

PHOENIX'S SPEECH – IS ACHILLES PUNISHED?*

Phoenix's speech in Book 9 of the *Iliad* is generally considered prophetic of what happens to Achilles later in the story. Many scholars have argued that Achilles is punished by Zeus through ἄτη (of either Achilles or Patroclus) which causes the death of Patroclus, just as anyone who spurns the Litai in the allegory of Phoenix will be punished by Ate sent by Zeus. The Meleager episode is also regarded as reflecting almost exactly what happens later: the Achaeans have difficulty in the battle due to Achilles' withdrawal, just as the Aetolians have when Meleager refuses to fight. Achilles, like Meleager, receives a set of three supplications to go back to the battle, and, just as Meleager loses his prize because he rejects the supplications, Achilles loses Patroclus because he does not listen to the pleas of the Embassy. This seems to be, in outline, the present orthodoxy.¹

There are, however, a complex of problems in interpreting Phoenix's speech. We are not in a position to judge if Achilles is really punished by Zeus in the way that Phoenix's speech, especially his Litai allegory, implies, until we answer the following questions:

- (1) Is Zeus actually the avenger of suppliants?
- (2) Does Zeus actually despatch ἄτη? Where does ἄτη come from?
- (3) Is Achilles' rejection of the Embassy's pleas his moral error?

Since I have not seen all of these problems treated together, I would like to undertake such a study in this paper.

Zeus and the suppliants

In the Litai allegory of Phoenix, Zeus is described as avenger of the Litai, of suppliants, and benefactor of those who respect them (*Il.* 9.508–12):

ὅς μὲν τ' αἰδέσεται κούρας Διὸς ἄσπον ἰούσας,
τόν δ' ἐ μέγ' ὤνησαν καὶ τ' ἔκλυον εὐχομένοιο·
ὅς δ' ἐ κ' ἀνήνηται καὶ τε στερεῶς ἀποείπη,
λίσσονται δ' ἄρα ταί γε Δία Κρονίωνα κιοῦσαι
τῷ Ἀτῆν ἅμ' ἔπεισθαι, ἵνα βλαφθεὶς ἀποτείσῃ.

It has been argued, however, that Zeus is not considered the protector of suppliants anywhere else in the *Iliad*. 'For the heroes of the *Iliad*', Victoria Pedrick maintains, 'supplication operates strictly on a human level, commanding respect only so far as custom and human sanctions compel.'² If so, Phoenix's allegory presents yet another difficulty for the unity of the epic.³ Pedrick even excludes the Litai allegory from her

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¹ Cf. nn. 33 and 35 below.

² 'Supplication in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*', *TAPA* 112 (1982), 125–40, 129.

³ Cf. D. L. Page, *History and the Homeric Iliad* (Berkeley, 1959), pp. 297–315, esp. p. 303; for an argument against the separatist view, J. A. Scott, 'Phoenix in the *Iliad*', *AJP* 33 (1912), 68–77.

examination of supplications on the ground that 'the retribution envisioned is otherwise alien to both epics, and suits Phoenix's arguments rather than any theology'.⁴

Her observation seems generally sound, and it is tempting to follow her path. First, however, we need to examine the Litai allegory in the light of the Homeric doctrine of supplication observed elsewhere. If it is alien to the rest of the corpus, in what way?

Zeus is called *Hiketesios* at *Od.* 13.213 and clearly regarded by mortals as patron of suppliants (*Od.* 7.165, 181, 9.270, etc.) in the *Odyssey*. In this epic, the majority of suppliants are foreigners asking for protection and hospitality, and their supplication is usually successful (except Odysseus' to the Cyclops, and to Aeolos on his second arrival). When Odysseus arrives in Alcinous' palace as a suppliant, the king even says that a guest/suppliant is like one's brother (8.546–7).

Another category of suppliants, those in battle, however, are not always successful. Odysseus, pretending to be a Cretan, claims that he successfully supplicated an Egyptian king in battle after the defeat of himself and his crew, and that the king pitied him, took him home and protected him (14.278–84).⁵ Odysseus himself, on the other hand, ruthlessly kills Leodes, when the latter supplicates for his life claiming that his conduct in the house of Odysseus has been reasonable (22.310–19). Shortly after this, Odysseus does spare Phemius and Medon who have also supplicated him and Telemachos respectively, but that is because he acknowledges their innocence. His criterion here is quite clear: an enemy must be killed. He is determined to kill all the suitors, whatever their excuse may be and even if they resort to the claim of suppliants. Of course, in his eye, they are the offenders against Zeus *Xeinios/Hiketesios* themselves, but at this point his rage seems to be beyond such reasoning. Telemachos even fears Odysseus may have killed Medon in his rage (22.359–60).

