

Discuss extent to which various aspects of this are supported by observation; shape seems ok; fire rises so that seems to support the idea that the upper reaches of the heaven would be composed of fire; surrounding river? more difficult to support; maybe reports from sailors? • Ethical: Homer's Iliad and Odyssey were often viewed as providing the ideal moral code. The actions and characters of the heroes depicted therein were taken as models to emulate. The philosophers we deal with can all be expected to have been very familiar with Homer. – Aretê is emphasized. "Aretê" is often translated as "virtue," and there are points of contact. But it means more generally, "excellence," being the best X or being the best at -ing. So, traditional virtues like courage, justice, temperance, wisdom, were emphasized, but also physical strength, quickness of mind (including deviousness), etc.. – Getting what one wants (sometimes irrespective of how it affects other people) is taken as a sign of being a successful person. – Honor and esteem of one's fellow citizens highly valued. Material honors highly valued. Slightings were taken seriously and viewed as requiring response. – Reverence for the gods emphasized.

Major themes

1. Epistemology: philosophers seek to know and understand the world, but they ask questions about how we get knowledge, about what it is, nature of observation, perception, etc.
2. Metaphysics: inquire into the nature of reality and whether science is exhaustive.
3. Ethics: rational understanding of morality; principles to

guide human conduct and justify political structures. The nature of a person's good, and how it relates to others.

4. Theology: they want to understand the nature and origin of the world, and our place in it. This often involves engagement with and assessment of religious outlooks.

Trojan War

The Greeks do not have a bible. The closest they have is *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad*, written by Homer who lived around 750 BC in Ionia, Turkey. The poems are c.1200 BC. From Homer many Greeks drew central and influential, not always conscious, elements of their conception of the gods and the relation of gods to human beings, and they drew a moral outlook and ideal that remained influential long after it had been thoroughly criticized. The youth studied and memorized it, it was put on at games, etc. Sophocles, Aeschylus, and the playwrights wrote plays about the various characters, writing stories about what happened to them before, during, and after the war. Sculptors sculpted based on it. Poets and singers sung about them. Vases were covered with images, etc.

Thoughtful Greeks attack and challenge his views on morality and religion. To see what they thought they should challenge, we too should begin with Homer.

The *Illiad* begins:

Sing, Goddess, of the rage of Peleus' son Achilles, the accursed rage that brought great suffering to the Achaeans.

- It's set about 1200 BC, but Homer lived about 800 BC.
- Zeus asks Paris, a prince of Troy, to judge which of the goddesses, Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite is the fairest.
- He picks Aphrodite, and she makes Helen fall for Paris. Sometimes this is depicted as an abduction. Sometimes this is depicted as a seduction.
- Helen is married to Menelaus, the king of Sparta. Menelaus is the brother of Agamemnon, king of the Mycenaeans and head of a league of Achaeans.
- Achilles is the best of the Greeks. Agamemnon wants him and his Myrmidons, and he sends Odysseus to recruit him. He is a demi-God, son of a sea nymph Thetis.
- The Trojan war lasts ten years with heroes like Ajax and Achilles leading various excursions throughout Trojan lands. The last days of the war see a dramatic rift between Achilles and Agamemnon. During one of Achilles' outings, he captures several slaves, including Briseis. Agamemnon demands her for himself, which is a huge slight on Achilles' honor. After submitting to Agamemnon, Achilles refuses to fight and the withdrawal of his Myrmidon turns the war in Troy's favor.
- Achilles' life-long companion, Patroclus, disagrees with this decision. Their relationship is legendary. For some, it is the idea of a same-sex relationship. Alexander is said to have modeled his romantic relationship with Hephaestion on Achilles' and Patroclus. For others, it is a model of platonic friendship. The debate is torturous. Those who engage it assume that a strong distinction between romantic

and non-romantic love, but we don't have such an obvious distinction amongst the Greeks. Greeks at this stage seemed attracted to youth and beauty in both genders, and do not seem to have words to discriminate heterosexual and homosexual relationships.

- Patroclus dresses as Achilles, and he leads the Myrmidons to battle; they think he's Achilles. He's killed by Hector, a prince of Troy, brother of Priam.
- Achilles is inconsolable, and his rage drives him to destroy many Trojan warriors, demands a duel with Hector. Hector knows he will likely lose, and that doing so will put Troy at risk. But, with his family looking on, honor forces him to agree. He is killed, and Achilles drags his body around the battlefield, bringing his body back to his tent. This is hugely sacrilegious. Priam, Hector's father, sneaks into Achilles' camp and begs his son's return. Achilles demurs.
- The war ends with a trick. Odysseus builds a horse that allows lots of soldiers hide in it. They leave it on the battlefield, hide, and make it seem they have given up the field. The Trojans let them in, and the ten year war is brought to an end. The Greeks sack the city, destroy temples, etc. The Gods are furious and most of the Greeks never make it home. Some Trojans survive and legend has it that Aeneas, one survivor, leads the remainder to Italy and establishes Rome.
- *The Odyssey* describes Odysseus ten year journey home.

