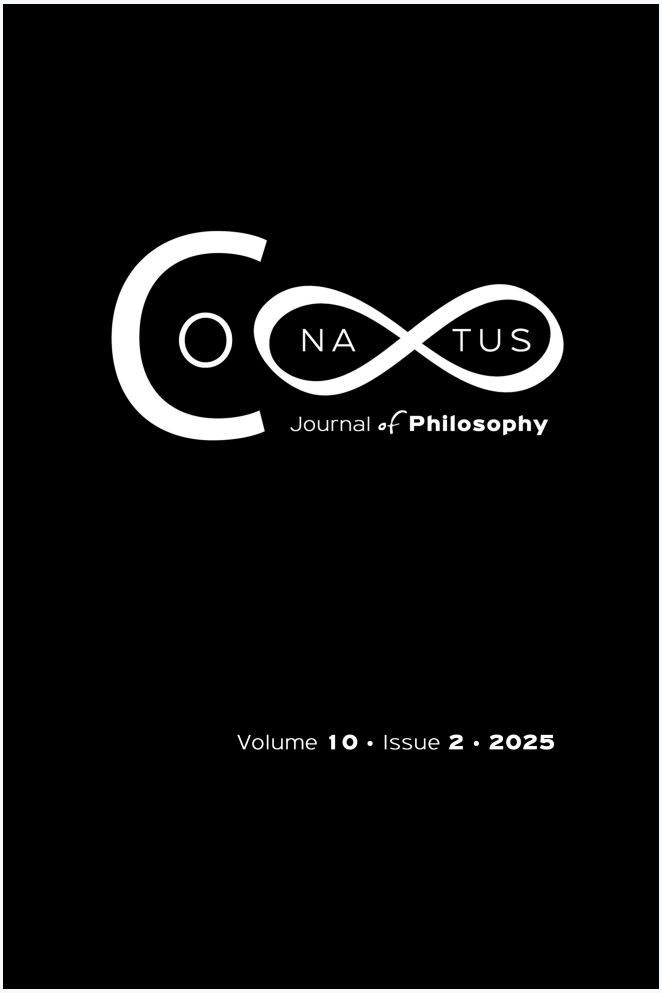

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Chreos and Philotês in Homeric Ethics: Beyond Enlightenment and Reverence

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Abstract

This article offers a philosophical reinterpretation of Homeric ethics by bringing into debate the opposing views of Peter J. Ahrensdorf, Richard Ruderman, and Darrell Dobbs. Ahrensdorf and Ruderman highlight the whimsical, capricious, selfish, and morally indifferent behavior of the Homeric gods. Given these divine flaws, humans lack perfect safeguards against calamities caused by fate (Moîra) and necessity or by their flawed judgments. For both authors, rational judgment serves as the most reliable antidote to suffering and destruction. Ruderman, in particular, interprets Homer as a defender of "enlightenment," grounded in the rejection of false hopes on divine providence, which in the Homeric context is considered unreliable and untrustworthy. Blind faith in gods, he argued, indulges thymos, the most self-assertive innermost human longing that incites rampant anger, often culminating in hubris (extreme moral transgression). In contrast, Dobbs focuses on Homer's Odyssey and defends a vision of reverence as morally stabilising. For him, rational action cannot guarantee morality and justice. More importantly, the instrumentality of rationalism can lead to recklessness and hubris. Reverence for divine powers, on the other hand, encourages moral resilience, even in the face of suffering imposed by the gods themselves or Moîra. This article evaluates both positions and argues that neither rational autonomy nor reverence alone suffices to secure justice and well-being. It another another aspect of Ahrensdorf's interpretation of the Iliad: the virtue of friendship (or philotês), which (in the author's view) is best exemplified by the character of Achilles. Drawing on Plato, Aristotle, and Empedocles, I explain that since philotês is grounded in a sense of chreos (moral necessity), it lays the foundations for a stable community of solidarity anchored in mutual recognition and respect. Thus, chreos and philotês emerge as the twin foundations of Homeric ethics.

Keywords: *Homeric ethics; Iliad; Odyssey; Achilles; friendship; reverence; mênis; Odysseus*

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I. Introduction

By general consensus, Homeric gods show little concern for morality or justice; they share a range of human-like flaws, such as lust for power, jealousy, indifference, and rugged self-interest.[1] For Peter J. Ahrensdorf, Homer is "a demure critic of the gods,"[2] who portrays them as capricious and self-centered beings, incapable of enforcing justice and common decency in the unstable world of mortals.[3] Homer "demystifies the gods" and reveals their whimsical nature, doubting their wisdom and justice;[4] and warns his audience to place greater importance on human responsibility instead of relying on divine justice.[5] Thus, Ahrensdorf assumes that Homer's poems are not about divine providence, but solely about human beings.[6] As also the French philosopher and mystic, Simone Weil, famously argued, "moments of grace are rare in the *Iliad*;"[7] "[n]early all the *Iliad* takes place far from hot baths,"[8] far from peace and reunion. These longings "violently negated by the realities of war," by the reality of force (or might), "which Weil understands as an enduring and inescapable feature of the human condition" in a world lacking divine protection.[9] Hence, in the absence of powerful divine constraints, the mortals must develop intelligence and wisdom to steer away from calamities caused by their flawed judgments that often culminate in *hubris* (implying folly, exaggeration, and moral transgression in the pursuit of selfish glory),[10] or by the harsh challenges imposed by fate and neces-

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[1] Peter Ahrensdorf, *Homer on the Gods and Human Virtue: Creating the Foundations of Classical Civilization* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 25, 57; cf. Arthur Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility: A Study in Greek Values* (Clarendon Press, 1960), 62-64; Naoko Yamagata, *Homeric Morality (*Brill, 1994), 3-21; Janny Clay, *The Wrath of Athena: Gods and Men in The Odyssey* (Princeton University Press, 1983), 230, 237.

[2] Ahrensdorf, 63.

[3] Ibid., 57; Peter Ahrensdorf, *Homer and the Tradition of Political Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 2022), 21-22, 24.

[4] Ahrensdorf, *Homer on the Gods and Human Virtue,* 66.

[5] Ibid., 63; Ahrensdorf, *Homer and The Tradition*, 71, 73, 77, 80-81.

[6] Ahrensdorf, *Homer on the Gods*; cf. Emily Kearns, "The Gods in the Homeric Epics," In *The Cambridge Companion to Homer*, ed. Robert Flower, 59-73 (Cambridge University Press. 2004), 70.

[7] Simone Weil, *Intimations of Christianity Among the Ancient Greeks* (Routledge, 2024), 48.

[8] Weil, 26.

[9] Michail Theodosiadis, "Introduction to Issue 18," *Dia-Noesis: A Journal of Philosophy* 18 (2025): 10.

[10] This definition of *hubris* can be found in my previous works: Michail Theodosiadis, "Republican Perspectives on Populism and Hope (Beyond Christopher Lasch)" (PhD diss., Goldsmiths University of London, 2021), 7; Michail Theodosiadis, *Ancient Greek Democracy and American*

sity, which often lead to disaster and ruin. Likewise, Richard Ruderman argues that in the context of divine imperfections, justice and morality require rational thinking.[11] He critiques Darrell Dobbs' assumption that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* convey reverence (or respect) for the sacred,[12] claiiming that divine providence in the Homeric context is unreliable and often deceptive.[13] In his view, Homer urges his readers to invest in their rational potential, striving for "enlightenment," rejecting false hopes and aspirations fueled by *thymos*, which the sacred enflames and indulges.[14] In brief, *thymos* refers to our most self-assertive innermost desires and longings, incited by selfish impulses that prompt recklessness or uncontrollable (and often *hubristic*) forms of anger. Hence, the most significant achievement for Homer "is the liberation of one's soul from the 'mythological' [i.e., religious or divine] ... world."[15]

This article engages with Ahrensdorf's and Ruderman's perspectives, providing a philosophical analysis of Homer's epics. Section one explores the limitations of divine providence, evaluating the views of these authors. Then, it turns to Dobbs' analysis, which considers Homer's epics a sophisticated exploration of the limits of rational choice. Dobbs – contra Ruderman – argues that rational judgment is not a reliable safeguard and "can even be the instrument of recklessness."[16] He centres on the character of Odysseus, whose transformation into a hero of epic stature derives from his reverence for the gods; reverence, he explains, stands for a correct approach to and respect for the sacred.[17] To ease the tension between human rationality and divine providence, this study considers another aspect of Ahrensdorf's interpretation of *The Iliad*: the virtue of friendship (or *philotēs*),[18] which (in

Republicanism: Prometheus in Political Theory (Edinburgh University Press, 2025), 18. "[T]he hubris of Agamemnon" ("ὕβριν ἴδῃ Ἀγαμέμνονος") is translated by Ahrensdorf as "folly" (or madness) (Ahrensdorf, *Homer on the Gods and Human Virtue*, 143).

[11] Richard S. Ruderman, "Odysseus and the Possibility of Enlightenment," *American Journal of Political Science* 43, no. 1 (1999): 143, 145, 148, 154, 160.

[12] Ibid., 142, 149, 156, 157, 159.

[13] Ibid., 144, 147.

[14] Ibid., 160.

[15] Ibid., 140.

[16] Darrell Dobbs, "Reckless Rationalism and Heroic Reverence in Homer's Odyssey," *The American Political Science Review* 81, no. 2 (1987): 498.

[17] Ibid., 493.

