

Equal Honor and Future Glory: The Plan of Zeus in the *Iliad*

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THE OPENING LINES of the *Iliad* give two apparent definitions of the poem's plot: the *mēnis*, "wrath," of Achilles, which, in the first line, the narrator asks the Muse to sing, and the *Dios boulē*, "plan of Zeus," which we learn in the fifth line was being accomplished through the deaths of the many Achaeans who perished as a consequence of Achilles' wrath. Both of these rather abstract formulations appear to correspond to the same specific course of events, which is set in motion in the first book of the poem: the scheme devised by Achilles and Zeus, with Thetis as their intermediary, to avenge and repair Achilles' loss of honor at the hands of Agamemnon through Trojan success in the war. This scheme or plot (in a literal sense) among the principal divine and human characters thus appears to define the plot (in a literary sense) of the poem in which it is narrated.

Though this correspondence seems clear at the outset, it eventually disappears as the *Iliad* draws out its story beyond the evident completion of that scheme. The poem continues past the point when Agamemnon realizes his error and does everything in his power to appease Achilles; past the point when Achilles no longer feels any anger toward Agamemnon or inclination to stay out of the war; and past the point when the Trojans are succeeding in the war. Both the wrath of the central hero and the plotting of the supreme Olympian god turn out to have unforeseen dimensions that are not exhausted by the enactment of that limited scheme. The poem escapes the limits of that plot in another sense as well, in that it contains long stretches of narrative, principally battle narrative, that have little to do with the Achilles plot, in which Achilles is not so much significantly absent as completely out of the picture. As the expected boundaries of its action are repeatedly dissolved, the *Iliad* explores the forces that keep its narrative going. It reaches its own conclusion only after showing how, in a world characterized by heroic anger and the plotting of Zeus, closure is systematically deferred.

The expansiveness of the plan of Zeus, which the proliferating plot of the *Iliad* dramatizes, is also indicated by the way the expression *Dios boulē*

evokes a broader mythological context. A scholiast commenting on *Iliad* 1.5 connects the plan of Zeus with the entire Trojan War rather than with the single episode of Achilles' glorification at the Achaeans' expense.¹ He cites a tradition that the Trojan War, along with the other great legendary war, the Theban War, was part of a scheme devised by Zeus to relieve the earth of its burdensome excess population. This tradition was apparently found in the *Cypria*, the poem that related the outbreak of the war, and the scholiast quotes a passage of seven lines from the *Cypria*, which ends by characterizing the war with the same phrase through which the *Iliad* characterizes its own plot: *Dios d'eteleieto boulē*, "The plan of Zeus was being accomplished." This larger version of a plan of Zeus evidently provided the blueprint for the entire multipoem Trojan saga, which the *Cypria* initiated.²

Furthermore, as the scholium to *Iliad* 1 makes clear, the whole Trojan War should be understood as only one episode in Zeus's plan, which takes in the Theban War as well. And even this larger cosmic story encompassing both legendary wars, the story of Zeus's response to the earth's oppression by human beings, is itself only one episode in an even larger plot, in which Zeus is always and everywhere engaged in archaic mythology, and which finally transcends all specific narratives: the plot of mortality. Zeus is the paramount representative of a form of divinity that is defined through the absence of mortality: the Homeric gods are *athanatoi*, "undying." Zeus constantly reasserts his nature and his power by assuring the existence for others of what he definitively lacks, repeatedly securing the mortality of mortals.

This ongoing project divides itself into a number of episodes, contained in a variety of narratives, all of which express the plotting of Zeus and tell the same underlying story: the birth of Athena, the abduction of Persephone, the contest of Zeus and Prometheus, the marriage of Peleus and

¹ This is Fragment 1 of the *Cypria*. See Davies 1988, 34–36.

² Since the *Cypria* was almost certainly later than the *Iliad*, one cannot assume, as the scholiast did, that the precise account of the origins of the Trojan War given there would have been current at the time when the *Iliad* was composed. On the other hand, the general notion that the Trojan War was planned by Zeus as a way of taking many human lives was clearly part of the larger epic tradition and would have been familiar to the *Iliad*'s original audience. A fragment of Hesiod's *Ehoëae* (fr. 204 M–W) portrays the war as Zeus's means of eliminating the entire race of the demi-gods. The proemlike summary of an alternative *Iliad* sung by Demodocus in *Odyssey* 8 describes a quarrel between Achilles and Odysseus and concludes: *tote gar rha kulindeto pēmatos archē / Trōsi te kai Danaōisi Dios megalou dia boulas* (*Od.* 8.81–82). This conception of the Trojan War has even deeper roots in ancient Near Eastern myths of the destruction of humanity by the gods. See Kirk 1972, 79; and, for a full discussion, Scodel 1982. Another scholium on *Il.* 1.5 makes it clear that it was already debated as early as the time of Aristarchus whether the *Dios boulē* alluded to there was the plan proposed by Thetis (Aristarchus's view) or something else. Erbse 1969, 10. For yet more possibilities, see Redfield 1979, 105–8.

Thetis.³ Archaic mythology responds to the human necessity of dying by treating it as a plot against humanity by a superior being. One mark of this sinister conception of death is that Zeus's plots not only impose death as an inevitable necessity, but intensify it, turning it into something actively sought for human beings in the form of violent death, early death, or death for the entire race.

As the master plot of archaic mythology, Zeus's imposition of death on mortals is retold numerous times. Zeus's rule is endless, and, correspondingly, there is no end to the human mortality that guarantees it. Thus the plan of Zeus is presented, in the phrase that surfaces to define the plots of both the *Iliad* and the *Cypria*, in the imperfect tense: *eteleieto*, "was being accomplished."

