Jake Sylvestre

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Summer Reading

Book 1 “The Quarrel of Achilles and Agamemnon”, Activity a:

The argument between Achilles and Agamemnon is a fierce argument that tears the two apart and almost does the same to the army. Although both men have satisfactory arguments Achilles’ argument is much better for the collective. Achilles’ argument shows that he has a greater concern than the army and the nation then himself. The first argument of the king is that his honor will be stripped along with his prize. If this man had the interest of the country in mind he would have no concern with his own honor. It would cause the country no harm if the king had one less woman. However when compared to the argument of Achilles the king’s argument is somewhat understandable being that he is the king and in societies past the king was the number one priority. For instance in egypt where people slaved away for the grave of a pharaoh. Achilles counter argument smashes any sympathy for the king. Achilles says that if Agamemnon were to give up his prize now he can indulge himself with many more prizes when the battle is won. Achilles also implies that if the plague continues the whole army will die out which means there will be no prize in the end, and the kings homeland will be undefended and Agamemnon's selfishness will leave nothing. Agamemnon comes back with a very logical counter argument which is, Achilles should not be able to indulge himself with briseis, his prize while Agamemnon is left in shame, and without his well deserved prize. So Achilles should give his prize over to the king, at which point Agamemnon will give the girl back to the priest. Achilles refusal to do so shows that he is as selfish as the king. However Achilles argument is still more logical considering that, Achilles not giving his price up has no apparent consequence, except the king being shamed. While Agamemnon's refusal to give up his prize causes his army to die and the other consequences listed above. In addition, it appears that Achilles is far more attached to briseis herself, than preserving his own honor. Despite the fact that this argument is won by Achilles, this chapter does say something about the importance of a mans honor. If agememon is willing to sit by while his army is assaulted with plague, just so that he may reserve a bit of his honor is astounding. He also risks losing the whole war all over one prize. Achilles however does the same. Agamemnon's counter argument to Achilles is if Achilles gives up the girl Agamemnon will give up his prize. However the selfishness of a hero once again prevents Achilles from compromising for the lives of the men. Although both men exercise a complete lack of regard for the lives of the men in the end Achilles argument proves more logical.

Another argument in The Iliad takes place in the trojan camp in book 18, on a night when each army is planning their next move. Polydamas makes the argument that they should retreat to the walls of troy. He gave several quite logical reasons for the retreat of the army. Firstly he said that the army would be tougher now, due to the fact that the fighting amongst the argives had stopped, and Achilles and Agamemnon were once again getting along. He also said that Patroclus death would make Achilles go mad and that Achilles would be much tougher to defeat. His speech was prolific scaring the men where it hurt. He spoke of Achilles taking the wives of the men and for the whole city. He spoke of all the riches troy would lose and how if they were in the walls of the city they would be safe. Hector, completely turned the table saying that the pleading of Polydamas was pathetic. He spoke of being crammed in the city, without their riches. Hector then generates a logical plan that would pin the argives to sea. This plan does nothing to sway the men. As they were all tired, and would want nothing more then to stay in the walls of the city. Even so Polydamas stops because Hector gave the order to do so.

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Book 18, “The Arming of Achilleus”, Activity b:

In societies past, whether it be the japanese and the samurais, the chinese and the Mongols, or as the Iliad illustrated the greeks, and the Achaeans or the Trojans: There is always honor in dying for causes of nobility . In fact the Iliad illustrates this perfectly through prolific images of men dying so they might win a war and if they succeeded come home to looted land, with few of the enemies riches, with the majority going to the king and Achilles. These people who were willing to give anything for country lived, according to Robert Fagles introduction 3,300 years ago in 1,300 b.c. So it must be asked is it still seen as heroic to knowingly confront death for a noble cause? In western society much like during the trojan war fighting for one’s country is seen as heroic. Today this is demonstrated by the public’s massive appreciation toward military members past and present through the use of discounts, whether it be a small corner store, or the world’s largest retailer walmart, military discounts are a great way of letting military personnel know they are appreciated, and appreciation defines who is a hero and who is not because if someone is appreciated then they’re cause is noble to someone. However what about people who risks their life for pointless things. For instance Shane from Buck Wild. Buck Wild was a show on mtv with millions of viewers every week. In this show, people who could be defined as hillbilly’s do pointless stunts with trucks, and other motor vehicles. During one of these such stunts, Shane a member of the cast died. Shane is remembered as being brave for having attempted such a stunt but not heroic. Heroism, is risking personal injury in order to help someone else or a group of other people. Bravery is doing something despite the fact that it may harm you. The answer to this question is no, because not all people who consciously confront death are heroic, and are brave. All heroes however are brave.

The definition of heroism has changed. In many ancient cultures including asia, europe and the americas, and in some modern cultures such as japanese and chinese, honor was the center of one’s life. Everything that a person did was to increase of prevent the decrease of one’s honor. Ultimately honor determines one’s legacy and whether that legacy will be a good one or a bad one which is why people were so focused on it . In modern times Hector’s sacrifice would’ve been heroic. Although his motives were not to help troy but for honor it wouldn’t have mattered. He would have been seen as the protector of troy.

Book 22, “The Death of Hector”, Book 24, “Achilles and Priam” :

Activity A:

The meeting of Priam and Achilles is a meeting that if not under the circumstances of grief should have been one of hatred and tension. Priam was the father to the man that killed Achilles best friend, and Achilles had slain the last of the heroic sons of Priam. These were men who were mortal enemies, and both men had so much blood of the others people on their hands. Instead of hatred, the meeting contained a mutual sense of empathy. However it is arguable whether it was mutual, sure Achilles felt empathy for Priam but perhaps priams empathy was a form of manipulation. Achilles could have easily killed priam, and he understood that so priam brought up topics that Achilles could relate to. That understanding that they had both lost someone dear to them caused them to openly weep together, something that was not socially acceptable of men during that time period.

Other than the loss of two men dear to them there was another important conversational component to the meeting. Achilles relationship with his father, and how that affected the interactions with the father of hector. The fathers of Hector, and Achilles were both in the same position. This position was that there was no one present to care for them “in their old age”. In the instance of Achilles. His absence caused his father potential harm. During the time period that the Illiad was written there were no nursing homes and no one to care for old people. Therefore it was the job of the children to care for their parents. However with Achilles at war, his father had no one to care for him. During the conversation this fact caused Achilles must distress, and guild causing a sense of empathy for priam. Priam, after the death of hector was in the same situation. There was no one to care for him, and withouts sons both of these men, these dedicated fathers that rose their children to be heroes would die a miserable, lonely death. This lead to an understanding of the grief of Priam on Achilles part.

The Iliad shows us how enemies can get along and how idiotic the reasons for fighting are. This war was caused merely by greed, not by any differences. Under other circumstance these two men could’ve been friends, but when faced with war they had nothing to offer each other but hate. The Iliad teaches us what war can do to people. Another example of the effects of war in the Iliad is the Argives and Chryses the priest of Apollo. Chryses was so desperate to get his daughter back that we was willing to kill thousands of people. Agamemnon was so desperate to keep his prize that he was willing to let his men die and let chryses suffer. Then there differences were set apart when Agamemnon gave chryses daughter back. They had a feast and prayed together, they shared a table. They laughed and they all had a good time. War brings out the humanistic side of things and exercises every side of the emotion.

*please note: In my edition of the Iliad, which is translated by Robert Fagles Hektor, is spelled Hector. I noticed variations of the name on the website. Also Achilleus is spelled Achilles.*