[18] The word *philoi* denotes persons who are in loving (or "friendly") relation with each other, see Seth Schein, *The Mortal Hero: An Introduction to Homer's Iliad* (University of California Press, 98). In Homeric Greek, being *philos* meant sharing responsibility for supporting the

the author's view) is best exemplified by the character of Achilles. A similar type of *philotēs*, grounded in *χρέος* (*chreos*, meaning duty or indebtedness)[19] to respect and uphold the dignity of others, is also evident in Homer's *Odyssey* (in the character of Odysseus, more specifically). Sections two and three suggest that while enlightenment and reverence play a crucial role in defending moral decency, they should be considered secondary to the more powerful virtues of *chreos* and *philotēs*. In different terms, *chreos* and *philotēs* are complementary to both reverence and rational judgment. *Chreos* emphasises companionship, respect, and mutual recognition of each other's worth and value, alleviating the suffering caused by fate or the flawed judgments of both immortals and humans.

To illustrate how *philotēs* surpasses rationality in preserving human decency, section two elaborates on Dobbs's interpretation of the Thrinakian episode, which the author positions "literally at the center of the *Odyssey*."[20] Simultaneously, I engage with Platonic readings of *thymos,* coupled with Aristotle's concept of practical wisdom. In section three, I examine Achilles' μῆνις (*mēnis*), implying "fruitless, self-defeating anger and frustration,"[21] "madness" and "frenzied" behaviour.[22] It is commonly held among Homeric scholars that Achilles' *mēnis* exhibits a selfish *thymotic* longing that hinders enlightenment,[23] and that this

members of a community, as well as providing hospitality to one another (ibid.). In *The Iliad*, an "emotional color" is also attached: being a *philos* means also sharing a commitment "beyond the bounds of the institution," demonstrating deep affection and personal attachment to someone who is "dear" or "beloved" (ibid.). These two layers, the communal and the personal, are interrelated; they are not separated (ibid.) as in the modern age, where "friendship" refers mainly to personal relations.

[19] In Book 21 of *The Odyssey*, we see Homer recounting how Odysseus travelled to Messenia to claim a debt (or *chreos*) (Homer, *The Odyssey*, Book 21, 17). However, this form of respect/*chreos* is presented as stemming from a reciprocal obligation, not solely from his royal status; it stems from some past assistance the Ithacan king provided to the Messenians, who feel obligated to repay him out of a sense of reciprocal duty. The specific wording used by Homer in line 21,17, "ἦλθε μετὰ χρεῖος, τό ῥά οἱ πᾶς δῆμος ὄφελλε" ("arrived to claim a debt/*chreos*, which the entire people owed to him") (*translation mine*), does not refer to Odysseus' royal position; instead, it strongly suggests a debt because of some specific action or service that occurred in the past by the Ithacan king. Thus, the word *chreos* in the Homeric context denotes obligation for respect based on mutual benefit.

[20] Dobbs, 494.

[21] Schein, 96.

[22] Michael Clarke, "Manhood and Heroism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Homer*, ed. Robert Flower, 74-90 (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 81.

[23] Cf. Giambattista Vico, *The New Science*, trans. David Marsh (Penguin Books, 1999), 19, 350, 351, 356-358.

raw sentiment "nullifies or paralyzes his *philotēs*."[24] It is also assumed that Achilles comes to fully appreciate the value of friendship and love only in Book 24, after relinquishing this wrath. Instead, I will suggest that the warrior's anger communicates broader disappointments with the actions of the Achaians, whom he urges to repent by condemning Agamemnon's unjust rule.[25] His love for his compatriots intensifies his hope that they will repudiate their past choices and reclaim their moral integrity. Thus, Achilles' *mēnis* is not an extreme *thymotic* desire driven by "unenlightened" passions;[26] it derives from the betrayal of one's expectations that their *philoi* (friends) would uphold the principles of justice.[27] Put differently, *mēnis* often reflects a sense of care and *duty* (chreos) toward mutual recognition and respect, which are central to the notion of *philotēs*.

In the next section, I will examine Homer's portrayal of human susceptibility to calamities in light of flawed divine providence. This analysis will lay the groundwork for understanding how *chreos* and *philotēs* function as stabilising counterforces.

II. On the limits of divine providence

As Kearns argued, in Homer's *Iliad*, the gods are often portrayed as morally remorseless (and, sometimes, self-interested).[28] They are "*makares*" and "*rheia zoiontes*," meaning "blessed ... who exist always" and "live easily" (per Schein's translation), while the mortals endure a life marked by "pain and toil."[29] Since the gods are untouched by worldly calamities, they struggle to empathise with the suffering of humanity. There are, of course, expectations that Zeus, at the very least, will punish wrongdoing.[30] Yet, he often demonstrates profound indifference to the suffering his actions cause to mortals. As we read in Books 1 and 2, Zeus considers the prayers

[24] Schein, 98.

[25] Ahrensdorf, *Homer on the Gods and Human Virtue*, 98. Cf. Dean Hammer, "Homer and Political Thought," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Political Thought*, ed. Stephen Salkever, 15-41 (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 25; Michail Theodosiadis, "The Flame and The Lyre: Promethean Echoes in Homeric Epic," *Cogito – A Multidisciplinary Journal* 7, no. 3 (2025): 88, 100-2.

[26] Cf. Schein, 115-116.

[27] On the notion of moral justice in the Homeric epics, see Anthony Arthur Long and Despina Vertzagia, "Antiquity Revisited: A Discussion with Anthony Arthur Long," *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 5, no. 1 (2020): 111-122, esp. 113.

[28] Kearns, *The Gods in the Homeric epics*, 67.

[29] Schein, 53.

[30] Kearns, *The Gods in the Homeric epics*, 67-8.

of Thetis to "Give Troy the upper hand" until the Achaians would "grow desperate" and restore Achilles' honor, punishing "Agamemnon the king," who took "away his prized reward."[31] In response, Zeus misleads "Agamemnon by means of a dream."[32] The king is convinced that the gods will assist the Achaians in conquering Troy on that day.[33] And he prepares his army for a full-scale assault. However, "Zeus did not plan that triumph so soon."[34] Consequently, the Achaians suffer a heavy defeat and are forced into a chaotic retreat to their ships. As a matter of truth, Zeus only uses the Trojans to destroy many Achaians. He hoped they would "turn to Achilles, in desperation, and honor him."[35] As Homer writes, Zeus "was about to unleash misery / of harsh combat on both Trojans and Greeks."[36] In response, Agamemnon convenes a council, where he publicly admits that he was "ensnarled" and deceived by the all-powerful god.[37] When "the entire assembly stirred and, shouting, / raced for the ships ... [and] thinking of home,"[38] Odysseus, urged by Athena, steps in;[39] he brings the Achaian soldiers back to the field, and Nestor reinforces discipline, preventing their full retreat. As both armies prepare for battle, "handsome Paris" steps forward and boldly challenges any Achaian warrior "to fight him face to face till one lay dead."[40] Once Menelaus, the husband of Helen, "learned of Paris' challenge / he wasted no time but raced to the front line."[41] This duel was meant to settle things peacefully if one side won, thus preventing further bloodshed. Since "Menelaus has won the victory" and Paris runs to hide, Agamemnon declares that the Trojans should return "Helen and all her riches" to the Achaians, so that they will sail home peacefully.[42] While the Achaians agree, the Trojans hesitate.[43] At this point, Zeus sends Athena to sabotage the truce "by inducing the Trojans to violate the sworn agreement," which is surprisingly insidious considering that "in the eyes of

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[31] Homer, *The Iliad* 1.503-510.

[32] Homer, *The Iliad* 2.5.

[33] Ibid., 37.

[34] Ibid., 3.

[35] Ahrensdorf, *Homer and The Tradition of Political Philosophy*, 50.

[36] Homer, *The Iliad* 2.39-40.

[37] Ibid., 111-15.

[38] Ibid., 149-154.

[39] Ibid., 166.

[40] Homer, *The Iliad* 3.16-20.

[41] Ibid., 21-22.

[42] Ibid., 456-457.

[43] Ahrensdorf, *Homer and The Tradition of Political Philosophy*, 66.

the human beings of the poem, he is the *enforcer* of oaths."[44] Menelaus, more precisely, places faith in Zeus to punish those who disrespect sworn oaths; however, we can see that it is Zeus himself who "induces the Trojans to "violate" this very oath."[45] We also see Agamemnon praying to Zeus and other gods to uphold the truce and punish violators.[46] Nonetheless, Homer's portrayal shows that the gods' plans never fit within the human sense of justice. Agamemnon, like many other characters of *The Iliad*, takes for granted that Zeus is just; he calls Zeus "the Father of Men and Gods," assuming "that he rewards the good and punishes the wicked, and that he specifically punishes those who violate their oaths sworn to him."[47] But, as Ahrensdorf claimed, the Homeric gods are perfectly willing to deceive men into betraying their oaths. In this way, the poet underscores "the shocking contrast between what humans believe" about divine justice and the true nature of gods.[48] He, therefore, sends an explicit and clear warning against trusting divine providence. This is also evident in Book 4, where we see Zeus encouraging the Trojans to accept Menelaus's victory and end the war, while Hera complains that a truce would allow the father of the gods to undermine her efforts to harm Priam and his children. But while Zeus judges Hera's rage for being malevolent, he suddenly yields to her requests and agrees to the destruction of Troy, betraying Achilles and showing fundamental indifference towards human suffering.[49]

A similar example of gods using manipulative and self-serving power is given in Book 24 and 3, where Aphrodite expresses a sham love toward Helen; her affection is rather manipulative, coercive, and self-serving. In short, during the Judgment of Paris, Aphrodite "vied in his courtyard,"[50] promising Paris the most beautiful mortal woman, "the one who stirred hot-blooded lust."[51] To fulfil that promise, she interferes with Helen's life and orders her to go with Paris, notwithstanding that she had already married Menelaus.[52] And when Helen shows reluctance, Aphrodite appears in her angry manifestation,

[44] Ibid., 66.

[45] Ibid., 66.

[46] Ibid., 23.

[47] Ibid., 67.

[48] Ibid., 67.

