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Proper Behavior in the Odyssey

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Homeric Greek has an extensive vocabulary of terms that reflect the characters' compliance with attitudes or behavior considered socially or personally acceptable by others.[1] This essay examines the use of seven of these terms, one adjective and six nouns, in order to learn what they can reveal about Homeric ideas of proper behavior. The words selected address this issue from a series of related but distinct perspectives. Some have been studied extensively before; others have not. I propose to show that they illustrate the need for good and proper behavior, "propriety," as viewed by society and the individuals involved. While propriety as such is never defined in the *Odyssey*, it is illustrated from a broad variety of perspectives by a large number of terms, each of which may reflect the general principle in varying degrees of intensity. Propriety represents a strong sense that, while success is always important, how something is done can also be of great significance. The examples used in this essay are all drawn from the *Odyssey*.[2] In the first section of the essay I will examine the basic ideas that are reflected by the selected terms, and in the second I will deal with selected aspects of the ways in which these terms are used.

[1] Proper behavior and manners are not coextensive, and this essay is not concerned with the latter. For a study of manners as such see I. M. Hohendahl-Zoetelief, *Manners in the Homeric Epic*, Mnemosyne Suppl. 63 (Leiden 1980). Hohendahl-Zoetelief's intention is to examine the views of A. Dihle, "Antike Höflichkeit und christliche Demut," *SIFC* 26 (1952) 169–90, H. Fraenkel, *Dichtung und Philosophie des frühen Griechentums*[2] (Munich 1962) 92 and H. Strassburger, "Der soziologische Aspekt der homerischen Epen," *Gymnasium* 60 (1953) 97–114, that the Homeric heroes knew and abided by fixed social rules. M. W. Edwards, *Homer: The Poet of the Iliad* (Baltimore and London 1987) 152–54, offers some excellent remarks on the role of proper behavior in the *Iliad*.

All references to the *Odyssey* will be by the book and line number(s) alone.

[2] These terms occur with greater frequency and variety in the *Odyssey* than the *Iliad*. I concur with the view that the *Odyssey* reflects a "later" or "more advanced" state of moral consciousness, a perspective that has been a commonplace in Homeric criticism since antiquity; see J. S. Clay, *The Wrath of Athena* (Princeton 1983) 215–16 and W. Kullman, "Gods and Men in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*," *HSCP* 89 (1985) 1–23.

The first term to be considered is *aeikes*, which appears 27 times in the *Odyssey*. Usage throughout the epic makes it clear this adjective is a very potent term to describe departures from acceptable behavior. The strongest use of the word comes not from the *Odyssey* but the *Iliad* where the theme of improper behavior is especially important in the final books and the phrase *aeikea erga* is used to describe Achilles' mutilation of Hector's body (*Il.* 22. 395, 23. 34). The most frequent uses in the *Odyssey* are with *potmos* (e.g. 2. 250, 4. 339–40, 22. 317 = 416) to describe an inappropriate or unseemly death, with *ergon* to characterize an act (3. 265, 11. 429, 16. 107), and even to depict Odysseus' ragged wallet (13. 437, 17. 197, 18. 108).[3] The range of the other appearances is broad. In 4. 533 it describes Aegisthus' plots against Agamemnon, in 20. 394 the Suitors' designs, and in 22. 432 the behavior of the faithless maidservants. In Nestor's description of Clytaemnestra before Aegisthus' seduction of her (3. 265–66) there is a strong contrast made between an improper act and good sense; in this passage proper behavior is depicted as knowing what to do and what not to do. The range of these appearances of *aeikes* to characterize acts, individuals, and situations is considerable, but, even though the adjective appears in a broad variety of contexts, the term consistently depicts strong disapproval with an act or how it is performed.

The next two examples I have selected are *aidos* and *nemesis*. The basic ideas conveyed by these terms were well summarized by Gilbert Murray when he stated: "Aidos is what you feel about an act of your own. Nemesis is what you feel for an act of another."[4] The two terms are complementary. *Aidos* and the other terms derived from this root imply a sense of shame and an awareness of the demands of the social system upon the individual to perform.[5] The term appears in a broad range of contexts in the epic. It is often seen as emblematic of social restraint or good manners (3. 14; cf. 3. 22–24, 8. 324, 14. 505–06). An interesting play upon the idea of *aidos* as social restraint, manners, or even a virtue of the upper

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[3] The use of the adjective to describe Odysseus' wallet is perhaps the most peculiar. In all probability it is used to convey both a sense of the wallet's wretched physical condition and to signal how Odysseus' disguise and squalor are completely out of line with his proper position.

