

HOMER ON JUSTICE

The *Iliad* takes place in a pre-law society. Order and justice are maintained, not by legal courts and police, but by the careful instilling of virtues in the elite members of society. All Homer's soldiers, Greek and Trojan, have been taught from birth to avoid shame and blame (*aidos*, *nemesis*) and to practice right conduct and hospitality (*themis*, *xenia*). In 5.787 and 7.93, soldiers are "shamed" into remembering their lost courage. No *nemesis* if fight for Helen (3.156), but *nemesis* for Helen if she goes to bed of cowardly Paris (3.410) and for Achilles if he does not return to war after Agamemnon offers gifts (9.523). Thersites (2.211) lacks *themis*; no one pities him; he's an anti-hero: Esau/Holden Caulfield.

Xenia defines relationship between stronger/weaker party. In *Iliad* if suppliant appeals for mercy, you must take ransom and grant it. Agamemnon refuses *xenia* to Chryses (1.18); compounds it by stealing Briseis. Thetis supplicates Zeus on Achilles' behalf (1.500). Chaos ensues when Menelaus (6.45) & Achilles (21.70) refuse to grant *xenia* to defeated, supplicating soldier. Order is restored when Achilles shows *xenia* to Priam (24.476).

Odyssey takes place in a more ethical world where distinctions between good and evil are clearer. We feel remorse for Hector, not for suitors. Image of Zeus's 2 urns (*Iliad* 24.527) suggests gods are arbitrary. Zeus rejects this point of view in *Odyssey* 1.32: Aegisthus got what he deserved for killing Clytemnestra. To fit ethical world of *Odyssey*, Homer takes tragic tale of house of Atreus (Aeschylus's *Oresteia* includes taboos of cannibalism, human sacrifice, wife-killing-husband, and matricide) and turns it into a simple melodrama.

We can tell good/bad guys in *Odyssey* by who honors/violates *xenia*, which now focuses on guest/host relationship: when a stranger comes to your door, you must take him in and feed/clothe him *before* asking his name. Guest, on other hand, is obliged to treat host's property with respect, not overstay his welcome (see Genesis 19 and Hebrews 12:2). We know Telemachus is good guy because he shows *xenia* to disguised Athena (1.113). He further reveals his *xenia* by being good guest to Nestor and Menelaus. Suitors are bad guests who devour Penelope's home. Odysseus' men punished for stealing cattle of sun (1.7). Lotus Eaters and Calypso are bad hosts who detain their guests against their will.

Odysseus meets good hosts (Aeolus, who gives him bag of wind; Phaeacians, who feed him royally, then escort him back to Ithaca) and bad hosts (Polyphemus, who *first* asks their name then feeds *on* them; Circe, who turns men to swine). In cave of Polyphemus, Odysseus is bad guest, pays for it by inciting Cyclops' curse that causes all his troubles.

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