[49] Homer, *The Iliad* 4.25-30. Scholars offering commentary on Zeus's immoral actions include: Ahrensdorf, *Homer on the Gods and Human Virtue,* 53; Yamagata, 24.

[50] Homer, *The Iliad* 24.29.

[51] Ibid., 30.

[52] Homer, *The Iliad* 3.390-413.

demonstrating her anger and promising to punish the mortal woman for her disobedience.[53] Aphrodite's actions here do not differ from those of Zeus (and other Iliadic gods), who lack a strict moral code and resort to all forms of deception in the pursuit of their self-interest, often expressing indifference towards the suffering they inflict on mortals. For example, in Book 17, we find Zeus expressing pity for human beings as a whole: "No other creature that breathes and crawls the earth / is half as miserable as mortal man."[54] But it is the same god who, in Book 8, killed many Achaians and plunged both sides into a disastrous conflict.[55]

Thus, in the *Iliad*, the gods are ambivalent and often cruel towards the mortals. More importantly, they are plagued by human-like flaws, such as self-interest and greed.[56] Despite their divine status, they are subject to the same physical frailties as humans are. This is particularly evident in Book 5, where we see the goddess Aphrodite being severely wounded by Diomedes in a battle:

> The point breached her skin –
> beneath the ambrosial gown the Graces had made –
> near the hand, releasing the immortal fluid,
> ichor, that flows inside the blessed gods.[57]

The wounding of the goddess reveals not only that the immortals can at times exhibit vulnerabilities akin to those of humans; they may, as Kearns suggests, be inferior to mortals in strength and skill.[58] Likewise, god Ares throws

> a spear over harness and yoke,
> a bronze spear intended to take a life,
> but gleaming-eyed Athena grabbed the weapon,
> shunting the point, useless, wide of the chariot.[59]

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[53] Ibid., 413-20; cf. Anna Afonasina, "The Image of Aphrodite in Empedocles," *Dia-noesis: A Journal of Philosophy* 16 (2024): 153.

[54] Homer, *The Iliad* 17.446-447.

[55] Homer, *The Iliad* 2.1-4; 4.64-72; 7.476-479; cf. Ahrensdorf, *Homer on the Gods and Human Virtue*, 58.

[56] Adkins, 62-64; Ahrensdorf, *Homer on the Gods and Human Virtue*, 25, 57.

[57] Homer, *The Iliad* 5.337-341.

[58] Kearns, 72.

[59] Homer, *The Iliad* 5.851-854.

This scene indicates that quarrels pervade the divine realm as the gods share a good deal of human imperfections (including jealousy and aggression). Hence, they cannot provide absolute moral guidance. According to Adkins, the Olympian gods do not think "in moralistic terms;"[60] they are "far from just," and can only "guarantee some moral relationships."[61] Therefore, calamities arise either from the moral indifference (or selfishness) of the gods or from human recklessness (*atasthaliai*). To escape this cycle of pain and suffering, the human mind must cast off *thymotic* longings and false expectations of divine providence, as Ruderman assumes. In turn, one must commit to rational action, pursuing "genuine enlightenment,"[62] that is, one must rely on individual intelligence to navigate challenges and make rational, moral decisions.

However, while in *The Iliad* the moral weaknesses of the immortals are vividly portrayed through their selfish indulgences, which often justify and glorify warlike vengeance and rampant enmity, in *The Odyssey*, we are told that they have shifted their stance, urging human beings to behave justly and piously.[63] For Kirk, *The Iliad* portrays "the tragic aspect of life, where suffering predominates, whereas the *Odyssey* offers a simpler, moralizing view," and the gods must "ensure that we will eventually suffer beyond our due if we misbehave."[64] We read in the second half of the poem about the gods forming a united front to help Odysseus return. This unity, Kearns writes, is founded on a moral basis. The gods (especially goddess Athena) assume that it is right for Odysseus to triumph "over his enemies and be reinstated as ruler of Ithaca," punishing the suitors, who are "wicked men"[65] and have violated the sacred laws of *xenia* (hospitality), dishonouring the king's household while exploiting his absence for their personal gain. Of course, this shift is not perfect, considering that Poseidon delays Odysseus' homecoming. However, in the assembly of gods, Poseidon is absent, as he is feasting with the Aethiopians on the fringes of the world.[66] One could speculate that

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[60] Kearns, 68.

[61] Adkins, 62-65.

[62] Ruderman, 142, 143, 147.

[63] Kearns, 69; Segal Charles, "Divine Justice in the *Odyssey*: Poseidon, Cyclops, and Helios," *The American Journal of Philology* 113, no. 4 (1992): 492, 515.

[64] Geoffrey Kirk, "The Gods in Homer: Further Considerations," In *The Iliad: A Commentary*, ed. Richard Janko, 1-7 (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 6.

[65] Kearns, 69.

[66] Tobias Joho, *Style and Necessity in Thucydides* (Oxford University Press, 2022), 237; cf. Homer, *The Odyssey* 1.22-27.

> if Poseidon had not been away from the deliberations on Olympus, he would have opposed the homecoming of Odysseus, who, in that case, might have returned even later than he does.[67]

For Segal, *The Odyssey* brings "the polycentric and polytheistic world order" of the various gods and their conflicting interests under a single, unified moral system governed by Zeus.[68] Poseidon represents the old "pre-Olympian" chaotic order of "monsters, Titans, and Giants," which has been replaced by the new order of Zeus.[69] Thus, Poseidon fades out of relevance, disappearing as the world moves forward in time.[70] From now on, Zeus will be in charge of mankind's Moîra; and he will judge the moral deeds of each mortal, punishing those who disobey while rewarding those who align their actions with his conception of justice. As we read in Book 5, Hermes informs Calypso that Odysseus's homecoming is predetermined;[71] "Zeus orders you to send him on his way,"[72] since it is not his Moîra (*aisa*) "to die here far away from those he loves."[73] It is his Moîra "to see his friends and his family" ("μοῖρ' ἐστὶ φίλους τ' ἰδέειν καὶ ἱκέσθαι"),[74] and to "come back home, to his own native land."[75]

The divine order in *The Odyssey* is, certainly, more unified and moralistic in comparison to the chaotic world of *The Iliad*. Yet, moral ambiguities are still present in the poem. It has been suggested that Athena's support for Odysseus's revenge against the suitors is grounded in a moral judgment; the goddess upholds the restoration of justice through harsh punishment inflicted on those who oppress others and abuse the norms of *xenia*.[76] However, in Book 18, we find Athena making the suitors "more overbearing and arrogant so that Odysseus may be all the more angry and their punishment more certain."[77] Thus,

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[67] Ibid.

[68] Segal, 498.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Joho, 236.

[72] Homer, *The Odyssey* 5.113.

[73] Ibid., 114.

[74] Ibid., 115.

[75] Ibid., 113-115.

[76] Kearns, 69.

[77] Ibid.

the goddess indulges Odysseus' *thymos*, permitting him to commit *hubris*. According to Ruderman, this indulgence ultimately prompts the Ithacan king to fatally compromise "his project of enlightenment."[78] As Ahrensdorf also argued, "[d]uring the battle with the suitors, "[o] nce the suitors are slaughtered," the Ithacan king "needlessly and [...] imprudently, tortures and kills two children of a faithful servant" and cuts off the head of the prophet Leiodes" as he "rightly protests his innocence."[79]

Additionally, while examining this new divine order, we observed that Zeus is in charge of the Moîra of humanity; he oversees mankind's Moîra, but without determining fate itself.[80] As Schein argued, a god "never causes Moîra" although there are occasional passages where the immortals prevent it "from happening prematurely or inopportunely."[81] In short, the gods bear primary responsibility for ensuring that events unfold in accordance with what is predetermined to occur. For example, in Book 8 (of *the Iliad*), we read Zeus making

> ready his golden balance
> On each pan he placed a portent of doom,
> one side for the Trojans, one for the Greeks.
> When he lifted the scale, the Greek side dropped.
> The Greeks' fate sank toward the bountiful earth
> while that of the Trojans rose toward heaven.[82]

In Book 22, Zeus weighs the fates of Hector and Achilles and prepares his golden scale.[83] Zeus's scale offers a visual representation of the appetites of Moîra. Through such an act of weighing, he measures the remaining lifespan of a mortal. Thus, he "placed in each pan a portent of death, / one for Peleus' son [Achilles], the other for Hector."[84] And then he "raised the center, and Hector's side sank / toward Hades."[85]

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[78] Ruderman, 154.

[79] Ahrensdorf, *Homer on the Gods and Human Virtue,* 203.

[80] It is striking that neither Ruderman nor Dobbs made substantial reference to the role of Moîra in their efforts to shed light on the complex relationship between human agency and fatality in the poems. However, Moîra occupies a significant position within the narrative, imposing constraints (though not absolute) on rational human action.

[81] Schein, 63.

[82] Homer, *Iliad* 8.69-74.

[83] Homer, *The Iliad* 22.209.

[84] Ibid., 210-11.

[85] Ibid., 212-13.

Notice that herein Zeus does not *choose* who will die; he can only influence the circumstances surrounding Hector's *keros* (doom or death).[86] Seemingly, *The Iliad* presents a less flexible depiction of Moîra than the *Odyssey*. But even within this rigid framework, there is room for human action. The *Iliad* is full of examples of characters making choices that influence the course of events, even if the outcome remains fixed. For instance, Agamemnon's choice to take Briseis away from Achilles, driven by a sense of entitlement,[87] sets in motion a chain of events that significantly affect the course of the war: Achilles withdraws from battle;[88] the Achaians suffer numerous losses (as recorded in Book 11). Therefore, while the outcome (the fall of Troy) is dictated by Moîra, Agamemnon and Achilles' choices alter the path by which that specific outcome is reached.