Yet, as a discrete narrative, each account of the accomplishment of Zeus's plan necessarily has a delimited shape and comes to some definable end. That end involves checks on Zeus's death-dealing power, which come through the assertion of those resources that allow humanity not to evade individual death, but to survive within the span of an individual lifetime and to continue as a race: technology, agriculture, sexual reproduction, and the capacity to appease the gods through sacrifice. The story of the separation of men and gods, beginning with the meal at Mecone, which is told in the *Theogony*, ends with humanity's new mortal condition mitigated by the availability of food and of fire, procured for humanity by Prometheus, and by the existence of women, although this final acquisition is presented not as a blessing from Prometheus, but as Zeus's conclusive act of malevolence. The *Hymn to Demeter* ends with death, initially imposed by Zeus in the form of Persephone's marriage to Hades, mitigated in a range of ways, all springing from the activities of Demeter: the existence of the seasons, which betoken both Persephone's periods away from the underworld and the possibility of agriculture; the fertility of the earth; the lasting fame of heroes like Demophoon; the easier version of death enjoyed by initiates into the Mysteries.

While it might seem at first, then, that these narratives move toward a defeat for Zeus and end with the limitation of his power, that is only

³ For language identifying these episodes as *boulai* of Zeus, see *Hymn. Hom.* 2.9, 30, 414 (Demeter); Hesiod *Op.* 71, 79, 99; Hesiod *Th.* 534; *Cypria* 1.7. Not only do all of these narratives express Zeus's plotting, but the phrase *Dios boulē* is conventionally used in early Greek epic to refer to the plot of a narrative. See Nagy 1979, 82, 98, 100–101, 134. Aside from the prologues of the *Iliad* and the *Cypria*, places where this usage seems most explicit include *Od.* 8.82 and 11.297. This widespread emphasis on the Will of Zeus is one of the thematic links that connect our individual examples of early Greek hexameter poetry and identify them as participants in a common tradition, even as they variously interpret that tradition according to narrower generic constraints or the individual concerns of their poets. On this shared heritage, see Thalmann 1984, esp. xi–xxi.

superficially the case. Zeus also sponsors the life-sustaining remedies that constrain his imposition of mortality, for he needs the human race to continue in order that human beings, through their ever-recurring mortality, can go on affirming the immortality of the gods. Thus in the numerous Near Eastern myths of the destruction of the human race that the various versions of the *Dios boulē* echo, it is always the case that humanity is not entirely annihilated.⁴

In Greek mythology, the gods' need for human beings is explicitly expressed in the notion that they are somehow dependent on the sacrificial offerings human beings make. Yet the manifest uselessness of those offerings suggests that they symbolize a deeper symbiosis, whereby mortals benefit the gods simply by being mortal. The interest of Zeus in an outcome that appears to circumscribe his power is registered in both the Prometheus and the Demeter myths, as the existence of Pandora becomes Zeus's final countermove against humanity and as the appeasement of Demeter also becomes the occasion of her return to the Olympian circle. These myths conclude with the full implementation of a boundless continuity, in which human beings constantly die but humanity preserves itself sufficiently that the race persists and still more people die. As chapters in a story that has a beginning in the coming to power of Zeus but no ending, these narratives find closure not in the definitive resolution of any issue, but in the completed institution of an ongoing state of affairs.

As an account of the Trojan War, the *Iliad* is one chapter in this larger story and rehearses Zeus's imposition of mortality from the perspective of its own distinctive concerns, in particular a concern with warfare as experienced by heroes caught up in the quest for individual *kleos*. Through a much-admired art of synecdoche, the *Iliad* incorporates the entire history of the war into its account of the brief episode of Achilles' wrath. Accordingly, in its opening lines, it aligns the plan of Zeus with Thetis's and Achilles' project of restoring Achilles' lost honor. Though it may thus appear that the *Iliad*'s interpretation of the Trojan legend involves replacing Zeus's larger plan of wholesale destruction with this narrower plan, that appearance is misleading.⁵ Rather, the *Iliad* artfully exploits its freedom to reconceive traditional material by playing the two possible referents of the *Dios boulē* off against each other and so revealing the limitations in Achilles'—and our—initial understanding of his situation.

The opening sections of the plot draw us into the illusion that the *Dios boulē* is nothing more than the plan suggested to Zeus by Thetis, which Zeus cooperatively enacts and which has as its sole aim the securing of

⁴ Scodel 1982, 40–42.

⁵ For this view, see *ibid.*, 47; Kirk 1972, 79; and especially Slatkin 1991, 122, for the insightful formulation of the narrower plan of Zeus as a “distillation” of the larger version.

glory for Achilles. But the plan Achilles imagines himself to have initiated has unexpected consequences, and he finds himself enlisted in Zeus's prior and overriding purposes. Thus the *Iliad* contains a number of allusions that link its plot to the traditional motif of Zeus's plan to destroy a great many people, in addition to its ambiguous evocation of the *Dios boulē* at 1.5,⁶ and as his story unfolds, Achilles himself comes to see the connection. He voices this recognition when he ends his quarrel with Agamemnon and returns to battle in Book 19. He now identifies Zeus as the instigator of the quarrel rather than, as he first appeared, the ally called in on Achilles' side once the quarrel was under way. If Zeus had not been behind the quarrel, he says, Agamemnon would never have stirred up Achilles' spirit and stolen his woman, *alla pothi Zeus / ethel' Achaioisin thanaton poleessi genesthai*, "But somehow Zeus wanted there to be death for many Achaeans" (*Il.* 19.273–74).

Over the course of the *Iliad*, the wrath of Achilles is revealed as another variation on Zeus's deadly master plan. It serves to forestall the inevitable victory of the militarily superior Achaeans, making room for further deaths on the Achaean side while Achilles is out of the battle, on the Trojan side after his return. Achilles serves Zeus's purposes so effectively because his wrath proves to be extendable in ways that he does not foresee or control, so that he goes on fulfilling Zeus's plan even after his own is complete. Achilles' unwitting service to Zeus is expressed in the deferred closure of the *Iliad's* plot, with which this discussion began.⁷

Against all expectations (see Nestor at *Il.* 9.164), Achilles remains unappeased by Agamemnon's capitulation and offer of gifts in Book 9, and then his original anger at Agamemnon is transformed into a second wrath against Hector. The catalyst for this transformation is the death of Patroclus, which is for Achilles a bitter and unintended consequence of his success in enlisting Zeus's support for his own quest for glory. Like a character in a fairy tale, Achilles achieves the fulfillment of his wish only to find that it comes in an unexpected and unwelcome form that reveals the limitations of his own power. This is dramatized in Book 18 when Thetis finds Achilles deep in grief for Patroclus and asks him why he is weeping,

⁶ As Kullmann has shown (1955, 1956).