If that is the case in the *Odyssey* where suppliants in other contexts are generally kindly treated, it is no surprise to find in the *Iliad*, where the business is war, that the majority of supplications are unsuccessful. Most of the suppliants in this epic are the Trojans or their allies asking an Achaean warrior for mercy, and they are all killed. Dolon is killed by Diomedes even as he tries to take a suppliant posture (10.454–7); Adrestos (6.63–5), who has supplicated Menelaos nearly successfully, and the sons of Antimachos (11.143–7) are killed by Agamemnon; Tros (20.463–72) and Lycaon (21.116–19) are killed by Achilles, who did once spare Lycaon and others (21.77, 100–2). The observation of Pedrick that 'no warrior in the *Iliad* is ever stopped from rejecting an enemy's plea for his life by fear of Zeus' is quite accurate.⁶ This does not, however, automatically mean that the notion of divine protection of suppliants does not exist in the *Iliad* as a whole, as she infers from the fact that *Hiketesios* is never mentioned in supplications.⁷

First of all, we must not forget that war is not a lawsuit. In battles, killing is the business, not appeals and hearings. The absence of appeals to Zeus seems rather due to the double standard of human morality universally observed even to this day: one in peace, another in war. If you kill a man in peace time, you will be a criminal. If you

⁴ Pedrick, art. cit. (n. 2), 132 n. 29.

⁵ Pedrick thinks that 'Zeus is imagined as protecting the suppliant even in battle' (art. cit. 133) in this passage. However, if we look at the passage closely, Zeus is not involved in the supplication itself. The king spared the suppliant out of his pity (14.279 μ' ἐλέησεν) and took him to his palace on his chariot (280 ἐς δίφρον δέ μ' ἔσας ἄγεν οἰκάδε). By then, therefore, the suppliant had acquired ξείνος status. And it is at this point that the authority of Zeus *Xeinios* (14.283–4) is brought into the story.

⁶ Art. cit. 133.

⁷ Art. cit. 129, 135.

kill hundreds on the battlefield, you will be a hero. Sad to say, killing enemies in battle is basically a *good* thing, the very heart of the heroic virtue. How can you incur divine anger when you are doing something good, winning glory? If a warrior kills more enemies, it means more honour. More honour means a bigger prize. A suppliant in battle therefore stands a chance of success only by offering his opponent a splendid ransom which will outweigh the prize the latter will get by killing him. This scheme sometimes works, but obviously, when the supplicated warrior happens to be bloodthirsty or seeking revenge rather than profit, it doesn't. See the poet's dry comment on Tros trying to supplicate Achilles (20.466–8):

νήπιος, οὐδὲ τὸ ἦδη, ὃ οὐ πείσεσθαι ἐμελλεν·
οὐ γάρ τι γλυκύθυμος ἀνὴρ ἦν οὐδ' ἀγανόφρων,
ἀλλὰ μάλ' ἐμμεμαώς.

This sort of situation is typical of the *Iliad*. It confirms the well-known human reality, that there is no use looking for the ethics of sanity where the war-god governs.⁸ In a world where moral values are reversed, pleading alone is not enough to make a valid *ικέτης*.⁹

This explains why Lycaon is the only suppliant in battle who claims to be 'like a *ικέτης*'.¹⁰ He claims that he shared a meal with Achilles sitting next to him when he was his captive (21.74–7):

γουνούμαι σ', Ἀχιλεὺ· σὺ δέ μ' αἶδεο καί μ' ἐλέησον·
ἀντί τοί εἰμ' ἰκέταο, διοτρεφές, αἰδοίοιο·
πὰρ γὰρ σοὶ πρῶτω πασάμην Δημήτερος ἀκτὴν,
ἥματι τῷ ὅτε μ' εἶλες ἐϋκτιμένη ἐν ἄλωῃ.

'I am like your *ικέτης*, because ...', he explains. The fact that Lycaon claims to be 'as good as' a *ικέτης* to Achilles alone means that he is not actually one, and the fact that the claim requires an explanation shows that it is far from being obvious. This clearly shows that holding one's opponent's knees alone does not make a *ικέτης*. Therefore Lycaon in his desperation tries to introduce the ethics of peace forcibly into his relationship with Achilles. This episode is good evidence for the existence of some respect for *ικέται* in the *Iliad* as in the *Odyssey*. A *ικέτης* is *αἰδοῖος* (to be respected) and also apparently under some divine protection, more specifically, the deities of food and hospitality. Even *διοτρεφές* immediately followed by *ικέταο* might be the sign of underlying association of Zeus with *ικέτης*.