Moîra is linked to the word *moros,* "used so often of someone's death or doom."[89] The poet chooses the words "ἴση μοῖρα" (*isoin Moîra*), to suggest that "[f]ate is the same whether one fights or no. / The coward's reward is the same as the hero's / Death awaits both the diligent and lazy."[90] Achilles "cannot escape his fate of death," he does have the option to "return home, live a peaceful life, and grow old," or remain in Troy "to fight for honor, but at the cost of dying in a foreign land."[91] Thus, "[w]hile the fate of death is irreplaceable, people can choose glory and honor, or they can opt for a mundane and unremarkable existence."[92]

It is assumed that not even Zeus can override Moîra;[93] for Schein, he is clearly able to do so, but refrains in order to avoid disrupting the cosmic order that Moîra herself protects.[94] However, the same author contends that we should distinguish Moîra from the concept

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[86] Dean Hammer, *The Iliad as Politics: The Performance of Political Thought* (Oklahoma University Press, 2002), 54.

[87] Homer, *The Iliad* 1.184-188.

[88] Ibid., 170.

[89] Schein, 62

[90] Homer, *The Odyssey* 9.318-320.

[91] Mingyi Sui, "The Concept of Fate in Homer's Epic – An Interdisciplinary Perspective," in *Proceedings of the 2023 5th International Conference on Literature, Art and Human Development (ICLAHD 2023)*, eds. Elisabetta Marino et al., 1128-1136 (Atlantis Press, 2023), 1131.

[92] Ibid., 1132.

[93] James Duffy, "Homer's Conception of Fate," *The Classical Journal* 42, no. 8 (1947): 477; cf. Amora Zilento Cilento, "Considerations on Fate in the *Iliad* and the Remarkable Interventions of the Divine," *Religions* 16, no. 5 (2025).

[94] Schein, 64.

of destiny; for former does not prescribe an absolutely fixed course of events.[95] This understanding of Moîra, Schein assumed, is informed by the Latin term *fatum* from where the English "fate" derives;[96] and more importantly, this misinterpretation has been influenced by "Christian notions of predestination."[97] Thus, we must avoid this translation, which is associated with a concept "that is in no way Homeric."[98] While the author rightly cautions against projecting utterly deterministic interpretations (rooted in later historical contexts) onto Homer's Moîra, the case of Odysseus's homecoming demonstrates that fate holds significant sway over human affairs. In fact, the degree to which human agency in the Homeric world is truly free from the appetites of Moîra is critical.[99] In some instances, mortals can come close to doing something "so exceptional" and "so remarkable" that it could have gone beyond Moîra ("beyond portion") (*huper moron, huper Moîran, huper aisan*). Certainly, the limits set by Moîra herself will hold firm.[100] However, her existence does not diminish human agency to shape the unfolding of events; Moîra sets a precise destination; but the path remains subject to personal choices; that is, the quality of one's journey is subject to the decided course of action. In Hammer's words, "[f]ate does not control all aspects of human action."[101] In this way, the mortals are responsible for fulfilling their ordained paths; flawed human choices (*atasthaliai*) play a crucial role in the broader process of moral development and self-understanding.

According to Kirk, sometimes "in the Odyssey mortals can suffer beyond what is fated, because of their own wickedness."[102] He knows that there is a Moîra "for the life of Odysseus ... over which he has no control."[103] However, even within such tight constraints, the king can retain a measure of agency and capacity to navigate. In addition, Moîra does not determine the specific means by which Odysseus will accomplish his homecoming; nor does she prescribe the moral insights a protagonist will

[95] Ibid., 62.

[96] Ibid; Sui, 1130.

[97] Schein, 62.

[98] Ibid., 62-63.

[99] Theodosiadis, "The Flame and The Lyre," 93-94.

[100] Schein, 63-64.

[101] Hammer, *The Iliad as Politics*, 54.

[102] Kirk, 6.

[103] Segal, 502.

acquire throughout his journey.[104] In light of this, Ruderman would suggest that since humans bear responsibility for their actions, they must trust their rational agency, abandoning fickle divine promises and mythological constructs that spring from dark impulses and often prompt *hubris* and utter ruin. This emphasis on human agency is also highlighted in Book 9 (of the *Odyssey*), where Odysseus progresses toward his fate by trusting his cleverness and cunning. He devises a plan to test "whether or not the gods are reliable supporters of justice."[105] When he approaches the cave of the temporarily absent Cyclops, he attempts to discover if these men are "lawless aggressors" or hospitable to "strangers, and fear the gods."[106] However, Polyphemus (Poseidon's son) proves to be brutal; he disrespects the gods, claiming that the Cyclops "think nothing of ... Zeus with his big scepter, / nor any god; our strength is more than theirs."[107] In vain Odysseus awaits the assistance of his patroness Athena, Yamagata argued; he has to rely only on his judgments, blinding the Cyclopes and then escaping by hiding under the bellies of their sheep. There is "no sign of divine aid," and Zeus "does nothing which we could expect from a 'moral' god," such as intervening to remind Poseidon that his son violated *xenia* and disrespected the mortals.[108] In the absence of divine intervention, Odysseus "displays a tremendous capacity for self-reliance by brilliantly and effectively saving himself and his men from the monstrous Cyclops."[109] He is, as Ruderman claimed, "enlightened" about the nature of his situation.[110] While Homer considers Odysseus' *eventual* return as "fated,"[111] he ultimately describes him as a man of action, who trusts "his own unaided reason" so that he can escape extreme hardship and save the lives of his shipmates.[112] In simple terms, Odysseus' experiences "bring him face to face with the harsh truth that the gods are fundamentally unreliable."[113] Therefore, to pursue his destined course, he must become *polymēchanos* (πολυμήχανος), that is, he must depend on his resourcefulness and intellect.[114]

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[104] Joho, 238.

[105] Ruderman, 153.

[106] Homer, *The Odyssey* 9.173-176.

[107] Ibid., 274-277.

[108] Yamagata, 6-8.

[109] Ahrensdorf, *Homer and The Tradition of Political Philosophy*, 81.

[110] Ruderman, 153.

[111] Homer, *The Odyssey* 11. 90-137.

[112] Ibid.

[113] Ahrensdorf, *Homer and The Tradition of Political Philosophy*, 81.

[114] Ibid. Moreover, Odysseus is referred to as *polymēchanos* seventeen times in the *Odyssey*.

Of course, Homer does not propose the complete removal of the realm of mythology from secular life. However, in Ruderman's eyes, mythological concepts in Homer's epics serve only as a springboard for reflection on the frailty of the human condition, rather than a realm through which humans can seek salvation.[115] Dobbs, conversely, argues that this frailty is not mitigated by rationalism,[116] but instead by recognising the limits of rational action itself.[117] Odysseus' greatness, he explains, does not rest only on "his intellectual resourcefulness" (*polymēchanon*) or intelligence, as it is commonly understood; it also stems from his reverence for the gods. As I will explain in the following section, this reverence tempers one's rationalism and aligns their actions with divine will.[118] Finally, I will argue that Odysseus' reverence is coextensive with his ethic of *philotēs* (or *chreos*), whose significance is further explored in section four.

III. On the limits of rational action

Upon reflecting on the Thrinakian episode, Dodds draws our attention to Odysseus' descent into the Underworld, where he encounters the blind prophet Teiresias. There, the prophet warns that if the king hopes to win his return "despite great losses,"[119] he must avoid eating the "grazing cows and fine fat sheep" on the island of Thrinakia, because they belong "to the god who sees and hears / all things – the Sun God."[120] Teiresias warns that violating the sanctity of these divine cattle will result in a type of punishment that would entail utter destruction. But as we read, the Ithacans remain stranded on the island for nearly a month. And when the "ship's supplies ran out" and hunger "gnawed their bellies," the men attempted to fish and hunt birds, but without success.[121] Then, Odysseus leaves his shipmates to seek advice

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According to *The Oxford New Greek Dictionary* (164), a *polymēchanos* man is "resourceful." is the word *polymēchanos* iscompound; it derives from *polys,* meaning "many," and *mēkhanē*, meaning "device" or "contrivance." Thus, to be *polymēchanos* (especially in the Homeric context) is to devise multiple solutions to a particular problem, demonstrating ingenuity that may include both clever reasoning, rational strategy, and cunning.

[115] Ruderman, 151.

[116] Ibid., 143, 145, 148, 154, 160.

[117] Dobbs, 493.

[118] Ibid.

[119] Homer, *The Odyssey* 11.111-112.

[120] Ibid., 107-10.

[121] Homer, *The Odyssey* 12.330-333.

from the gods.[122] However, his men give in to their urge and decide to slaughter the cattle. Eurylochus proposed a "foolish" (or reckless) plan:[123] "If the gods should fail to cooperate in punishing the men, slaughtering the cattle is clearly preferable to the alternative" of starvation and slow death.[124] In the event the gods decide to inflict punishment, then slaughtering the cattle is still a better option; for an immediate death is physically and morally more preferable to the torturous death of starvation.[125] The "most miserable of all."[126] In response, Helios demands revenge from Zeus,[127] who sends a thunderstorm to destroy Odysseus' ship,[128] drowning all of his shipmates. Only Odysseus survives; and he is washed up on the island of Calypso.

For Clay, Odysseus' shipmates are fundamentally innocent; yet, they receive "no consideration whatsoever," as Helios acts "with complete ruthlessness" to protect his "offended honor."[129] In the author's mindset, the gods "capriciously bestow good and evil" while attempting "to ruthlessly protect their own prerogatives without any sense of justice or fairness."[130] Thus, Odysseus must rely on his personal abilities; in this way, he will become "the hero of a world without justice."[131] Dobbs challenges this view and underscores "the culpable recklessness of the crewmen," in the light of which "the dawn of reverence in Odysseus" is substantiated.[132] But why are such rational choices condemned as "reckless?"[133] To address this we must consider Dobbs' emphasis on the actual message conveyed by Teiresias' warning: the prophet's urge for abstinence from food carries an educational (or moral) dimension; through this instruction, Odysseus and his shipmen are urged "to check [their] heart[s]" (θυμὸν ἐρυκακέειν),[134] that is, to restrain their *thymos*.[135] In this context, *thymos* does not ex-

[122] Ibid., 333.