⁷ At *Iliad* 15.49–77 Zeus offers Hera an outline of future events, including the linked deaths of Sarpedon, Patroclus, and Hector and the ultimate destruction of Troy, and makes it clear that his promise to Thetis and Hector's consequent success are implicated in that larger scheme. At this point, right after his awakening from Hera's seduction of him in Book 14, he is exhorting her to cooperate with him and suggesting that their interests are really the same. Thus the impression he gives in Book 1 that he is acting in opposition to Hera is—like the impression that he is capitulating to Thetis and Achilles against his own will—here revealed to be false. Zeus's engagement with Achilles' wrath is expressed in his statement at 15.72 that he will not stop his own anger (*cholos*) until Hector has driven the Achaeans back to the ships.

for "that has been fulfilled / by Zeus which before you prayed for, reaching out your hands" (*Il.* 18.74–75). In his wretched response, Achilles complains that instead of protecting Patroclus, he has sat by his ships *etōsion achthos arourēs*, "a useless burden on the earth" (*Il.* 18.104), perhaps a subtle reference to Zeus's larger scheme as formulated in the account of the Trojan War that made its way into the *Cypria*.⁸

At the beginning of the *Iliad*, Achilles believes that he is set apart from Agamemnon precisely because he is able to dictate a plan to Zeus. In fact, he is unwittingly in the same position as Agamemnon when Zeus manipulates him in order to set that plan in motion. The only difference is that the poet makes Agamemnon's situation explicit from the outset. Recounting the false dream sent to Agamemnon, through which Zeus sends the Achaeans back to battle to be slaughtered, the narrator adds:

Having said this, he was gone, and he left that man there
 imagining things in his heart that were not going to happen;
 for he thought he would take Priam's city on that day.
 Fool! He did not know what Zeus was planning (*ha rha Zeus mēdetō erga*);
 for he intended to impose yet more sufferings and groans
 upon the Trojans and the Danaans through mighty combat.

(*Il.* 2.35–40)

This passage makes clear the connection between the way the human characters' limited projects are subsumed into Zeus's larger plan and the deferral of closure in the narrative structure of the *Iliad*. Agamemnon entertains hope that the story of the Trojan War will end that very day, but Zeus intends to prolong it so that more warriors will suffer and die on both sides.

Contrary to what Agamemnon supposes, he and Achilles are caught up in a plot that postpones the war's inevitable end. Such postponements occur repeatedly in the *Iliad*. Achilles' withdrawal and return to combat frame a long battle narrative structured as a series of moments in which the war is nearly brought to a conclusion, but always somehow continues. The time in which the story is set, the ninth year of the war, is a point at which both the fated ten-year time span at one level, and the willingness of the participants to continue at another level, are nearly exhausted, and the *Iliad* records the drawing out of the war just a little longer so that its destructive power can be exploited to the fullest. The threat of peace takes many forms, which are canvassed as the narrative unfolds: swift victory in battle for one or the other side, abdication by one side or the other, the construction of a truce, the decision of the conflict through a duel between representatives of each side.

⁸ Slatkin 1991, 122 and, for the overturning of expectations for both characters and audience as a definitive feature of the *Iliad*, 49–52.

As the *Iliad* recounts occasion after occasion on which impulses toward peace are overcome, it records Zeus's ongoing success in impelling human beings to bring on their own deaths. In the process of doing so, it provides a full-scale investigation of the motivations that make human beings complicit in their own destruction. It reveals the forces that prevent the human actors from accepting moments of peaceful closure and that keep them busily extending the course of the war and, with it, the plot of the poem. In concert with Zeus, the human heroes who populate the *Iliad* respond to the necessity of dying by turning death into an active project, purposefully inflicting death on other people and courting it for themselves. They do so whether or not Zeus actively intervenes in their lives, as he does in the lives of Achilles and Agamemnon, because ceaseless human destruction is built into their system of values, which itself reflects Zeus's underlying purposes.

The warriors of the *Iliad* are committed to the repeated generation of death because they identify with a set of values—the heroic code—that enlists them in a quest for honor that is endless. For these heroes, honor is indispensable, since it is essential to their sense of self, and yet always to be sought. In the world of heroic warfare, the honor through which heroes know themselves is constantly subject to question. The aristocratic warriors who fight at Troy come to the war already heroes by virtue of their ancestry and their past deeds, and yet they are never able to rest on their laurels. Instead they are caught up in an endless attempt to distinguish themselves, which is also a quest for sufficient compensation for their efforts, for an adequate description of their deeds, and for a satisfying affirmation of who they are.

The world of combat is one of constant insecurity, in which heroes can never pause to enjoy the honor they earn. The press of battle is often too great even to allow the stripping of spoils from a defeated enemy; comrades in arms are too busy to stop and take note of one another's achievements. More subtly, friends and enemies conspire to keep warriors fighting by repeatedly questioning their identity as heroes.

Leaders keep their subordinates fighting by calling into question those features of heredity and status on which heroic identity is based. Thus Agamemnon, sending his resting troops back into battle at the beginning of Book 4, accuses Odysseus and Menestheus of enjoying the privileges of heroic status without earning them, suggesting that they are always ready to participate in feasts, but not equally ready to enter the battle (*Il.* 4.338–48). In a related tactic, he then tells Diomedes that he is not living up to the reputation of his father Tydeus (*Il.* 4.370–400), now undermining the hero's sense of inherited excellence rather than of social merit. In an intensification of this strategy, Athena urges Diomedes on once he is fighting by expressing doubt that he really is the son of his father (*Il.* 5.812–13). A

hero is made to experience himself as a series of claims that are always open to question, that therefore must always be substantiated in action once again.