[4] G. Murray, *The Rise of the Greek Epic*[4] (Oxford 1934) 83. On the two concepts see also: C. E. F. von Erffa, AIΔΩΣ *und verwandte Begriffe in ihrer Entwicklung von Homer bis Demokrit*, Philologus Suppl. 30. 2 (1937) Chap. I; J. Ferguson, *Moral Values in the Ancient World* (New York 1979); J. M. Redfield, *Nature and Culture in the Iliad* (Chicago and London 1975); M. Scott, "Aidos and Nemesis," *AC* 23 (1980) 13–35; B. Snell, *Lexikon des frühgriechischen Epos* (Göttingen 1955–) *s.v.* αἰδώς; W. J. Verdenius, "AIΔΩΣ bei Homer," *Mnemosyne* 12 (1944) 47–60. These studies bring out the close relationship of *aidos* and *nemesis*. Redfield 115–19 offers an excellent short discussion of the importance of *aidos* in Homer. One important quality of *aidos* is that it is externally oriented and directed by the individual's response to social situations and the opinions of others; it is *not*, in other words, what we might term "conscience."

[5] This is nowhere more poignantly illustrated in the epics than in Hector's refusal to withdraw into the walls, *Il.* 22. 104–15, which offer a moving echo of 6. 442.

classes is found when Telemachus tells Odysseus to beg from the Suitors because *"aidos* for a man in need is not good" (17. 347; cf. 17. 352). My final example comes from Odysseus' outburst of 20. 169–71 in which he forcefully comments on how the Suitors' execrable behavior can be explained by their lack of *aidos*. The frequent appearances of this term illustrate one of the most significant ways in which society's call upon the individual is expressed.

While there are few appearances of *nemesis* (1. 350, 2. 136–37, 20. 330, and 22. 40), they are significant in the way that they complement *aidos. Nemesis* is directed outward and conveys a sense of how an individual feels about an act of another.[6] In its simplest form *nemesis* conveys a sense of moral indignation. It reflects the moral and emotional sensitivity of the individuals who experience this sensation. The primary sense of *nemesis* is one of resentment at someone else's attitude or failure to perform worthily. The language of *nemesis* describes one of the ways the dictates of *aidos* are carried out. And, while *aidos* and *nemesis* also reflect what Adkins has termed the competitive values, they primarily mirror standards that are commonly accepted and shared by most men.[7]

Atasthalia and the parallel verb and adjective, *atasthallo* and *atasthalos*, are much more common. They have often been translated by such expressions as "presumptuous sin," "to be reckless," "wicked" and so have been given an undeserved moral stance that is more characteristic of later eras than that of Homer. Usage in the epics make it clear that the terms imply not only an attitude of wanton disregard or fixation implied by *ate* but also a certain exuberance suggested by *thallo*.[8] *Atasthalia* is often used to

[6] As R. Lattimore, *Story Patterns in Greek Tragedy* (London 1964) 24, observed, ". . . nemesis means, not an action or activity, or an agency, but a feeling of shock, outrage, indignation at *hybris* or any other misbehavior" (see also Scott [above, note 4] 25–27). There are a number of terms that reflect sentiments parallel to *nemesis*; see J. P. Holoka, "Looking Darkly (ΥΠΟΔΡΑ ΙΔΩΝ): Reflections on Status and Decorum in Homer," *TAPA* 113 (1983) 1–16. Holoka offers a very detailed examination of how the phrase reflects someone's (usually a superior's) indignation at being treated indecorously. Holoka shows how the expression conveys a sense of umbrage at a violation of the rules which govern the interactions at all levels of society.

[7] On the distinction between competitive and cooperative values see A. W. H. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility* (Oxford 1960) Chaps. I–III and "'Honour' and 'Punishment' in the Homeric Poems," *BICS* 7 (1960) 23–32. These works offer a convenient epitome of Adkins' position; see also A. A. Long's criticism of Adkins' work, "Morals and Values in Homer," *JHS* 90 (1970) 121–39, and the latter's response, "Homeric Values and Homeric Society," *JHS* 91 (1971) 1–14. C. J. Rowe, "The Nature of Homeric Morality," in *Approaches to Homer*, ed. C. A. Rubino and C. W. Shelmerdine (Austin, TX 1983) 248–75, provides a thorough discussion of both Adkins' and Long's positions.