[123] Ibid., 339.

[124] Dobbs, 496.

[125] Ibid.

[126] Homer, *The Odyssey* 12.342.

[127] Ibid., 376-82.

[128] Ibid., 419.

[129] Clay, *The Wrath of Athena*, 230.

[130] Ibid.

[131] Ibid, 231.

[132] Dobbs, 494.

[133] Ibid., 497.

[134] Homer, *The Odyssey* 11.105.

[135] Dobbs, 495.

clusively refer to explosive emotions of anger; rather, it encompasses a broad range of meanings. It can also be associated with chaotic human desires that must be disciplined in the face of temptation, hardship, and suffering. In Plato's philosophy, *thymos* is triggered by the *epithymetikon* (ἐπιθυμητικόν) – the so-called appetitive – part of the soul,[136] which deprives the *logistikon* and "rules like a beast" ("ἄγοντος ὥσπερ θηρίον"), activating the spirits, namely the *thymoeides* (θυμοειδές).[137] According to Ruderman, Homer hews closely to this Platonic psychology, defining *thymos* as a form of proud self-respect that prompts us to blindly trust divine entities, which "alone can assist us in punishing those wrongdoers who escape, as so many do, earthly punishment."[138] *Thymos* makes the "renunciation of (low) pleasures a kind of pleasure itself" and often indulges "the most tempting pleasure of all: pleasure of righteous indignation in the face of undeserved suffering."[139] However, in Dobbs' view, this "righteous indignation," this *thymotic* impulse, is not fueled by reverence; rationalistic judgments, which rely on calculated choices (or commensuration), can also indulge this demand for action in the pursuit of what *prima facie* seems just. In his own words, "[r]ationalism is ... a form of licentiousness," as it works its influence from within.[140] In simple terms, rationalism inherits an instrumental logic; it grants full autonomy to mechanisms that lead to a desired end or ultimate purpose/objective (*telos*), which is often decided by our deepest *thymotic* drives that frequently legitimise and glorify wrath or rebellion. In simple terms, driven by the *thymotic* belief that we deserve better, we pursue a (rational) *telos*: to alleviate (or dismantle) this perceived inequity. Nonetheless, by resisting or defying perceived sources of injustice – divine or otherwise – mortals risk overlooking the moral lessons these seemingly unfair trials contain. In fact, such trials often serve as catalysts for personal moral development. In the Homeric context, the gods use suffering as a form of divine testing: the more the mortals suffer, and yet refrain from giving in to their *thymotic* desires, the more they learn to endure with patience and regulate their catastrophic passions (including *hubris*).

Consequently, what is being tested here is reverence; that is, trust in divine providence. Through patience, humility, and trust, one re-

[136] Plato, *Republic*, 439a.

[137] Ibid., 439e.

[138] Ruderman, 155. As also Kirk argued, in Homer's epics the god's actions usually evoke "the whole range of [human] emotions" that Aristotle has urged us to expect from such literature (*Introduction,* 2).

[139] Ruderman, 147.

[140] Dobbs, 500.

strains the *thymotic* motivational system. The whole Thrinakian episode makes reverence seem high as it becomes a mirror for the internal state of the characters: (1) the crew is ruled by appetite and despair; (2) Odysseus shows restraint and respect; yet he cannot lead effectively, as his men indulge their *thymos,* violating divine orders. Moreover, the cattle serve as a powerful symbol of temptation, appealing not only to appetites but also to the calculating mind that evaluates all moves and ostensibly identifies the fairest decision or move. Thus, we see a rational choice leading to a transgression of

> the limits imposed by the sacred [...] which commands respect on its own terms, not in virtue of comparison or analogy with something else. By its very nature, the sacred defies commensuration.[141]

Instead, the purpose of the sacred is "the proper cultivation of the human soul" in the face of struggles and hardships.[142] In this context, every form of disobedience to divine rules is a reckless choice (or *atasthalia*). It is a dangerous move, as it prevents the mortals from developing high moral capacities by "win[ning] their soul" ("ἀρνύμενος ἥν τε ψυχὴν").[143]

To further substantiate this claim, Dobbs discusses the case of Aigisthos, who murders Agamemnon to marry Clytemnestra.[144] The gods had warned not to murder the king "or court his wife," because "Orestes would grow up / and come back to his home to take revenge."[145] However, his desire for power outweighs the consequences of Orestes' vengeance. Thus, he makes a rational decision, weighing benefits and costs.[146] Such "reckless" moves, in Homer's eyes, treat divine prohibitions not as perfect moral lessons but reduce them to calculative domains of choice in pursuit of individual self-interest. This choice, as Aigisthos' case reveals, is often susceptible to the very human impulses that give rise to *hubris*. Furthermore, rationalism "upholds the limitless possibility of commensuration because it presumes the ultimate hegemony of reason," or "intelligence ... in the pursuit of wisdom."[147] How-

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[141] Ibid, 499.

[142] Ibid, 500.

[143] Homer, *The Odyssey* 1.5; cf. Dobbs, 503.

[144] Dobbs, 497-501.

[145] Homer, *The Odyssey* 1.40-42.

[146] Dobbs, 499.

[147] Ibid, 500.

ever, the flourishing of true "reason into wisdom" requires (as I have already explained) "a recognition of its limits."[148] To put it bluntly, rationalism is an abuse of reason; "[p]erhaps this can be clarified most effectively with the aid of a political analogy. Rationalism is to reason as majority tyranny is to democracy."[149] Or – to use my own terms – rationalism is to reason what intelligence is to wisdom. Intelligence relies on scientific forms of evidence in order (1) to unveil the main *causes* of an *effect/*problem and (2) to identify "potential solutions, either by eliminating the causes or by repairing and rectifying the resulting damages (the effect)."[150] The intelligent person *calculates* the consequences of various actions, considering which ones offer the greatest benefit for the completion – or *telos* – of a particular desired goal; however, this *telos,* where all objectives are finally accomplished,[151] is not always judged by considering its ethical content and purpose. In other words, intelligent actors (such as Aigisthos or Odysseus' crew) prioritise outcomes based on a cost/benefit calculation, without always anchoring "benefit" to hidden moral principles.

To further highlight the distinction between wisdom and intelligence, I will turn to Aristotle. The philosopher delineates practical wisdom – or prudence (*phronesis*) – as a virtue concerned with ethical deliberation, in contrast to mere rational knowledge. Prudence is a virtue that "encourages constant re-evaluation, reflection, and reassessment" of opinions, actions, and ideas through deliberation and dialogue.[152] Here, there is no *telos*, and nothing is considered definitive or self-evident.[153] Prudent persons can "deliberate nobly" about what "conduces to living well."[154] In this regard, practical wisdom (or prudence) encourages us to engage with others in search of common understanding; prudent persons, in other words, acknowledge the multiple facets of a problem, viewpoint, concept, or idea while seeking deliberative compromise.

In light of the Thrinakian episode, Odysseus's efforts to navigate between divine injunctions and the immediate needs of his crew reflect

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[148] Ibid, 500-501. "This recognition respects the sacred, "such as that which determines Odysseus' refusal to join his crewmen in their rationalistic smorgasbord" (ibid). On this, see also Pia Valenzuela, "Fredrickson on Flourishing through Positive Emotions and Aristotle's Eudaimonia," *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 7, no. 2 (2022): 37-61.

[149] Ibid, 500.

[150] Theodosiadis, *Ancient Greek Democracy,* 119.

[151] Ibid., 13.

[152] Theodosiadis, *Ancient Greek Democracy*, 119; cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1140b.

[153] Theodosiadis, *Ancient Greek Democracy*, 131.

[154] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1140a.

a display of prudence/phronesis. Notice that in *The Odyssey*, he is referred to as *polymēchanos* (πολυμήχανος) seventeen times. As previously explained, to be *polymēchanos* is to engage in multiple "machinations" or strategic responses to a given problem. In this sense, a *polymēchanos* is an intelligent person who places trust in rational mastery. However, to be truly *polymēchanos* is not merely to rely on rational methods; to possess the ingenuity to identify "multiple" answers implies that a person can employ a wide range of approaches (rational, intuitive, emotional, and so on) in order to navigate challenges arising from human *hubris* or natural misfortune. This becomes all the more evident in Odysseus' portrayal, not simply as *polymēchanos* but as *polyphron* (πολύφρων). According to Ahrensdorf, *polyphron* is the man who possesses profound wisdom[155] (and, more specifically, practical wisdom), rather than intelligence alone; for *polyphron* comes from polys ("many" or "multiple") and *phron* (φρων), the root of *Phronesis*. Thus, the *polyphron* Odysseus is characterized by manifold prudence and practical wisdom, rather than mere intelligence.

To suggest that practical wisdom knows no *telos* in the process of evaluating facts and arguments is to assume that the *polymēchanos* and *polyphros* Odysseus does not take any assumption or concept as given once and for all. Simply put, the morality of divine injunctions is not absolute. Therefore, Odysseus – as a practically wise actor – does not see divine injunctions as being entirely inviolable; he evaluates both sides of the divine character: he knows that the gods sometimes act with a sincere desire to morally uplift mortals; but he is also aware that divine beings are not always morally stable. After all, his experience on the island of the Cyclopes made him aware that the Olympian gods are capricious and, quite often, morally indifferent and self-interested. Thus, the Ithacan king is aware that divine orders can be excessive and unbearable. Even so, he hesitates to defy their will; he recognises that trials and hardships imposed by divine providence often serve a greater purpose: the moral development and elevation of mortals. As a *polymēchanos* and *polyphros*, he invents a method of interaction and communication with the sacral, conveying the plight of his men, threatened by hunger and starvation under harsh divine orders. At the same time, even justified disobedience in the face of suffering can impede moral development, which is essential for one to "win their soul." Through this method, divine and mortal wills are brought into dialogue; in other words, gods and mortals engage in deliberation, led by Odysseus himself.