If a hero's allies undermine such claims, his enemies do so all the more. Opponents in battle automatically see themselves as attempting to disprove one another's claims to superiority. These claims are implicit in the act of facing the enemy, but are also regularly made explicit in the form of boasts, so that an encounter is often the testing of stated assertions by one or both participants. As James Redfield puts it, Homeric combat is "a kind of experiment which falsifies the hypothesis of one hero or the other."⁹ This conception is reflected in the poem's recurrent formulations of battlefield encounters as learning experiences, as opportunities for people to find out the truth about one another (e.g., *Il.* 8.110–11; 16.242–45).

The ceaseless warfare of the *Iliad* is thus fueled by an endless supply of open questions about the merits of the participants, experienced by them as a continuous deprivation of the stable sense of identity on which they depend. The honor through which they know themselves is repeatedly lost in the climate of negative speech they inhabit,¹⁰ and that loss always has to be made up through renewed efforts. The urge to repair loss links the quest for honor to the other motivation for fighting that Iliadic warriors most often display, revenge for fallen companions. The death of a companion is an incitement to action both as a source of dishonor to his fellow warriors and as a loss that inspires in them the attempt to repair it through further deeds.

The link between these two motivations is dramatized in the event that sparks the *Iliad's* plot, Agamemnon's loss of Chryseis, who is both a badge of honor and someone he personally prizes; his attempt to repair that loss within his own camp turns that camp into an arena of conflict and inspires the variation on normal warfare according to which Achilles is responsible for myriad deaths among his own companions. The same connection surfaces more complexly in Achilles' return to battle in an attempt to repair the loss of Patroclus. This recurrent experience of honor as something lost is then key to the ongoing fulfillment of Zeus's plan, and also to the protraction of the *Iliad's* extended narrative. The heroic system depends on a constant questioning of honor, and this provides the *Iliad* with its version of what David Miller calls "the narratable: the instances of disequilibrium, suspense, and general insufficiency from which a given narrative appears to rise."¹¹

Warfare perpetuates itself because it provides the context for the attempt

⁹ Redfield 1975, 129.

¹⁰ On which see Slatkin 1988.

¹¹ Miller 1981, ix.

to recover lost honor, and yet also frustrates it. On the battlefield, a hero's attempts to repair past losses only invite new ones: for a hero to kill an enemy to avenge a fallen companion only turns the hero and his companions into targets for new enemy assaults; an attempt to put his achievements into words through boasting only provokes the enemy to another attack. Somewhere in this endless give-and-take, the hero is almost certain to die, losing his own life before he has a chance to experience the honor he has earned. Thus Agamemnon repeatedly holds out to his troops offers of prizes to be granted when Troy is defeated, a conclusion that seems always to be postponed and that many of them will never see.

This constant thwarting of honor during a warrior's lifetime is purportedly compensated for by honor after death, and yet that promise, too, goes largely unfulfilled for all but the greatest heroes. The press of battle leaves little room for the recovery and honoring of the dead. Even when the war is briefly suspended for that purpose, as it is by the Achaeans on the advice of Nestor in Book 7, there is no prospect of distinguishing and memorializing each individual (*Il.* 7.323–43, 433–41). Nestor suggests that some men's bones may be set aside and taken home for burial in the future, when the Achaeans return there, but then goes on to propose that they construct a single tomb, *akriton*, "indiscriminately," and that that tomb be put to use as the foundation of the Achaeans' new fortifications (which are themselves destined to disappear after the Achaeans leave; *Il.* 7.442–63, 12.3–35, cf. 23.326–33). When the Trojans take advantage of this truce to gather their dead, they find it difficult even to identify individual bodies (*Il.* 7.424).

As the story of Hector illustrates, the posthumous honor of even the greatest warrior is jeopardized by the same pressures that compromise his recognition in life. As Hector faces death in Book 22, he knows himself to be shamed in the eyes of his fellow Trojans for his unsuccessful military gamble (*Il.* 22.98–110), and he is aware that Achilles' hatred makes it unlikely that his body will be properly buried. His only hope is in *kleos* itself (*Il.* 22.304–5), the reputation that is solidified and perpetuated in heroic song, and that he and the other major heroes of the *Iliad* do achieve. Numerous other heroes do not, or do so only fleetingly as they are briefly mentioned in poetic "obituaries" and then forgotten as the poet's (and audience's) attention moves on to other things.¹² Given the importance of *kleos* through song to the character's lives and to the *Iliad's* own value, it is striking how little and how joylessly it is actually envisioned within the poem. Hector is the character who dwells most on fantasies of his own

¹² For an appreciation of these "obituaries" as a valiant attempt to mark the lives and achievements of even insignificant heroes, see Griffin 1980, 140–43 and the other critics he quotes there.

future glory,¹³ but those fantasies are tied to a painful vision of Andromache's future (*Il.* 6.458–63) or to the kinds of unrealistic hope to which he is prone (*Il.* 7.87–91). The only character who refers explicitly to her future commemoration in song is Helen, and she does so without pleasure, presenting that future song as the cause of her present sufferings (*Il.* 6.354–58). This is in notable contrast to the *Odyssey*, whose story of honor achieved and enjoyed includes episodes in which the hero experiences his own celebration in song.

Not only is the fulfillment sought by the *Iliad's* heroes constantly deferred, but that fulfillment is always questionable, because the bargains on which the heroic code depends are by nature unequal. Warriors who are caught up in the instinctive drive to assert themselves do not normally notice this inequality, but Achilles' ability to pursue honor by doing nothing gives him an opportunity to become aware of it. Achilles points to the most extreme instance of this inequality when he declares in his speech to the embassy in Book 9 that no number of gifts can be equated with the loss of his life, but it is always the case that the rewards of heroic endeavor, whether material gifts, social privileges, or poetic commemoration, come in a currency markedly different from the expenditures of effort through which they are earned. The search for an adequate match between a hero's investment of energy and acceptance of risk and the honor that rewards them is always inconclusive. The conditions that the *Iliad's* plot illuminates can never assure a perfect equilibrium between a hero and his public valuation, or the removal of all suspense about whether a hero will continue to live up to his reputation, or the enjoyment of compensation sufficient to make a hero indifferent to the loss of his life.