Lycaon's supplication fails largely because of Achilles' determination to avenge his friend's death, but it must fail also because Lycaon cannot claim to be a genuine *ικέτης*. His claim depends on the shaky logic, 'A captive is like a guest'.¹¹ On the

⁸ Cf. *Od.* 11.537 ἐπιμῖξ δέ τε μαίνεται Ἄρης; cf. A. Heubeck, S. West and J. B. Hainsworth, *A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey Volume I: Books I–VIII* (Oxford, 1988), on 5.447: 'αἰδοῖος: the claim of the suppliant, *except in the heat of battle*, was absolute against other men, and sanctioned by Zeus *ικετήσιος* (xiii, 213) ...' (my italics); even in the successful example of war-time supplication in the *Odyssey*, i.e. a fictitious episode of Odysseus being saved by the king of Egypt, we see the 'ethics of war'. While the pious king protects the helpless enemy in awe of Zeus *Xeinios* because the foreigner is already accepted into his house as *ξείνος* (14.280), other angry Egyptians still demand his life (14.281–2).

⁹ Note how different Hector the family man (e.g. *Il.* 24.767–72) is from Hector the warrior (e.g. *Il.* 24.739).

¹⁰ ἀντί = as good as; cf. W. Leaf, *Homer: The Iliad*² (London, 1902), *ad loc.*

¹¹ W. Leaf, *op. cit.* (n. 10), on *Il.* 21.75, referring to the parallel custom of the Arabs, says that 'The mere breaking of bread under another man's roof entitles to the position of a suppliant, even though the intention to protect be absent'. Cf. bT scholion *ad loc.* But Achilles

other hand, a genuine guest-friend relationship can successfully introduce the morality of peace into the battlefield, as we know through the Glaucus–Diomedes episode (6.212–33). Therefore, we must assume that Zeus’ capacity as *Hiketesios* has a valid force among humans also in the *Iliad*, so far as the functions of *Xeinios* and *Hiketesios* overlap.

Achilles, naturally, does not incur divine anger by killing his pseudo-*ικέτης* Lycaon, except the wrath of the pro-Trojan river-god Xanthos (21.146–7). However, even the god himself cannot help admitting that Achilles is acting ruthlessly (*αἴσχυλα ῥέζεις* 21.214) *because the gods themselves always stand by him* (215). This being the case, we must conclude that the gods in general, including Zeus, do not act as the protectors of suppliants on the battlefield.

Under more peaceful circumstances, however, Zeus does seem to expect men to respect suppliants. As he predicts Achilles’ treatment of Priam, he says (24.156–8 = 185–7):

οὐτ’ αὐτὸς κτενέει ἀπὸ τ’ ἄλλους πάντας ἐρύξει·
οὔτε γὰρ ἔστ’ ἀφρων οὐτ’ ἄσκοπος οὐτ’ ἀλιτῆμων,
ἀλλὰ μάλ’ ἐνδυκέως ἰκέτω πεφιδήσεται ἀνδρός.

The implication of this passage is straightforward. Those who kill *ικέται* are mindless, thoughtless, and wrongful, and *ικέται* should be treated kindly. What must be noted here is the way Zeus expresses his expectation. His tone is not that of the declaration of the guardian-god of suppliants saying, ‘He must fear me, *Hiketesios*’. Instead, it is a relaxed expression of his trust in Achilles’ humanity: ‘He is a thoughtful enough man to treat a suppliant kindly’, as if it were solely a matter of human morality over which Zeus has no direct authority.¹² Therefore, we cannot consider it unmistakable evidence of Zeus as avenger of suppliants, while it does show that in the *Iliad*, too, the respect for suppliants is a well-established moral obligation among human beings, expected, even if not imposed, by divine authority.