[155] Ahrensdorf, *Homer on the Gods and Human Virtue*, 199.

In short, Odysseus's communication with the gods can be seen as an attempt to curb the consequences of unchecked *thymos*, even when it is cloaked in the guise of reason. At this point, Dobbs' assertion becomes fully clear: Odysseus' homecoming is not merely a physical return; it is not merely a physical journey but also a moral one, during which the king acquires moral strength through his hardships and wanderings. However, it has become evident that while reverence plays an important role in shaping his ethical character, it is not the sole driving force; nor does his "enlightenment" alone (his intelligence and rational mastery) constitute the core of his ethical growth. Instead, it has been revealed that the core of his ethical personality rests with his prudence, marked by a reflective engagement with conflicting values and a drive toward compromise. Through practical wisdom, Odysseus strives to avert calamities inflicted by the gods' harsh orders or even by the perils of *thymotic* human desires. Consequently, practical wisdom is a complementary ethical foundation to both reverence and rational judgment. At the same time, we have seen that his prudence is urged by *chreos* and *philotēs*. *Chreos* towards his men encourages Odysseus to deliberate with the gods; in the pursuit of justice, the king reflects on the pain and anguish of his crew and actively responds by striving to bridge the chasm between divine mandates and mortal necessities. Therefore, *chreos* and *philotēs* are essential additions to both reverence and rational judgment. It is time to move on, explaining how *chreos* is also portrayed in *The Iliad,* particularly by the figure of Achilles.

IV. *Chreos* and *philotēs*; beyond "enlightenment" and reverence

In the first half of the *Iliad,* Achilles is (seemingly) depicted as a ruthless warrior, consumed by *mēnis* (or *thymos*), that is, by an extraordinary, and almost supernatural, insanity "that can be seen in both gods and wild beasts."[156] As explained in the previous section, *thymos* is commonly associated with self-assertive, and often unruly, human impulses that incite recklessness, selfishness, and often anger or rebellion. We have seen that on certain occasions, when a person is wronged and endures hunger, cold, or a different type of suffering, their spirit seethes and grows fierce, often aligning with what seems to be right.[157] However, does *thymos* always deprive self-control and self-mastery? Does the passion of anger always deprive the *logistikon,* signalling a failure to align one's actions with reason and virtue? Plato was not so cat-

[156] Clarke, 81.

[157] Plato, *Republic*, 440b.

egorical on this issue: in some cases, he assumed, this type of spiritedness aligns with reason (σύμμαχον τῷ λόγῳ γιγνόμενον τὸν θυμόν τοῦ τοιούτου);[158] these passionate tempers (περὶ τοῦ θυμοειδοῦς) often provoke inner turmoil or rebellion (τῆς ψυχῆς στάσει τίθεσθαι), which in many respects enhances prudent thinking, instead of undermining the human ability for moral judgment.[159] Aristotle defines anger as a longing for revenge, in the view of "a real or apparent slight, affecting a man himself" or his relatives.[160] Therefore, anger is not always "irrational;"[161] it often stems from the (rationally accessible) judgments of persons who are held in low esteem and suffer the injustices committed by another.[162] As Aristotle wrote,

> [t]here is praise for someone who gets angry at the right things and with the right people, as well as in the right way, at the right time, and for the right length of time.[163]

The Greek thinker condemns "insensibility," namely, the condition that plunges persons into apathy; insensible people, he contends, never express anger because they are indifferent to pain and suffering.[164] Aristotle also uses the term (πραότητα) *praotēs*, as a middle state between insensibility (ἀναλγησία) and *orgilotēs* (ὀργιλότης) – or "irascibility" (extreme anger),[165] which refers to the condition where persons are angered not with the "right things," the "right people," and "in the right way." *Orgilotēs* is a prolonged *thymos* that endures even when the reasons for its existence no longer apply or hold sway.[166] Specifically, it is *orgilotēs*, rather than every manifestation of *thymos*, the primary enemy of reason. With this in mind, I will argue that Achilles' *mēnis* should not be equated with arrogant or insolent anger of *orgilotēs*; instead, it is an expression of righteous anger over betrayal and dishonor inflicted upon him; but, more importantly, it expresses his deep disappointment for the failure of the Achaians, that is, for his *philoi,* to uphold genuine

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158 Ibid.

159 Ibid.

160 Aristotle, *Art of Rhetoric*, 1378a32-1378b2.

161 Bernhard Koch, "Anger and Reconciliation," *Conatus - Journal of Philosophy* 8, no. 2 (2023): 284.

162 Ibid.

163 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1125b.

164 Ibid.

165 Ibid.

166 Ibid.

justice. We understand, then, that Achilles *mēnis* and *philotēs* are not two conflicting forces; they are the opposite sides of the same grading scale.

It is worth briefly revisiting Achilles' withdrawal in Book 1, following Agamemnon's dishonourable actions. He is confident that someday the Achaeans "will come to repent" of their injustice to conform to the decisions of the king;[167] they will be "hard-pressed and desperate / but helpless, as under Hector's hand so many / are falling dead."[168] When Achilles wishes Zeus "to let the Trojans / drive the Greeks to the ships' sterns and the sea,"[169] he desires to see his comrades punished, so that they "will resent their king" recognising their injustice;[170] the "Greek chiefs" would "crouch at [his] knees, / begging" for his return.[171] This is exactly how the story unfolded: in light of heavy losses, Agamemnon sends Phoinix, Ajax, and Odysseus to persuade Achilles to return. Phoinix finds no fault in his anger. However, he advises Achilles to let go of his *mēnis* by telling the story of Meleagros, who also withdrew from battle in anger, only to return when his wife implored and reminded him of "how much / horror there is when warriors take a city," as "they slaughter the men" and "burn the buildings down." [172] Phoinix appeals to their personal and communal bonds: for, like Ajax and Odysseus, he shares a close bond with Achilles. Thus, the embassy does not present itself as a messenger of Agamemnon; the three Achaians invoke their friendship.[173] Finally, Odysseus conveys to Achilles Agamemnon's offer of compensation:

> ten talents of gold, seven new tripods,
> twenty burnished kettles, a dozen horses
> bred for racing [...]
> lands or lustrous objects made of coveted gold [...]
> seven skilled women
> from Lesbos.[174]

[167] Ahrensdorf, *Homer on the Gods and Human Virtue*, 145.

[168] Homer, *The Iliad* 1.241-3.

[169] Ibid., 408-409.

[170] Homer, *The Iliad* 1.410.

[171] Homer, *The Iliad* 9.609-10.

[172] Ibid., 591-593.

[173] Schein, 112-113, 115.

[174] Homer, *The Iliad* 9.264-271.

And Phoinix reminds him that Meleagros "saved his people without recompense,"[175] while Achilles is offered abundant wealth and honor by the king. Yet the warrior remains unmoved.[176] Though the causes of this *mēnis* have been (seemingly) addressed, he does "not quiet the anger that still / consumes him."[177] He insists that he "will not consider fighting [the Trojans]," even when "Priam's battle-crazed son Hector / reaches the Myrmidon vessels and camps," and burns the Achaean ships, slaughtering every Greek in his path.[178] Only when the Trojans near Achilles' "lodge and unburnt crafts" would he "stop Hector, however hard he fights."[179] But why does our hero remain angry even after his honor is seemingly restored? Does this not suggest that he is, indeed, possessed by the savage spirit of *orgilotēs*? As we read in Book 1, Achilles

> never received a prize like yours when we
> attacked one of the towns neighboring Troy.
> Even though all the hard, riskiest fighting
> fell on my hands, when time came to divide,
> your share was greater by far, and very little
> wound up at the ships where I lay, war-weary.[180]

Ahrensdorf contends that Achilles' *mēnis* arises not solely from Agamemnon's threat to take his prize, but more fundamentally from the king's unjust nine-year reign,[181] which lacks the credentials to deliver justice.[182] More to the point, in the Homeric world, justice (*themis*) does not reside with the leader's prerogative,[183] while public wisdom constitutes its vital guardian. Hence, when the *basileus* is unable to separate his private desires from public claims, considering justice an issue of his own arbitrary and unchecked prerogatives,[184] he enacts a form of oppressive, despotic, and unjust rule; for "[t]he voice of the

[175] Ibid., 599.

[176] Ibid., 612.

[177] Ibid., 678-679.

[178] Ibid., 653.

[179] Ibid., 654-655.

[180] Homer, *The Iliad* 1.163-168.

[181] Ahrensdorf, *Homer on the Gods and Human Virtue*, 138.

[182] Hammer, *Homer and Political Thought*, 24.

[183] Ibid., 24-25.