Both the protracted course of the war and the extended battle narrative that fills much of the *Iliad* nonetheless have their limits, and these limits generate the moments of temporary closure that punctuate the poem's narrative of ongoing mortality. Though heroes are caught up in a quest for individual distinction that leads them to court death, they are also enlisted in the preservation of their society and, to borrow A. H. Adkins's terminology, pursue cooperative virtues as well as competitive ones.¹⁴ The forward motion of battle narrative is routinely checked as heroes pause to rest, to participate in the rituals of feasting through which their social bonds are renewed, to take note of what they have achieved, and to honor the dead. At a less routine level, both the Achaeans and the Trojans take periodic steps toward bringing the war to an early close, proposing to end the ongoing slaughter by entering into a truce.

As in the mythological paradigm the *Iliad's* society echoes, these checks

¹³ Martin 1989, 136–37.

¹⁴ Adkins 1960, 7.

on the onward march of death also reinforce it, assuring that the band of warriors survives to go on fighting, killing, and dying. As in that paradigm, these closural elements are related to notions of natural regeneration, in both the human and the agricultural spheres. Often, pauses in the flow of combat are motivated by human needs for food and sleep and are tied to the cyclical rhythms of nature, as when an episode of fighting ends despite the unfinished business that remains because of the need, as a recurrent formula expresses it, *nukti peisesthai*, "to obey the night." The need for such pauses is underscored in Book 19, when Odysseus insists, despite Achilles' rage for battle, that the army stop to eat and sleep, stressing that this is essential if they are to continue to fight (*Il.* 19.154–83, 215–37). Achilles absorbs this message and repeats it with characteristic concision in his exhortation to Agamemnon, "Now go to your meal, so that we may bring on Ares" (*Il.* 19.275).

The transitory quality of such pauses is related to society's dependence on the muting of competition, on a certain blurring of distinctions that fosters social harmony and yet also threatens to undermine it. As members of a society unite, they give up something of their individual claims and so accept another form of unequal bargain, one in which unlike things are equated, in which individuals who differ in their abilities and achievements are treated as if they are more nearly equal than—from their own perspectives—they really are. The typical heroic hostility to equation is well illustrated by the response of Sthenelus to the speech, cited above, in which Agamemnon provocatively accuses Diomedes of falling short of his father Tydeus. Sthenelus bursts out that he and Diomedes are in fact superior to their fathers: "So do not ever hold our fathers in like honor [*homoīē . . . timē*]" (*Il.* 4.410). The countervailing tendency of heroic society to gloss over distinctions is well illustrated in the language of Nestor as he tries to salvage Achaean harmony by making peace between Achilles and Agamemnon in Book 1. Even while he asserts to Achilles the higher authority of Agamemnon, he uses rhyming terms and balanced phrases that make the two seem equal.

If you are stronger (*karteros*), and a goddess mother bore you,
 Yet he is mightier (*pherteros*), since he rules over more people.
(*Il.* 1.280–81)

Nestor follows this statement with advice to each hero to yield to the other. The failure of this advice shows how much this equalizing pressure is at odds with the heroic passion for distinction evinced by both Achilles and Agamemnon. That quest for distinction has a strong antisocial dimension, which is expressed in the fantasy Achilles voices as he sends Patroclus into battle (*Il.* 16.97–100). In that vision, all of the competing claims on both sides of the war have finally been played out, and only Achilles and

Patroclus remain to take Troy and triumph over all. This fantasy places Achilles decisively at the top of the warrior hierarchy, but at the cost of any survivors who might recognize and honor his achievement. Normally, societies keep themselves going and thus preserve a context for honor, however imperfect, by keeping those claims untested among their members and channeling heroic energies toward competition with external enemies. This process lies behind the assumption expressed in *Iliad* 19 that the preservation of Achaean society is linked to continued hostilities toward Troy.

Those externally directed competitive energies assure that in the *Iliad* the two opposing sides cooperate in keeping the war alive. There are, of course, moments in the *Iliad*'s plot when the combatants do seem willing to suspend the war, entering into the kinds of unequal bargain that peace depends upon. Thus in Book 3 both the Trojans and the Achaeans are willing to conclude a truce according to which for one side the loss of Helen would go effectively uncompensated. But that truce is broken when an individual Trojan, Pandarus, is unable to resist the opportunity to distinguish himself by taking a shot at Menelaus (*Il.* 4.86–104).

The fragility of such truces is further underscored by the similar episode in Book 7, in which the general fighting stops for a single combat between Hector and Ajax. Planned from the outset by the gods as simply a day-long pause in the war (*Il.* 7.29–32), this ceremonious encounter enacts a combination of civility and equality that assures the resumption of hostilities. Both Hector and Ajax's Achaean supporters have hopes that the duel will be decisive (*Il.* 7.74–91, 202–5), but it leads instead to what the Achaeans present as their second-best hope, that Zeus will grant *isēn amphoteroisi biēn kai kudōs*, "equal strength and glory to both" (7.205).¹⁵ Thus it is inevitable that, as the two combatants agree to break off in deference to nightfall and exchange gifts, Hector looks forward to a future occasion when they will fight "until the god / distinguishes us and gives victory to one or the other" (*Il.* 7.291–92).¹⁶

As in the mythological scheme of the *Dios boulē*, so in the warrior society that enacts that scheme, the continuity of a stable situation comes at the cost of human individuals. If heroes are not actively courting death, they are systematically devalued through active shaming or through the quieter loss of status that comes with social accommodation. Inevitable death and participation in social life are united in their power to erode the sense of distinction that is always a component of human motivation, but is the

¹⁵ Note the difference between the two imagined bits of *kleos* quoted by Hector at 89–90 and 301–2.

