

Morals and Values

Rights

There were 3 ways available to Homeric heroes for the settlement of disputes over rights.

1. It could be submitted to arbitration i.e. the assembly of leaders would decide.
2. it could be decided by oath. No man would swear falsely for fear of the gods or if he did he would certainly be punished by them.
3. there could be trial by armed combat - to the victor goes the right.

This is well illustrated in Book 23 of the Iliad.

The defence of a right was a purely private matter.

The heroic code

'Warrior' + 'hero' are synonyms and the main theme of a warrior culture is constructed on 2 notes - proress + honour.

Proress = The hero's essential attribute

Honour = The hero's essential aim

Life itself may not stand in the way although the Homeric heroes loved life fiercely. However life must surrender to honour.

It is significant that never in the Iliad or the Odyssey is there a rational discussion - There are arguments. Even Nestor who was renowned for the wisdom of old age, the voice of experience did not draw upon his experience to suggest a particular course of action. His talk was invariably emotional and psychological, aimed at bolstering morale or at soothing overheated

tempers, not at selecting the course of action. He had a store of incidents upon which to draw for models of heroic behaviour.

Odysseus, on the other hand was a man of many devices. He was most skilled in deception and lies.

Athena: "Deceit + artful tales are dear to you from the bottom of your heart
- This was not controlled rational behaviour. (13.295)

COUNSEL

Homer often uses the word counsel, but by it he does not mean rational analysis, judgement - he refers to the decision itself and the power of authority. There was little room for judgement in a society whose basic values were set, as was man's place and his privileges and duties

Honour

It is the nature of honour that it must be exclusive. If everyone has it equally it is devalued. So, the world of Odysseus is fiercely competitive, as each hero strove to outdo the others. Thus, on the battle field, the taking of life is honourable to the highest degree; it is glamorous.

The poet lingers over every slaughter. This is because the one indisputable measure of success is a trophy. That is why heroes often risked their lives to strip a slain opponent of his armour. Victory without honour was unacceptable.

Gift-giving too was part of the network of competitive, honorific activity. It was as honourable to give as to receive. One measure of a man's true worth was how much he could give away in treasure. Heroes boasted of the gifts they had received and of those they had given as signs of their prowess. That is why gift-objects

had genealogies. See Menelaus + Telemachus (1.374-5) and (2.239-40) Status was the chief determinant of values and this was transmitted from the person to his possessions.

The heroes had a keen accumulative instinct as wealth meant power and direct material satisfaction to them. When Odysseus landed on Ithaca and failed to recognize it because of Athena's trick, he immediately began to worry about the gifts he had been given + then Athena personally helped him hide the treasure in a cave. When Odysseus first met Penelope he told her an elaborate tale in which collecting treasure figures. (13k19) A king "begged" for gifts of treasure as part of the normal course of his travels. Odysseus was happy to wait "a year if necessary" for Alcinous's gifts and yet in the same court he had reacted violently to the suggestion that he might be a trader seeking 'corrupted gains'. There were delicate distinctions between honorable acquisition and a trader's gains. The heroes had a streak of the peasant in them, + his love of possessions.

The heroic world visualized achievements + relationships in CONCRETE TERMS - the gods were anthropomorphized, emotions + feelings were located in specific organs of the body, even the soul was materialized.

Giving + receiving were ceremonial acts. e.g. King Alcinous personally stowed the Phaeacian gifts aboard Odysseus's ship, as the head of a modern state personally signs a treaty before assembled dignitaries. They signify that a relationship has been established, an obligation and

responsibility created.

Feasting

This was an heroic activity. What was blameworthy about the suitors was not the total idleness and luxury of their daily banqueting. That was proper aristocratic behaviour, but it was improper to carry it out at one man's expense especially in his absence.

'Shavers in the feast' Odysseus says in Phaeacia, meaning sharing cost + pleasures.

See also. 1. 374-5 and 2. 139-40 - Telemachus.