Achilles does not fall short of Zeus’ expectation. He treats Priam kindly as an unhappy father like his own, despite his ever unquenchable wrath at Hector as the killer of his friend Patroclus which nearly surfaces at one point (24.559–70). To Priam’s hasty request to see his son’s body and refusal to accept Achilles’ hospitality, Achilles answers by saying that he is returning the body (though reluctantly) because of the gods’ instruction, and that he is aware of the divine escort which has brought Priam to his hut unnoticed by others (24.563–7). Therefore do not upset me any more, he says (569–70):

μή σε, γέρον, οὐδ’ αὐτὸν ἐνὶ κλισίῃσιν ἐάσω
καὶ ἰκέτην περ ἑόντα, Διὸς δ’ ἀλίτῳμαι ἐφετμάς.

is fully aware of the fact that Lycaon was once his captive, as we know from his monologue, and that is precisely what drives him to try to ‘kill him again’ (21.54–63). The bread they shared simply is no hindrance at all to Achilles. Similarly, Odysseus does not hesitate to kill the suitors who have eaten under his roof. Here again, some might like to quote the Egyptian episode of Odysseus as an example of the protection guaranteed to a captive. However, the king obviously treats the Cretan (Odysseus’ assumed identity) not as his captive, but as his guest, for the man is even given property by the king and other Egyptians. That is by no means what every captive can expect from his enemy. Achilles’ attitude, on the other hand, is not that of a bloodthirsty killer, but of a man who has renounced the joy and warmth of life. He calls Lycaon *φίλος* (106), not because they once shared bread, but because they are dying together. Cf. G. K. Whitfield, *The Restored Relation* (Diss. Columbia, 1967), p. 151; C. Daude, ‘Homère: un humanisme pessimiste’, *Actes du Congrès, Association G. Budé*, VII^e Congrès, Aix-en-Provence (Paris, 1964), pp. 543–64, p. 554.

¹² But, in fact, Achilles’ release of Hector’s body is his *κύδος* bestowed by Zeus. Cf. *Il.* 24.110.

‘δέ’ after ‘Διός’ separates two concerns: (1) lest he kill a suppliant and (2) lest he offend against the instruction of Zeus. These two find their echoes in the god’s prediction. Achilles tries not to offend (ἀλίτωμαι) against Zeus’ instruction just as the god expects Achilles not to be ἀλιτήμων, and Achilles is restraining himself from harming a *ικέτης* just as Zeus expects (ικέτω πεφιδήσεται ἀνδρός). Since the word *ικέτης* is specifically introduced in both passages, we must assume that Priam deserves protection as a *ικέτης per se* to some extent. The gods’ message to Achilles is therefore to make sure that he will not fall back into the ‘morality of war’ which can emerge at any moment within his heart swollen with anger.

This example, again, does not make clear the status of Zeus, whether he actually acts as the god of suppliants or not, but it at least leaves open the possibility of some divine concern for suppliants. Thus it also leaves a channel open between Phoenix’s Litai allegory (where Zeus is clearly the avenger of suppliants) and the rest of the *Iliad* (where, it has been claimed, he is not).¹³

Phoenix’s speech

Let us now go back to the speech of Phoenix. What sort of supplication does he talk about? After he has recounted his ‘history’, he urges Achilles to restrain his great spirit because even the gods are appeased by gifts (9.499–501):

καὶ μὲν τοὺς θυέεσσι καὶ εὐχολῆς ἀγανῆσι
λοιβῇ τε κνίσῃ τε παρατρωπῶσ’ ἀνθρώποι
λίσσόμενοι, ὅτε κέν τις ὑπερβῇ καὶ ἀμάρτη.

Clearly this is a new category of supplication. It is neither a request for protection and hospitality by *ξείνος-ικέτης*, nor a plea for one’s life in battle, nor an attempt to ransom one’s child (dead or alive). It is a supplication for pardon by those who have done something wrong.

This exactly matches the present situation – probably so designed.¹⁴ Agamemnon slighted Achilles, but now here they are: he has sent Achilles’ closest friends as an embassy to offer him splendid gifts and ask him to return to the battle. There is only one exact parallel to this situation in the *Iliad* – the paradeigma of Meleager, also recounted by Phoenix (529–99). It is almost the exact parallel not only to the present supplication, but to the main structure of the ‘Song of Achilles’ as a whole. Meleager is the supreme warrior by whose aid the Aetolians have held the Kouretes back. But he withdraws from the battle, angered by his mother’s curse. Then the Kouretes start pressing hard the city of Aetolia. He receives three supplications to return to battle, one from the elders and priests of the city offering gifts, another from his family, and another from his friends, but he refuses them all. Finally, when the enemy have started climbing the walls and setting fire to the city, he yields to the tearful plea of his wife and returns to battle. Although he saves the city, it is too late. He receives no reward.