Homeric Ethics

Two main issues:

1. What is goodness, excellence, or virtue (three ways of rendering the Greek *areté*?) By this, we mean to ask what is the best life for a human to live. What kind of activities do they engage in? What kind of goods must one possess to live the best life?
2. What are our obligations to one another?

Characteristics of a good person

1. Birth: one must be born into a noble family to be good.
2. Wealth: one must be rich to be good.
3. Strength: one must be physically fit to be good.
4. Good in battle
5. Strength (Ajax)
6. Skill (Odysseus and Achilles)
7. Courage (Achilles, Hector)
8. Honors
9. Other people's good opinion
10. Wins trophies, gifts
11. Has many minion. The more he has the more powerful he is.
12. He is better than others.
13. Achilles father sent him "to always be the best and to excellent the others."

Which of these are within the agent's control? Which involve other people?

Achilles and Agamemnon quarrel, in the incident that begins the main action of the *Iliad*, because Agamemnon takes Briseis, who is Achilles' prize, and so slights Achilles' honour. Honour (*timé?*), as Homer conceives it, includes, primarily, other people's good opinion, and, secondarily, the material and social 'honours' that are both causes and effects of this good opinion. The hero is individualistic, in so far as he is concerned primarily with his own success and reputation; he does not aim primarily at some collective goal that includes the good of other people, or of a whole society. On the other hand, he is also other-directed, in so far as he must attend to the good opinion of the people who control the goods he aims at. Moreover, as Aristotle remarks, the hero must respect, not merely manipulate their opinion, since it defines the values that make his own aims worth while for him.

Obligation to Others

The hero is expected to have concern for others, but these concerns are instrumental and secondary to his primary concern, which consists in glory and honor. The basic rule is that one is expected to have concern for one's inferiors.

- Heroes are expected to have **some concern for others**:
 - Hector's concern for Andromache and Astyanax
 - Achilles' concern for Patroclus
 - Achilles and Agamemnon are blamed for neglecting the army's welfare
- Heroes are expected **not to be indifferent to suffering**:

- Achilles' treatment of Hector's corpse is clearly an outrage (the episode with Priam shows us that)
- Patroclus moves Achilles by appeal to the suffering of the army b/c of Achilles' absence
- Heroes are expected to have sympathy for those who are helpless.
- Those who fail to show such feelings are beasts, not human
- BUT, in spite of those expectations, **heroes are not praised for their concern for others**: Achilles is not less good because he acts selfishly. There is no suggestion that his reputation will suffer from his selfish actions.
- BUT if he had been enslaved, he would have lost his good reputation! **The day of enslavement, a person loses his virtue.**
- Priam is no less good for shirking his responsibilities.
- Others enhance the more important aspect of a hero's goodness, namely his reputation and material honor. They are clearly secondary to the big boldfaced ones above. A hero is never expected to sacrifice his reputation or material honors for others. That would diminish his honor, which would diminish his ability to protect and further his followers.
 - When Achilles returns to battle, he returns because as much because he failed to protect Patroclus and that made him look weak as because of love for Patroclus
 - Hector twice chooses his honor over protecting his

family and city

- He chooses to fight Achilles
- He admits that withdrawing in battle would serve Troy's interest better, but does not do so because of honor

Objections to Homeric Ethics

Homeric ethics seems reasonable:

- Wealth, honor, status, power are all achievable.
- It is clear and intelligible
- It is not clear that it is wrong
- It is not clear that our society today does not follow it in many ways
 - A somewhat clear example: the mafia
 - The idea of creating leaders. A system that values leadership wins only if there are leaders and followers, so it's premised on a world view that cannot equally distribute goods.

But there are some significant difficulties with Homeric ethics:

1. Very other dependent, i.e., honor requires an honor giver.
2. Because reputation and material honors are the prizes to be won, a person must adjust his goals to the opinions of others to win the prizes his society holds most important. There is paradoxically little room for one to hew one's own path of virtue.
3. More generally, each individual hero has an incentive to do

things that are bad for society as a whole.

4. A hero's inferiors can expect protection from a hero ONLY IF it does not conflict with that hero's honor.

5. The Homeric hero must choose between security and contentment or precarious honor, and Homer makes it clear that honor is the choice one should make.

6. In contrast, the gods possess honor securely and inalienable. They also possess security. They are the ideal resolution of the problem of a human hero: how to retain honor and yet be secure. But they do that thru the magic of immortality

7. All pretty bad for those inferior to the heroes.

8. But still, perhaps this sort of system is good for a society exposed to attacks from outside.

9. BUT the heroic code itself creates a situation where protection from such attacks is needed: it feeds upon itself
Why could not some other means of defense be found?

10. All this causes conflict because you have battles between heroes. Disorder and conflict. A system in which there are winners and losers, conflicts between winners.