[184] Ibid.

people was the supreme law for *basileus* and *boule*."[185] In this context, Agamemnon is judged as being selfish, "vindictive ... and [a] devouring" usurper;[186] he profits greatly from the war, claiming the lion's share while Achilles and the Achaians for almost nine years "in a noble spirit of generosity" were risking their lives on a daily basis, only "to gratify Agamemnon and to win honor [*kleos*] for him."[187] Thus, Agamemnon's rule was so selfish and unrighteous that Achilles finds it "unreasonable for any of the Achaians to obey him."[188] From this, it follows that the warrior's wrath on Agamemnon's rule is not solely directed against the *basileus* himself; he "implicitly criticizes the Achaians for acquiescing in the foolish and unjust rule of Agamemnon."[189] Moreover, the Achaians' attempts to convince Achilles to return to the battlefield through promises of abundant wealth and honor only exacerbate his sense of alienation; the warrior perceives himself not as a respected companion in arms; rather, he is a mere instrument in their "fruitless war." However, Achilles loves "the Greeks ... more than any."[190] Despite nine years of toil and sacrifice met only with ingratitude, disrespect, and humiliation,[191] he refuses to abandon the Achaians, sailing back home; this is because he "cares" about his compatriots.[192]

In other words, Achilles wants to hold the Achaians accountable for their unjust choices to prolong a war that only serves Agamemnon's ambitions. His love for them manifests in a yearning for collective repentance, directed not only towards him as a person of value; his "harsh and destructive anger," Ahrensdorf claimed, "is a sign of his love, his desire that others be good, good for him but also good for themselves."[193] Achilles wants the Achaians not only to understand the

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[185] Abraham Feldman, "Homer and Democracy," *The Classical Journal* 42, no. 8 (1952): 341. For further discussion of Homer and democracy, one may consult the following works: Lewis Morgan, *Ancient Society* (MacMillan and Co.,1877), which argues that Homer's epic poems emphasize popular participation in political decision-making through public assemblies; Hammer, *The Iliad as Politics*; Dean Hammer, "Homer, Tyranny, and Democracy," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 39, no.4 (1998): 331-360; Theodosiadis, *The Flame and the Lyre*, 97-106.

[186] Hammer, *Homer and Political Thought*, 24; cf. Homer, *The Iliad* 1.150.

[187] Ahrensdorf, *Homer on the Gods and Human Virtue*, 138; cf. Schein, 102. As recounted by Homer, "I have little to show for all my struggles, / often risking my life to wage fruitless war" (Homer, *Iliad* 9.321-322).

[188] Ahrensdorf, *Homer on the Gods and Human Virtue*, 138.

[189] Ibid., 139.

[190] Homer, *The Iliad* 9.521-522; cf. Ahrensdorf, *Homer and The Tradition of Political Philosophy*, 85.

[191] Homer, *The Iliad* 1.162, 168; cf. Ahrensdorf, *Homer on the Gods and Human Virtue*, 140.

[192] Ahrensdorf, *Homer and The Tradition of Political Philosophy*, 91.

[193] Ahrensdorf, *Homer on the Gods and Human Virtue*, 98.

importance of his virtues; "[h]e wants genuine honor, a genuine recognition of his excellence from men who are capable of genuinely recognising excellence."[194] We could contrast this expression of *thymos* with Ruderman's depiction of Odysseus' wrath. While Teiresias urges him to "win his soul" by restraining his *thymos*,[195] Odysseus shows no mercy upon his return to Ithaca, slaughtering the suitors. For this reason, Odysseus fails to "win his own soul" from the *thymos* that directs him into violent battles, through which he may win fame, "but only at the cost of derailing his quest for enlightenment."[196] Accordingly, it is Odysseus' *thymos* that reflects the spirit of *orgilotēs*, whereas Achilles' *mēnis* is better understood as an expression of *philotēs*.

Nonetheless, how does Achilles' deep care for the Achaians, rooted in his desire for their moral improvement, reconcile with the consequences of his *mēnis*, which sent "uncounted hosts of his own comrades to death" merely "to prove what folly it was for Agamemnon to belittle him in the assembly of his peers?"[197] Let us consider Ruderman's view of *thymos* as a vice that elevates lesser pleasures and, more seriously, the pleasure of indignation, "the most tempting pleasure,"[198] which frequently gives rise to *hubris* and moral transgression. As discussed earlier, *thymos* prompts persons to insist on their worth and dignity by bestowing blind faith in unreliable divine sources, expecting retribution for all wrongdoers who escape earthly punishment.[199] From this, it follows that even if *thymos* is not motivated by selfishness, even if anger is triggered by a spirit of love and care (as in Achilles' case), its resulting expression may prompt irrational actions that yield catastrophic outcomes. Therefore, if we consider the contribution of Homeric gods to mortal suffering and Ruderman's argument that humans should avoid indulging their *thymos* by placing blind faith in divine retribution, we may conclude that Achilles' *mēnis*, though rooted in love and *philotēs*, was the primary cause of the "uncounted" losses of his comrades. However, in Book 1, we do not see Thetis and Achilles pleading for the destruction of the Achaians; the widespread death and devastation we see are exclusively decreed by Zeus himself. Certainly, the father's actions were the direct response to Achilles' call for ret-

[194] Ibid., 98.

[195] Ruderman, 155.

[196] Ibid., 156.

[197] Clarke, 74.

[198] Ruderman, 147.

[199] Ibid, 154-155.

ribution, incited by his *mēnis*. But can we attribute the warrior's trust in the "unreliable" divine providence solely to his *thymos*; this would, certainly, be too far a stretch; for such a trust was mainly driven by his powerlessness as a mortal facing fate.[200] Indeed, when addressing Thetis, he uses the following words:

> Mother, since you gave me only a brief life,
> the Olympian ought to favor and honor me,
> high-thundering Zeus, but now he does not.
> Atreus' son, powerful Agamemnon,
> has shamed me by making my woman his own.[201]

And when Thetis approaches Zeus, she only begs him to "Give Troy the upper hand until the Greeks / grow desperate and exalt my son Achilles!"[202] Achilles seeks divine intervention because he is born *minithadios per eonta* ("μινυνθάδιόν περ ἐόντα"), namely, "with a brief life."[203] This awareness leads him to assume that Zeus has the *ophelen* (ὄφελλεν), or the *chreos*, to rectify an injustice inflicted upon him.

Achilles' trust in divine providence, though ultimately misplaced, does not diminish his moral integrity. His decision to speak out and help the Achaeans out of *chreos* and love is well recorded in the poem. In fact, when the Achaians had to face the destructive wrath of the god Apollo, it was Achilles who alone combined "prudence and devotion to themselves with the necessary courage" and intervened to save them from destruction "through his speeches," while neither Nestor nor Odysseus spoke up, "evidently fearing, as the prophet Calchas fears, the anger of their hubristic king Agamemnon."[204] Achilles, "spent as many days in bloody strife," laying waste "a dozen cities / near Troy, another eleven on foot," and seizing "fabulous treasure," bringing it "all back here to Agamemnon," while "Atrides, who waited safely near his ships [...] kept most himself and shared very little."[205] Thus, Achilles' speech-

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[200] Human frailty and powerlessness, especially in the context of mortality, rather than *thymos*, is the primary motivation of trust in divine providence, Clay also argued by elaborating on *The Odyssey* (*The Wrath of Athena*, 238). Homer, *The Iliad* 1.352-356.

[201] Ibid.,

[202] Ibid., 509-10.

[203] According to Achilles: "[m]other, since you gave me only a brief life / the Olympian ought to favor and honor me / high-thundering Zeus, but now he does not. / Atreus' son, powerful Agamemnon, / has shamed me by making my woman his own." (Homer, *The Iliad* 1.352-356).

[204] Ahrensdorf, *Homer and The Tradition of Political Philosophy*, 90; cf. Schein, 99.

[205] Homer, *The Iliad* 9.325-333.

es reflect "the spirit of duty" and devotion, the spirit of *chreos* (in my terms) "to the well-being of the Achaians."[206]

However, the Achilles we see after the death of his close friend, Patroclus, is markedly transformed; he is no longer a man who simply expresses his *thymos* in the face of collective disrespect. *Orgilotēs* entirely possesses him.[207] This vengeful passion (*epithymetikon*), driven by a ruthless impulse to transgress moral boundaries (by killing and destroying without restraint or a sense of remorse), does not invoke any divine promises of justice and retribution. We can see in Book 21 that Achilles' "thoughtful compassion" and "friendly affection," as depicted through his love for Patroclus, have given way to a "savage fury,"[208] which is not fueled by the gods; it arises from within himself. As we read, mighty Achilles "lifted and poised his long spear" while Lycaon, the son of Priam,

> grabbed at his knees
> and crouched so the spear flew by to hit the ground
> where it stood upright, still craving human flesh.
> One of Lycaon's hands clasped Achilles's legs,
> the other clenched the spear and would not let go.[209]

Lycaon, powerless and disarmed, begs for his life: "Achilles, I beg you to pity me!"[210] Lycaon attempts to explain the reasons Achilles should spare his life:

> I face you as a suppliant, owed respect
> because you and I shared Demeter's grain
> the day you seized me in the orchard rows,
> then took me far from father and friends to sell,
> in Lemnos, my price a hundred oxen's worth.
> I bought freedom for three times that, and this day 80
> is only the twelfth since I returned home,
> weary from trials.[211]

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[206] Ahrensdorf, *Homer and The Tradition of Political Philosophy*, 90.

[207] In Ahrensdorf's words, "[t]he Achilles we see after the death of Patroclus is a man out of balance, shifting suddenly between terrible grief and friendly affection, and between savage fury and thoughtful compassion." (Ahrensdorf, *Homer on the Gods and Human Virtue*, 179); cf. Schein, 98-99.

[208] Ahrensdorf, *Homer on the Gods and Human Virtue*, 179.

[209] Homer, *The Iliad,* Book 21, 66-72.

[210] Ibid., 73.

[211] Ibid., 75-80.