¹⁶ For a widely influential discussion of the destabilizing effect of lack of differentiation among individuals within a community, see Girard 1977.

mainspring of heroic existence. This double assault on human particularity is expressed by Achilles in his speech to the embassy in Book 9 through the notion of *iē timē*, "a single honor," a refinement of Sthenelus's *homoīē* . . . *timē*, "like honor," that, as a number of commentators have pointed out, is inherently paradoxical.¹⁷

There is an equal portion for the one who hangs back, and in the case of one who fights hard.

The coward and the brave man are held in a single honor.

The man who does nothing and the man who does much die the same.

(*Il.* 9.318–20)

Here Achilles formulates his complaint that all human distinctions are rendered meaningless by the equal subjection of everyone to death in terms borrowed from his complaint about Achaean society, which is that unequal contributions are met with equal rewards. And though Achilles believes, possibly with some justice, that he has a particular grievance against Agamemnon as a leader, the loss of distinction is, as we have seen, a constituent feature of all social life. Achilles describes this threat to individual distinction by playing on a certain slipperiness in the idea of equation. The central ritual of heroic social life, the *dais eisē*, "the equal feast," is an occasion when distinctions are properly maintained, and the feast is understood to be equal in the sense that each participant is given a portion that equates to his distinctive merit.¹⁸ Yet the inclusion of everyone in the feast necessarily limits the distinction that can be conveyed by participation in it, and the concept of equality is all too easily transferred, as it is here by Achilles, to situations in which everyone is equally honored.

This is the same limitation that Achilles finds in the universality of death: heroic endeavor, however distinguished, is not efficacious enough to overcome death; a heroic death, however distinguished, is not ultimately different from any other death. Achilles uncovers the common element in these two seemingly opposed aspects of the heroic system, detecting the same leveling effect both in the social arrangements that preserve warrior society and in the death on which that society is purposefully bent.

If the story of Achilles' wrath as the fulfillment of Zeus's plan continues far longer than expected, pressing on beyond a number of points of likely conclusion, it does finally come to a close. The time arrives at which Achilles can no longer evade the violent, early death that he invites by playing out his role as agent of destruction. And the larger theme of the Trojan War also has its limit in the eventual Achaean victory. Zeus's purposes may be infinite, but they depend on working through human agents,

¹⁷ See Schein 1984, 105–6, building on the suggestion of Parry (1964).

¹⁸ Motto and Clark 1969, 118–19.

who have their inevitable ends. The *Iliad* is notable, however, for not narrating either of the conclusive events toward which its plot moves, the death of Achilles and the fall of Troy. Instead, it stops after recounting an event, the death of Hector, in which both of those outcomes are implicit: as Thetis tells him, Achilles' death is fated to follow Hector's (*Il.* 18.95-96), and it is clear that Troy can no longer stand without its greatest defender.

Not only does Hector's death represent within the *Iliad* the end of Achilles' life and the end of the Trojan War, but the ransoming of Hector's body also brings a sense of closure to the poem. Hector's funeral aligns the final lines of the *Iliad* with a natural moment of closure in the rhythm of human experience; Achilles' accession to Priam's request concludes his extended wrath; and the language and events of Book 24 echo and invert the language and events of Book 1 so as to create a strong formal close.¹⁹ But by displacing the more finally conclusive events of Achilles' death and the fall of Troy onto the death and ransoming of Hector, the *Iliad* does nonetheless mute the finality of its ending, and this accords with the *Iliad's* role as one more chapter in Zeus's endless scheme.

The more cosmic versions of the *Dios boulē* discussed above end when the conditions of human life, with its ineluctable individual mortality and its strategies of communal survival, have been established as an ever ongoing state of affairs. The *Iliad* recounts the *Dios boulē* as experienced by individual mortals and shows how their actions serve to make that state of affairs unending, and so it is fitting that it should end at a point when the war is still ongoing (as *Il.* 24.667 reminds us) and when Achilles, for all that his fate has been decided, is still caught up in the complex of motivations that turns heroic society into a mechanism for constant and accelerated mortality. While effectively concluding the wrath of Achilles, the ransoming of Hector still captures the inherent inconclusiveness of the larger story that the *Iliad* tells through the episode of the Wrath.

The ransoming of Hector is clearly marked as the fulfillment of Zeus's planning through the negotiation between Zeus and Thetis that brings it about. Zeus summons Thetis to Olympus, requires her acquiescence in Achilles' surrender of the body, and sends her as a messenger to Achilles to impress the necessity of it upon him (*Il.* 24.77-140). This action contributes to the poem's effect of formal closure by inverting the initial negotiation between Zeus and Thetis at the end of Book 1 and signals that the surprisingly extensive plan they devised then has finally run its course.

The significance of Thetis's acquiescence in the return of Hector's body has recently been clarified by Laura Slatkin, who has investigated the my-

¹⁹ Macleod 1982, 32-35.

thology concerning Thetis that lies behind the plot of the *Iliad*.²⁰ Thetis's history is another episode in the story of Zeus's preservation of his own immortality through the imposition of mortality on human beings. Zeus initially desires to marry Thetis, but abandons that plan when it is revealed that she will bear a son who will usurp his father. Zeus escapes mortality—of which the replacement of father by son is a hallmark—by avoiding this marriage for himself and imposing it on a mortal, Peleus, with the consequence that Peleus's son Achilles is also mortal. In this myth, then, there is a direct causal link between the continuous immortality of Zeus and the death of the mortal Achilles. The marriage of Peleus and Thetis fulfills Zeus's plan in two ways. First, it is the occasion of the discord that leads to the Trojan War with its myriad deaths, and thus it provides the first event in the *Cypria*'s account of the *Dios boulē* in the form of a scheme to relieve the earth of human population. Second, it leads to the mortality of the paradigmatic human hero Achilles and thus underlies the *Iliad*'s account of the *Dios boulē* in the form of Achilles' quest for honor.