[8] On the concept of *ate* in Homer see: J. M. Bremer, *Hamartia* (Amsterdam 1969) 99–112; E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1951) Chap. I; R. E. Doyle, S.J., "ATH: *Its Use and Meaning* (New York 1984) 1–22; H. J. Mette, *Lexikon des frühgriechischen Epos* (above, note 4) *s.v.* ἄατος; W. F. Wyatt, Jr., "Homeric "ATH," *AJP* 103 (1982) 247–76. See also R. D. Dawe, "Some Reflections on Ate and Hamartia," *HSCP* 72 (1967) 89–123.

describe the folly or the untoward conduct of the Suitors as individuals and as a group (e.g. 21. 146–47, 22. 317 [= 416], 23. 67, and 24. 458). Unlike Odysseus and Telemachus, who have a very keen sense of social order, the Suitors arrogantly flaunt the "normal" rules and expectations of society in the belief they can have the world on their own terms. Much the same attitude is displayed by Odysseus' *hetairoi* and mirrored in Zeus' complaints about mankind in general and Aegisthus in particular (1. 33–37). At the same time these and other passages imply the Suitors' disregard of personal responsibility as well. This creates in turn a sense of a causal link between ignorance and misconduct that parallels the one found in the uses of *aeikes*. By the use of these and other terms the poet makes it clear that, while an individual may be ignorant of the causes behind certain acts, he is none the less responsible for them.

The use of *hybris* in the *Odyssey* is simple and direct. It refers to violent physical behavior in a number of different forms. By far the most frequent uses of *hybris* are to describe the activities of the Suitors and their almost total disregard for proper behavior and the rights of Odysseus' house (e.g. 1. 368, 16. 86, and 410).[9] In the last two passages the noun is accentuated by the adjectives *hyperbios* and *atasthalos* which intensify and characterize the action in even more graphic detail. The adjective *hybristes* appears three times in the lines:

> And are they violent (*hybristes*) and wild and not "just" or are they friendly to strangers and do they have a god-fearing mind? (6. 120–21 = 9. 175–76 = 13. 201–02)

In these lines *hybristes* is paired with "wild" and opposed to "just," "hospitable," and "god-fearing." The lines make it clear that, even though a

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Although the derivation has been doubted (e.g. by W. J. Verdenius, *A Commentary on Hesiod Works and Days 1–382*, Mnemosyne Suppl. 86 [Leiden 1985] *ad* 134), usage seems to suggest that the terms are derived from a combination of *ate* and *thallo*. The idea of extravagant behavior also helps us understand the parallel concept of *hybris*; see A. Michelini, "ΥΒΡΙΣ and Plants," *HSCP* 82 (1978) 35–44. The passages in which *atasthalia* appear suggest, but do not demonstrate, a connection between *atasthalia* and ignorance.

[9] Many studies have examined the role of *hybris* in Greek tragedy and the concept has been extensively scrutinized in histories of Greek religion. My views have been shaped by the following: E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (previous note) Chap. II; C. Del Grande, *Hybris* (Naples 1947); N. R. E. Fisher, "*Hybris* and Dishonor," *G&R* 23 (1976) 14–31 and 26 (1979) 32–49; J. T. Hooker, "The Original Meaning of ὕβρις," *Archiv für Begriffgeschichte* 19 (1975) 235–37; Lattimore (above, note 6) 23–27; D. M. MacDowell, "Hybris in Athens," *G&R* 23 (1976) 14–31; Michelini (previous note); Murray (above, note 4) 326–29; H. North, *Sophrosyne* (Ithaca 1966) Chap. I; L. Pearson, *Popular Ethics in Ancient Greece* (Stanford 1962) Chap. II; and T. G. Rosenmeyer, "Hubris and the Greeks" in *Hubris, Man and Education* (Bellingham, WA 1959) 19–30.

notion of "just" may not have been well defined, an antithesis of the concepts of the just and violence may have been significant from an early date.[10]