All ceremonial occasions required a feast.

e.g. The Iliad closes with the Trojan mourning of Hector. On such occasions there was no sharing of costs. The meaning of this ceremonial eating together becomes clearest in still another context. Without exception, whenever a visitor arrived, whether kin or guest friend, messenger or stranger, the first order of business was the sharing of a meal. Only after the meal was it proper for the host to inquire who his guest was + what was his mission [e.g. 14. 45-7 - Eumeus]

This was a ritual that could not be refused - it was shared by the gods. This renewed the bond between men + gods. It seemed necessary for establishing peaceful relations.

Conversely, exclusion from the feast was a mark of the social outcast. [See Iliad 7. 11 492-5]

Women had no place at the feast. Not only was this a man's world, it was one in which the inferior status of women was neither concealed nor idealized. From Homer to the end of Greek literature there were no ordinary words with the specific meanings 'husband' + 'wife'. A man

was a man, a father, a warrior, a nobleman, a chieftain, a king, a hero, linguistically he was almost never a husband. Then, if you consider the verb 'to love' in Greek (*philein*), it was used in every context in which there were positive ties between people. We seldom see examples of what the modern world calls "love". More often than not Penelope was omitted from the image of home. Although monogamous marriage was the rule (with the exception of Priam), it did not impose monogamous sexuality on the male nor did it place the small family at the centre of a man's emotional life.

The ^{most} intense relationships seemed to be between father + son. [e.g. 16.17-18 - simile] This is probably because women were held to be naturally inferior and so strong personal attachments were sought and found among men.

But we have already seen women characters who do not quite fit this description. e.g. Arete with her strange, unwomanly claims to power and authority.

Helen - no innocent victim but she received no punishment and scarcely any reproach.

She ended her days in Sparta, participating in the life of the palace much like Arete and not like a proper Greek woman.

Penelope - not even altogether free of suspicion.

[see Athene 15-20-3) In Homeric psychology every human action and every idea could be the direct consequence of divine intervention.

When the action was witless or otherwise astonishing there was no doubt that the gods had intervened.

What are we to believe? Do we take it all

literally or is it just poetic metaphor to describe e.g. a lucky accident. The narrative needs the interventions of the gods and so do the psychology ~~of~~ and the behaviour of the heroes. The gods were created in man's image - ~~these~~ their world was a social world in every respect, with a past and a present, with a history, so to speak. They were just as concerned with honour and prowess as any hero.

With respect to power the divine world was as differentiated as the human, and the range was very wide. There were also significant distinctions in the spheres in which power could be applied. Only Zeus occupied a position without earthly parallel. His power was overwhelming. He alone maintained a distance between himself and the mortal world - he never intervened directly in speech or act.

The humanization of the gods was a step of astonishing boldness. Having created his gods, Homeric man called himself godlike. But, although kings were honoured like gods, they were never worshipped.

"Honour him like a god with gifts" is a recurrent phrase about kings; the converse is that the gods are to be honoured like kings with gifts. In practice that meant gifts of food, of feasting, and gifts of treasure, through dedications of arms and cauldrons and tripods arrayed in the temples. Man turned to the gods for help but not for moral guidance; that was not in their power. Chance, not merit, determined how the gifts fell to a man. He could offend a god mightily but only by

dishonouring him e.g. through a false oath, or failure to make a sacrificial gift. Then the offender had to make amends exactly as he would to any man. This was not a penance. It was the re-establishment of the proper status relationship.

However there are elements of a new conception of the gods, appearing in the Odyssey. The suitor theme is in some fashion a tale of villainy and retribution. (see 24.351-2)

r. 140 The contrast with the Iliad is striking.

e.g. [22.408-13 Odysseus to Euryclia] - this was an unheroic sentiment, for heroes commonly exercised their prerogative to exact publicly over their victims. It was as if, groping to understand a new vision of man and his fate, the poet saw something so profound and yet so far beyond the horizon of his world, that he gave it expression in a few brief verses, only to draw back from it at once.