Thetis's agreement to the limitation on Achilles' powers involved in his giving up Hector's body thus represents, in displaced form, her acceptance of his mortality.²¹ Her joining of the Olympian circle, which is marked by a shared meal, recalls the ending of another version of the *Dios boulē*, the *Hymn to Demeter*, which concludes with Demeter returning to Olympus after bringing about a range of outcomes, all involving the mitigation of death, including the intermittent immortality of her daughter Persephone and the everlasting honor of her mortal nursling Demophoon. Thetis's role in the *Iliad* echoes Demeter's in a more focused form, and her yielding to Zeus marks her achievement of one particular goal, the securing of honor for Achilles.

The significance of Achilles' action in releasing Hector's body is further illuminated by an exchange between Zeus and Hera, in which the quarrel sparked by Zeus's initial agreement with Thetis is patched up. Hera objects to the idea that Achilles should return the body, because she feels his doing so will obliterate the distinction between him and Hector. She protests to Apollo, who has proposed the idea, on the grounds that it would involve giving *homē timē*, "like honor," to both Achilles and Hector (*Il.* 24.57). Zeus, however, reassures her on this point. He declares that *ou men gar timē de mi' essetai*, "There will not be a single honor" (*Il.* 24.66), but he goes on to add that Hector has won the gods' love through the many sacrifices he has offered to them.

The opposed perspectives of Zeus and Hera are resolved in a situation that is defined as an unequal bargain—as the treating of unlike things as

²⁰ Slatkin 1991.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 105.

like—but that is colored by a promise of future distinction. This final episode of the poem thus enacts heroic society's characteristic combination of the promise of distinction in the future with the striking of unequal bargains in the present. Achilles' acceptance of ransom for the body of Hector, which for him is freighted with the lost life of Patroclus, represents a final resolution to the issue of the unequal bargain that has surfaced repeatedly at key junctures in the *Iliad's* plot, beginning with Agamemnon's rejection of Chryses' ransom for his daughter Chryseis, which Achilles' action here obliquely corrects.

Agamemnon rejects the offer of ransom for Chryseis because he does not see the gifts her father offers as commensurate to her; as he explains to the assembled Achaeans, he likes her and does not feel that the gifts he is offered can compensate him for her loss (*Il.* 1.109–15). The outcome of this episode reveals that he would have done well to accept the ransom, despite its inadequacy, because in the event he loses her anyway—and now without compensation. Agamemnon's refusal is echoed in Achilles' rejection of his gifts during the embassy in Book 9, where the same issues surface again and are addressed more explicitly. Achilles, like Agamemnon, rejects what he perceives as an unequal bargain, declaring that Agamemnon's gifts cannot make up for what he has lost in the past, the honor bound up with his possession of Briseis, or for what he must lose in the future, the rest of his life.

Achilles' rejection meets with two responses from his former companions, both of which amount to defenses of the unequal bargains of social life. One is Phoenix's account of Meleager, who similarly rejected material gifts as an inducement to fight, but ended up fighting anyway out of concern for his community, at which point those gifts were no longer available. Phoenix's message, which is borne out by Achilles subsequent experience, is that there are other reasons for fighting besides the gifts to be won; since these other reasons will lure him back anyway, he might as well accept whatever rewards are offered in exchange for his likely loss of life, however incommensurate. Soon afterwards, Ajax condemns Achilles by referring to the institution of the blood price, pointing out that people are willing to accept the inadequate material settlement that is the only available recompense for irrecoverable lost relatives.

For even from the killer of his brother someone
will accept a price, or for a dead child.

And the killer stays there in the country, having paid much,
and the heart of the other is held in check and the strong spirit,
once he has received the price.

Achilles is deaf to the message directed at him by his fellow Achaeans in Book 9, and he remains indifferent to the imperfect exchanges of communal life as he returns to battle bent on revenge for the death of Patroclus. He accepts Agamemnon's gifts on his return to the Achaean army in Book 19, but it is clear that they mean nothing to him. And, in his encounter with Lycaon at the beginning of Book 21, he refuses to enter into an arrangement to ransom Lycaon such as he had engaged in regularly in the past. His holding on to Hector's body is his final, futile act of resistance against the substitutions and approximations that compromise the satisfaction offered by his world. His continued assault on Hector represents a repeated effort to recover what is lost through revenge, an attempt to undo Patroclus's death by overcoming his killer, as Hecuba seems to understand when she later comments that, despite his mistreatment of Hector's body, Achilles could not bring Patroclus back to life (*Il.* 24.756).

This sequence of rejected bargains is finally broken when Achilles enters into a bargain with Priam, taking material gifts in exchange for Hector's body. The compensation he receives is notably incommensurate with the intense attachment to Patroclus that Hector's body represents for him, and yet it is the only compensation there is. The *Iliad* brings to a close its exploration of the reasons why human beings in the end do willingly enter into unequal bargains by depicting two interlocked experiences of the relinquishing of grief, an emotional transition that entails letting go of the hope that what has been lost can be exactly recovered. This is an experience of closure that is also the precondition of future action, as Achilles acknowledges when he tells Priam that nothing is accomplished by mourning: *ou gar tis prēxis peletai krueroio gooio* (*Il.* 24.524). The truce that is constructed by Achilles and Priam is, like the other truces recorded in the *Iliad*, a temporary pause that facilitates the continuation of the war—the final manifestation of the pattern of incomplete closure that pervades the poem. This quality is captured in the lines in which Priam proposes the terms of the truce, where the return to battle becomes the concluding event of a rounded twelve-day sequence.

For nine days we will lament him in the hall,
 on the tenth we will bury him, and the people will feast,
 on the eleventh we will build a mound over him,
 on the twelfth we will fight, if that is what must be.