The final two terms, *moira* and *themis*, are much more positive in nature. *Moira* expresses a broad variety of ideas about order including lot, portion, procedure, fate (in a very loose sense), and very frequently, in both epics, death.[11] Adkins underscores an important characteristic of *moira* when he describes it as acting in accord with one's social position and status in society.[12] Thus, according to Adkins, Homeric man sees a close relationship between an individual's social position and how he is expected to behave. In this way *moira* becomes an embodiment of what is right and proper and these parameters are determined by an individual's social status. This idea can be clearly illustrated by the use of the expression *kata moiran* in a broad variety of contexts throughout the epic. These include the depictions of Polyphemus milking his goats (9. 245, 309, 342), the frequent descriptions of portions at meals as *moirai* (14. 448, 15. 140, 17. 258, the highly sarcastic remarks of Ktesippos 20. 293–95), and the frequent references to "correct" speech in a broad variety of social settings and contexts throughout the epic. The range as well as the variety of contexts in which the term figures make it clear that while "success" is a very important goal the manner in which it is achieved is also highly significant.

Themis is even more specific than *moira*. In Homer *themis* is a broad and diverse concept of order with constitutional as well as religious ramifications. Whereas *moira* sets limits to an individual in terms of his strength and position in society, *themis* is a representation of the social rules and categories within which the individual works. The appearances of the term in the *Odyssey* makes it clear that *themis* reflects the idea of order or principles of order.[13] In the personification of *themis* in 2. 68–69 there

[10] M. Gagarin, *Early Greek Law* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1986) Chap. II, stresses the importance of arbitration and the avoidance of violence in early Greek legal procedures. The question of justice (*dike*), its nature and role, is too complex to be dealt with in an essay of this length. From the extensive literature on the subject I found the following to be especially useful: M. I. Dickie, "*Dike* as a Moral Term in Homer and Hesiod," *CP* 73 (1978) 91–101; M. Gagarin (above) and "*Dike* in Archaic Greek Thought," *CP* 69 (1974) 186–97; E. A. Havelock, "*Dikaiosyne*," *Phoenix* 23 (1969) 49–70; K. Latte, "Der Rechtsgedanke im archaischen Griechentum," *A&A* 2 (1946) 63–76; H. Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1971); M. Ostwald, "Ancient Greek Ideas of Law," *Dictionary of the History of Ideas* (New York 1973) II 673–85. A convenient short discussion of the major issues involved is offered by J. E. Rexine, "The Nature and Meaning of Justice in Homer," *CB* 54 (1977) 1–6.

[11] *Moira* is frequently commented on in conjunction with other concepts noted before (e.g. Dodds [above, note 8] Chap. I, and Ferguson [above, note 4] Chaps. I–II); see also B. C. Dietrich, *Death, Fate and the Gods* (London 1965) and W. C. Greene's classic study, *Moira: Fate, Good, and Evil in Greek Thought* (Cambridge, MA 1944).

[12] Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility* (above, note 7) 17–23.

[13] On *themis* see R. Hirzel, *Themis Dike und Verwandtes* (Leipzig 1907) and M. Ostwald (above, note 10).

can be seen the beginnings of the process of abstraction that were to culminate in the concept of *themis* as "law" or "right." *Themis* is, in some ways, the mark of civilized society. Stanford argues that *themis* should be considered a personification of that part of primitive justice that is concerned with precedents; it is the established or right way of doing things (e.g. 3. 45, 187).[14] In many passages the term is equivalent to "right," "fitting," and "proper" procedures (e.g. 10. 73, 11. 451, 14. 56–57, 430). This emphasis on what are commonly accepted practices in society is even more apparent when the term appears in the plural. Commenting on the absence of civilization among the Cyclopes, Odysseus states (9. 112):

> For they have no councils where they make plans and no *themistes*.

Here *themistes* imply established procedures founded on earlier practices and judgments. *Themis* and *themistes* appear in a variety of contexts. Odysseus invokes *themis*, *aidos*, and Zeus *epitimetor* in his attempt to obtain guest-friendship at the close of his first speech to Polyphemus (9. 267–71).[15] Nestor says that he will tell Telemachus "as is *themis*" (3. 187) what he has learned about Odysseus since they parted at Troy, and in Agamemnon's poignant description of Odysseus' return he describes how Telemachus will embrace his father "as is *themis*" (11. 451).   In the final analysis, however, the evidence about *themis* is paradoxical for, while it is clearly an important term that reflects some of society's and the individual's most significant concerns, it is not a common term or a primary frame of reference by which the characters determine their action. In all likelihood the ambivalent status of *themis* points to the relative weakness of communal values when confronted with the demands imposed by the heroic individual.