Thereupon, Homer attempts to draw his reader's attention to Lycaon's distress: "Now you have me again. / Such is my dismal fate."[212] Priam's son, powerless, disarmed, and wounded, knows that his death is imminent: "Lycaon listened and knew he was doomed."[213] In Book 23, he kills Hector and defiles his corpse before the eyes of his grieving parents.[214] The poet depicts his "extreme savagery and utter inhumanity" when he kills angrily twelve Trojan youths on Patroclus' tomb,[215] "slaughter[ing] them, brutal intent in his heart."[216] Indeed, in these passages, Achilles "has virtually ceased to be human both physically and ethically; he has become a force of sheer destructive energy, annihilating whatever gets in his way."[217]

Ahrensdorf's account of Odysseus shares much in common with this frenzied image of Achilles; the Odysseus we see in Book 22 of *The Odyssey* 22 is not the *polymēchanos* and *polyphros* Odysseus of the Thrinakian episode, nor the "the most sensible among the mortals" ("νόον ἐστὶ βροτῶν"), for whom Zeus was proud;[218] he is *orgilos,* "possessed by a blind fury," to use Ahrensdorf's words, and commits *hubris.*[219] As the same author claimed, "[d]uring the battle with the suitors, Odysseus angrily cuts off the head of the prophet Leiodes" as he "rightly protests his innocence" and "[o]nce the suitors are slaughtered," the Ithacan king

> needlessly and, it would seem, imprudently, tortures and kills two children of a faithful servant whose family – not yet aware of the killing – later provides valuable support to him against the relatives of the suitors.[220]

But neither the *hubris* of Achilles in Book 21 nor Odysseus' savagery during the slaughter of the suitors is rooted in what Ruderman calls "mythological expectations" (implying blind faith in divine providence). Achilles' *orgilotēs,* his uncontrollable rage, emerges as a result of the physical loss of

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[212] Ibid., 81-83.

[213] Ibid., 114.

[214] Homer, *The Iliad* 22.395-474.

[215] Schein, 47.

[216] Homer, *The Iliad* 23.175-176.

[217] Schein, 145.

[218] Homer, *The Odyssey* 21.66-67.

[219] Ahrensdorf, *Homer on the Gods and Human Virtue*, 203.

[220] Ibid.

the foundations that guarantee human solidarity. In short, Patroclus, as a *philos,* was a vital part of Achilles' emotional and social world, which produced meaning and orientation. His death represents the destruction of the spirit of companionship, namely, of the very foundations of this common world of solidarity. This leaves Achilles desperate. When Thetis argued that "Zeus has done all / that you beseeched him for,"[221] the warrior responds with the following words: "The Olympian, / Mother, did answer that prayer, / but what is the use when my best friend is dead."[222] Achilles seems to have lost the will to live, and he is ashamed "to stay alive among men unless Hector / topples beneath my spear, losing his life / to pay for that of Menoetius' son Patroclus."[223] To escape the torment of distress, Achilles resorts to vengefulness; he makes Hector and the Trojans the immediate objects of his *orgilotēs*.

Turning to Empedocles' approach to love and *philotēs*,[224] we can shed light on the reasons this destruction of the "common world" incites violence and strife. For the Greek thinker, love and *philotēs* are beneficial powers; they are associated with Aphrodite,[225] who often appears under the name of Cypris. The goddess deals

> with the purification and rebirth of souls. [...] Cypris is proclaimed [as] the only deity to whom no bloody sacrifices are ever made, because, as Porphyry explains [...] when Love and a sense of kinship rule, no one kills anyone, considering all animals to be kin.[226]

To put it in my terms, when *philotēs* (or love) manifests as mutual respect, the impulse towards violence and aggression is tempered; for *philotēs* establishes the foundations for respect and recognition, understood in terms of obligation (or *chreos*). As discussed in the previous section, *chreos* powers practical wisdom, urging action in the pursuit of justice. Practical wisdom, it has been also argued, operates without a

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[221] Homer, *The Odyssey* 18.74-75.

[222] Ibid., 79-80.

[223] Ibid., 91-93.

[224] For a detailed account of *philotēs* see Željko Kaluđerović, "Empedocles on Ensouled Beings," *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 8, no. 1 (2023): 167-183, esp. 169ff.

[225] Afonasina, 153. Afonasina notes that Empedocles' depiction of Aphrodite differs substantially from that of Homer (ibid, 156); in Empedocles' poem, Aphrodite is not the goddess of deception we find in *The Iliad* (Book 3). Herein, the goddess displays love and god-craftsmanship; she is, also, involved in metal casting, pottery, and artwork.

[226] Afonasina, 154.

fixed *telos*; nothing here is taken as self-evident;[227] it considers different aspects of reality and encourages the constant re-evaluation and reassessment of opinions and moves.[228] In short, *chreos* paves the way for ethical deliberations; by seeing no fixed *telos* in meanings, identities, and intellectual constructs, it contributes to the gradual dismantling of rigid views. Thus, it bridges divides, making opposition (and often aggression) feel unnecessary. In this way, *chreos* urges us to recognise our interconnectedness with our peers and to consider our fellow citizens as integral parts of our own physical and spiritual existence. But as opposed to *philotēs*, Achilles' actions in Book 21 invoke a type of anger that divides and destroys. By losing the world within which he and Patroclus share a common *chreos* towards each other, receiving mutual respect and recognition, he ends up isolated; he has nobody to deliberate with, that is, to *think* and *talk with*; he has no companion to soothe his extreme *thymos* and feelings of desperation, from which he becomes entirely consumed.

However, if Achilles' wrath is at all tempered by the poem's conclusion, it might be due to the shared tears shed with Priam over their lost loved ones. In Book 24, we find the Achaian warrior deliberating with the Trojan king; and through such deliberations, their shared experiences are brought to light. This scene could be examined as a psycho-spiritual process: Achilles' and Priam's egos no longer strive to reassure their supremacy; both heroes come to terms with the limits of their mortal nature. By doing so, they tame their anger and desire for supremacy; and their egos are humbled through their encounter with the universal reality of human vulnerability, trauma, and suffering. Achilles sees in the distress of the king his own grief. And gradually, enmity gives way to mutual recognition. Thus, in Book 24, we see the two enemies forgiving each other. Achilles no more confronts Priam as an opponent but rather as a man who shares the same pain that fate often inflicts on all human beings equally. We also witness how "the purification and rebirth of souls" and, subsequently, the repeal of hatred are prompted by love (or *chreos*), which prevents utter destruction per Empedocles.[229] As it has already been claimed, the loss of friendship in earlier books represents the collapse of the structure that once gave Achilles meaning, affection, and orientation. In this moment of mutual forgiveness, that consoling order is recovered. Crucially, this reconciliation, "the noblest and most compassionate act in the poem,"

[227] Theodosiadis, *Ancient Greek Democracy*, 131.

[228] Ibid., 119.

[229] Afonasina, 154.

according to Ahrensdorf, "is entirely independent of the gods."[230] It is "an act of human rather than divine compassion, an act of human rather than divine providence."[231] Once again, the gods remain indifferent to the plights of the mortals. Yet their moral silence and absence make room for human will to become the sole protagonist in this profound moment of moral decency. But this will, we can see, does not merely depend on "enlightenment," namely, on rational thinking that (in Ruderman's view) must shepherd human conduct in the pursuit of moral decency.[232] This will to coexist, this will to love, which binds human relationships and shields our common world from the savagery of *hubris*, can often thrive on the stir of human emotions, awakened in the view of a shared suffering and vulnerability, of a shared recognition that human life is bound to death, error, and destruction.

V. Conclusion

Homer's epics are profoundly complex works; they are open to diverse philosophical interpretations. In this regard, questions about morality in the poems are subject to debate. This paper casts a critical eye on Ruderman's and Ahrensdorf's interpretations concerning the limitations of divine providence. Both scholars assume that, without absolute protection from human frailties and insecurities, mortals must rely solely on their own rational agency. Moreover, we have seen that while Moîra determines the outcome of many human endeavours, she does not decide the means through which the protagonists will reach their final (predetermined) destination. Thus, the protagonists are vulnerable to their own weaknesses (including *atasthaliai* and *hubris*), which often brings about devastation and ruin. Dobbs' arguments express a diametrically opposite view: rationality alone cannot safeguard moral decency. Instead, morality is a matter of reverence; the mortals must consider hardships sent by the gods as moments where their *thymos* is tested. They incite rebellious passions, directed against the gods themselves. However, the purpose of this suffering is "education." By learning how to control their *thymos*, humans "win their souls." Conversely, our analysis of Aristotle's account of practical wisdom urges caution in relying solely on rational action. In this context, Ruderman's and Ahrensdorf's interpretations merit careful and critical engagement; but so does Dobbs' emphasis on reverence. Thus, *chreos* and *philotēs* serve

[230] Ahrensdorf, *Homer and The Tradition of Political Philosophy*, 80.

[231] Ibid.

[232] Ruderman, 160; Ahrensdorf, *Homer and The Tradition of Political Philosophy*, 71, 73, 77, 80-81.

as essential complements to both rational action and reverence, helping us to secure more stable ethical foundations.

Certainly, no Homeric hero is free from error; as Ruderman argued, "Homer [...] does not simply celebrate Odysseus;"[233] in the same way, the poet does not idealise mighty Achilles. No human character in Homer's world is infallible. In section two, we have seen Odysseus exhibiting intelligence but also prudence and moral strength (incited by friendship/ *philotēs*) towards his shipmates. Conversely, section three has highlighted the selfish aspects of Odysseus' character. In the same way, Achilles expresses *philotēs* and love in one instance, but we also noticed that at times he demonstrates numerous weaknesses: we can find our hero blindly trusting the gods or crossing the line to an extreme type of anger (or *orgilotēs*). Homer's world cannot afford a vision of perfection; the poet ardently highlights the instability, fragility, and vulnerability of human life, exposed to all forms of calamities, caused by Moîra, divine capriciousness, or by flawed human judgments. This tragic vision permeates every aspect of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* and affirms a moral agency rooted in a clear recognition of love's significance.

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[233] Ruderman, 142.

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