(*Il.* 24.664–67)

Like the other truces of the *Iliad*, the compact between Achilles and Priam depends on the equation of unequal things. This structure is registered in the *Iliad's* final episode in a variety of ways, not only in the equation of Hector's body with the ransom Priam offers for it, but also in the

substitutions—of Priam for Peleus, of Achilles for Hector—that turn the encounter of Achilles and Priam into a simulation of the two reunions of father and son that will now never take place. Whatever future distinction is to be secured for Achilles by the *Iliad* or by other forms of commemoration, such as the magnificent funeral recounted in the *Odyssey*, the poem ends with an enactment of equal honor. However singular the achievements recorded by the poem as a whole, Achilles shares the narrative focus of the final book with the living Priam, from whose perspective the story of the ransoming is told and whose action is presented as an extraordinary heroic exploit, and with the dead Hector, whose achievements are honored in the final sections of the poem.

And, like all the truces of the *Iliad*, the compact of Priam and Achilles is limited by the continuing investment of human beings in the search for complete distinction. This limitation is reflected in the contradictory quality of Achilles' statements, which preclude any reading of his condition at the end of the poem as one of detached transcendence of the conflicting impulses that animate his society. While it seems from his sober statement about the uselessness of grief that he accepts Priam's ransom with a full awareness of how little it matches what he has lost, he is not at ease with his bargain. He feels a need to defend it to Patroclus and addresses a speech to him in which he assures Patroclus of the value of the gifts he receives.

Do not be angry with me, Patroclus, if you should learn
 even though you are in Hades, that I ransomed shining Hector
 for his dear father, since he gave me gifts that are not inadequate (*aeikeia*),
 and I will share with you a fitting portion of them.

(*Il.* 24.592–95)

Here Achilles expresses an ability to settle for less: he is willing to treat the ransom as adequate compensation, and he is willing to have his own honor diminished through sharing that ransom with Patroclus. On the other hand, his fantasy of a future transaction between them shows that he still seems to think, and to need to think, that he can somehow get Patroclus back.

Furthermore, Achilles is not really reconciled to the equalizing of honor involved in his bargain with Priam. Readers of the poem often find the implicit link between Priam's request that Achilles remember his own father and Achilles' willingness to give up Hector's body to be the most significant and compelling aspect of this episode: if Achilles' respect for Priam's paternal concerns springs from thoughts about his own father, his gesture becomes a moving acknowledgment of the common condition of humanity. And yet this is something Achilles himself refuses to admit. Whatever we may feel has happened between them, it is necessary to Achilles to deny that Priam's appeal has inspired his own action.

Do not provoke me, old man. I have on my own decided
to ransom Hector for you. There came as a messenger to me from Zeus
my mother, who bore me, the daughter of the old man of the sea.
And I recognize about you, Priam, and it does not escape my notice,
that one of the gods has led you to the swift ships of the Achaeans.

(*Il.* 24.560–64)

This passage, which cannot easily be assimilated to accounts of Achilles as the exponent of a common humanity, reveals how fully caught up he remains in the idea of individual distinction.²² He continues to stress what separates him from other mortals, his divine mother and his special connection to Zeus, rather than the connection to other mortals he inherits from his mortal father Peleus, the connection to which Priam has alluded with results that Achilles will not acknowledge.

While Achilles distances himself from Priam's appeal in this way, he does also himself make a point of the shared experience of Priam and Peleus. He does register the connection on which Priam's appeal is based, but in a displaced form, which is also an account of Zeus's role in shaping human affairs. Seeking to impress on Priam the uselessness of mourning, he points out that the best that mortals can hope for from Zeus is a mixture of good and bad, and he describes the two jars from which Zeus dispenses variously blessings and hardships (*Il.* 24.527–33). Through this image, Achilles conveys the ambiguity of Zeus's plan, which incorporates both the pressures that induce human beings to invite their own deaths and the blessings that mitigate the hardships of mortal life. He illustrates this mixture by instancing both Peleus and Priam (linked explicitly with the words *kai se* at *Il.* 24.543), both of whom have experienced a life of initial prosperity darkened by the painful loss of a beloved son. Both men thus exemplify the way Zeus causes human beings to suffer more than they have to: both suffer a loss that reverses the natural order of things through the purposeful, premature death brought about by warfare.

Before the story of the *Iliad* begins, Zeus masters the challenge posed by Thetis by making Achilles mortal. The *Iliad* shows how Achilles, in common with the other mortals who make up his society, responds to his mortal state by intensifying it, actively bringing on the deaths of many others and finally his own death. It shows how he and his fellow warriors become active promoters of Zeus's purposes, engaged in a constant project of mutual destruction that never ceases for long and that will continue after the events of the *Iliad* are over. The examples of Priam and Peleus point up how differently Zeus and his mortal agents experience the fulfillment of

²² Macleod suggests that Achilles evokes Zeus's will in order to keep himself in check since his anger could easily flare up again: Macleod 1982, 136. That residual capacity for anger is, of course, itself a sign of his continued investment in the motivations that fuel heroic warfare.

his plan. Zeus's success involves seeing Achilles, the man who would have been his son, die; in this way, he protects himself against the challenge of a son who could be his rival and so maintains his immortality. His victory is accomplished by imposing the same experience on mortal fathers, and to them it brings the mortal condition in a cruelly intensified form. Though Peleus and Priam are only two of the many mortals who exemplify this pattern, they do also have a closer tie, to which Achilles' speech implicitly alludes. Both suffer through the actions of Achilles himself in his role not as the instigator but as the agent of Zeus's plan, a role he plays equally for his hated enemy and for his beloved father—both in his glorious achievements as the killer of Priam's sons and in his own early death.²³

²³ Versions of this paper were delivered at Harvard University on March 18, 1993, and at the Center for Hellenic Studies on February 2, 1995. I am especially grateful to the graduate students of the Harvard Department of the Classics for inviting me to speak and for forming part of a lively and receptive audience. My thanks also to the editors and referees of this volume and to Joseph Russo for their helpful comments on an earlier draft.