The term that comes the closest to offering a definition of propriety is in the negative and that is *aeikes*, "unseemly." *Aeikes* is used in a broad range of contexts including a variety of departures from accepted behavior, from actions of Odysseus' faithless slave girls to the appearance of the ragged wallet he bears. The uses of *aeikes* suggest that propriety is most frequently seen as a check to excess rather than a positive inducement to good behavior. There is a much greater emphasis on what is not proper than on what is. Proper behavior is most frequently defined and illustrated from the negative. A substantial number of the most potent terms are in the negative, imply the negative, or concentrate on violations of accepted

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[14] See W. B. Stanford, *The Odyssey of Homer*, 2 vols. (London and New York 1954–55) on 2. 68 and Gagarin, *Early Greek Law* (above, note 10) Chap. II, on the importance of procedural law in Homer.

[15] The effect of the appeal is intensified by the group of terms implying proper behavior at the close of the speech and there is no small irony in light of Odysseus' own conduct earlier when he helped himself to the Cyclops' stores.

standards. It is important to recognize that it is the departures from rather than compliance with social and personal expectations that are the greatest concern to Homeric man.[16]

This does not mean that there are no goads to positive action: *aidos* and *nemesis* are powerful stimuli to proper behavior. Both reflect the demands of the social system on the individual to perform. *Aidos* illustrates the claims that an individual can place upon himself and *nemesis* how he can respond to the acts of another. Other terms characterize an act or attitude of a character in very specific ways. *Atasthalia* points to the almost mindless folly of the Suitors and the term brings out the link between their ignorance and misconduct (e.g. 1. 7–8, 34, 21. 146–47, 23. 67, 24. 458). Terms are often used in conjunction with one another for greater emphasis and to link the various ideas in different ways to one another. The implications of violence in *atasthalia* are quite explicit in *hybris*, which is used to describe the actions of the Suitors, their wanton behavior, and disregard of appropriate conduct. Descriptions of the Suitors using this term are important for the way in which they characterize the Suitors and cast doubt on their ability to perform in the "normal" heroic way. The final two terms considered, *moira* and *themis*, are much more positive in nature and express a sense of order in the life of an individual and society. *Moira* describes a broad sense of what is right and appropriate in a wide range of contexts. *Themis* is more abstract; it describes order, political order, procedure, and, as noted before, is an important antecedent to justice.

This examination of these terms is only a beginning; much more remains. There are many other terms and examples that should be considered. Verbs and adverbs as well as nouns and adjectives need careful scrutiny. A careful study of grammatical constructions and the formulaic qualities of the lines in which these terms appear needs to be made. Nevertheless there are some points that can be made on the basis of the preceding observations. The first is the appearance of "clusters" where three or more terms are concentrated in a few lines (e.g. 1. 227–29, 3. 205–07). Although clusters are relatively infrequent, they add an emphatic note. Their presence appears to be a very deliberate poetic act rather than a chance

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[16] In many respects social roles and responsibilities are epitomized by adherence to the practices of guest-friendship. Since antiquity commentators and critics have noted the importance of the theme and its close connection with proper behavior. M. I. Finley, *The World of Odysseus*[2] (London 1977) has shown with particular clarity the importance of this theme and his work remains the best guide to the subject. Meals are one of the most important settings for the display of appropriate behavior and it is not accidental that much of the major action in the *Odyssey* takes place at meals. As has been often noted, the conventions of guest-friendship are sometimes manipulated by hosts and guests to their own advantage and one index of the Suitors' or Polyphemus' depravity is the travesty they make of the normal rites of guest-friendship. The importance of these practices is also indicated by the manner in which they are parodied in the epic; see F. Williams, "Odysseus' Homecoming as a Parody of Homeric Formal Welcomes," *CW* 79 (1986) 395–97.

collocation of terms. The force of the individual terms may be strong, but the emphasis created by their juxtaposition is greater than the simple sum of their parts. The clusters are a very graphic device by which the poet underscores an element in the narrative. Another interesting phenomenon concerns the distribution of terms. The *Odyssey* is in this respect an "uneven" work; there are often extended gaps between appearances of a term even though situations occur where its use might seem entirely appropriate. There is virtually no term with which this phenomenon does not occur. To consider how many lines on an average separate appearances of a term can be very misleading. Three striking examples are the absence of *aeikes* from 4. 694 to 11. 429, of *atasthalos* from 8. 166 to 16. 86, and of *atasthalia* from 1. 34 to 10. 437. These gaps are striking and there seems to be no simple rationale that explains this phenomenon. Variety not consistency marks the language of the epic.

An examination of the repetition of individual terms, phrases, and lines suggests that the references to propriety had been part of the epic for some time. The language of propriety forms part of the formulae of the *Odyssey*. It is impossible to show that statements about proper behavior belong to any one stratum or social group of the epic. What, instead, is presented is a reflection of cultural principles that are important for all levels of society and the chaos that can result when they are challenged or disregarded. The characters, save for the Suitors and Polyphemus who interpret them solely according to their own interest, are aware of the demands of proper behavior and respond as well as circumstances allow.

Another significant feature of the epic's diction which sheds light on the concept of propriety concerns who uses the terms, the poet or his characters. While direct quotation or quotation of one character by another constitutes approximately two-thirds of the *Odyssey*, an even higher percentage of the more significant terms referring to propriety are spoken or quoted by the characters.[17] The figures for the seven words examined in this study are:

Term	Direct speech or quotation	Total number
aeikes	20	27
aidos	8	9
nemesis	4	4
atasthalia	8	9
hybris	11	14
moira	41	58
themis	12	12

What this table indicates is that, with the exception of *moira*, it is the characters and not the "invisible" poet who set the standards that shape the ideals and principles of the epic. There seem to be two closely related reasons for this habit of speech. The first is that this language most commonly occurs when there is a strong reaction to an action, situation, or another individual, and so it is natural for the characters to respond, and respond strongly. In this way the terms gain a greater potency from having been placed within the dialogue and in turn have greater weight in shaping the response of the audience to the poem. Secondly, because it is the characters and not the poet who employ more of the emphatic, "loaded" language, events and characters are given a greater immediacy than they might otherwise have possessed. There are, in effect, two languages in the epic, the restrained voice of the poet and the lively, vivid voices of the characters and it is the latter that prevail.

The strong concern for proper behavior that marks the *Odyssey* stems from the unsettled social and political conditions portrayed in the work as well as those of the eras of the epic's formation.[18] It is a world of lost and stolen children where piracy and brigandage are acceptable if not honored callings. The world of the *Odyssey* is one of change and uncertainty. There is a greater concern over class and distribution of wealth than in the *Iliad*. Finally, the environment of the *Odyssey* is a nervous one in which society is not sure whether or not violence is about to break out. There is little but brute force that can contain the individual who asserts himself and does not of his own volition acknowledge the rights of society. The emphasis on the active, competitive values makes violence a very real likelihood. As a result individuals and societies defend themselves with an elaborate series of social practices that are carefully fitted to personal as well as social circumstances. An awareness of propriety, fit and appropriate behavior, was at the core of these social conventions. Society depended on adherence to

[18] A good introduction to the complex question whether the epic reflects an actual historical period and, if so, which one is offered by the following studies: W. Donlan, "The Politics of Generosity in Homer," *Helios* 9 (1982) 1–5; M. I. Finley (above, note 16); J. Halverson, "Social Order in the *Odyssey*," *Hermes* 113 (1985) 129–45; "The Succession Issue in the *Odyssey*, *G&R* 33 (1986) 119–28; A. M. Snodgrass, "An Historical Homeric Society," *JHS* 94 (1974) 114–25.

these loosely interwoven conventions to survive. In the *Odyssey* the demands of proper behavior are acknowledged and supported on every social level from the loyal slaves Eumaios and Philoitios to King Alkinoos. The characters who subvert or pay the least attention to these fragile conventions pose the most danger. The threat they raise comes not just from their actions but also the challenge they pose against one of the few things that bind this society together. In the widest sense the best sign of a character's worth and merit is to be seen in his understanding of and adherence to his society's conventions. Achilles in the *Iliad* transcends the bonds and ties of his society; only at the end does he approach a fragile reconciliation with this world. The *Odyssey* begins with Odysseus set apart and ends with his full reintegration in society and the restoration of proper order on Ithaca. The epic is, in many respects, an account of the triumph of propriety.

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