¹³ There is one example of divine wrath against a man who has rejected a suppliant, namely, Agamemnon, who has rejected Chryses’ appeal to him to release his daughter (*Il.* 1.11ff.). However, although Chryses is described with a term of supplication (15 *λίσσετο*), he pleads in his capacity as a priest of Apollo rather than a suppliant (21), and the Achaeans are punished for Agamemnon’s insult to Chryses’ priesthood by Apollo on his priest’s request (1.35–52). Therefore, the issue here is solely Apollo’s *τιμή*, not the right of a suppliant.

¹⁴ Cf. M. M. Willcock, ‘Mythological Paradeigma in the *Iliad*’, *CQ* 14 (1964), 141–54, esp. 149–53.

Like Meleager, Achilles withdraws from the battle leaving the Achaeans in severe military difficulty. He also receives a set of three supplications. He is supplicated first by Odysseus, as the official envoy from Agamemnon, offering gifts – corresponding to the Aetolian elders and priests – then by Phoenix, as Achilles’ ‘nurse’ – corresponding to Meleager’s family – and finally by Ajax as a friend who tries to persuade Achilles with the logic of friendship.¹⁵ Achilles, like Meleager, does not listen. He will change his mind, like Meleager, only when the enemy have started climbing the wall and setting fire to the Achaean ships, and with the tearful plea of Patroclus. However, the parallel ends there. It is Patroclus, not Achilles, who returns to battle to drive back the hard pressing enemy. Achilles does get gifts in the end (as promised by Athena at *Il.* 1.213–14) – though they are meaningless to him after the death of Patroclus.

Probably the most striking point of comparison between the two is that both groups of supplications completely miss the point. The promise of gifts from Agamemnon means absolutely nothing to Achilles – a fact not recognized by any of the members of the Embassy. The point of Achilles’ long angry speech of refusal is compressed into the following two lines (9.386–7):

*οὐδέ κεν ὥς ἐτι θυμὸν ἐμὸν πείσει' Ἀγαμέμνων,
πρὶν γ' ἀπὸ πάσαν ἐμοὶ δόμεναι θυμολαγέα λώβην.*

Remember, this is said *after* the offer of splendid gifts from Agamemnon. The offer obviously has not made any difference to the situation at all. Achilles does not feel he has received a due apology or the restoration of his honour.¹⁶ That is the full stop. All the following persuasion based on the same offer, though it has some emotional impact on Achilles, must fail.¹⁷ Instead, he gets even more infuriated. Is his reaction unreasonable?

It is obvious to the audience/reader that, though having agreed to send the Embassy to Achilles, Agamemnon has hardly changed his attitude towards Achilles, as we see in the closing lines of his speech (*Il.* 9.158–61):

*δμηθήτω – Ἀΐδης τοι ἀμείλιχος ἦδ' ἀδάμαστος·
τοῦνεκα καὶ τε βροτοῖσι θεῶν ἔχθιστος ἀπάντων –
καὶ μοι ὑποστήτω, ὅσσον βασιλεύτέρος εἰμι
ἦδ' ὅσσον γενεῇ προγενέστερος εὐχόμαι εἶναι.*

There are no ‘sweet words’ (*ἔπεσσι μελιχίοισιν* 9.113) as recommended by Nestor. Instead, we hear a typical boast of his higher rank and his implicit displeasure with Achilles’ haughtiness.¹⁸ ‘If he remains stubborn after this, he will be as hateful as Hades to me.’ – knowing Achilles so well, he certainly suspects that it is a possible outcome. We readers might think that there is no way for Achilles of knowing what Agamemnon’s actual feeling is like, and judge Achilles’ reaction to the Embassy accordingly, thinking that he should not be so obdurate.¹⁹ However, in fact, he acts

¹⁵ For the corresponding roles of the members of two sets of supplications, cf. H. Ebel, *After Dionysus* (Cranbury, NJ, 1972), p. 99.

¹⁶ Cf. S. E. Bassett, *The Poetry of Homer* (Berkeley, 1938), p. 201: ‘...Achilles now recognizes the claim of friendship, but feels that the slight upon his honour still remains, since his best friends misunderstand the real point at issue.’

¹⁷ For the emotional impact of the speeches of the Embassy on Achilles, see T. A. Tarkow, ‘Achilles’ Response to the Embassy’, *CB* 58 (1982), 29–34, 30–1.

¹⁸ Cf. S. E. Bassett, ‘The Ἀμαρτία of Achilles’, *TAPA* 65 (1934), 47–69, 59–62; D. E. Eichholz, ‘The Propitiation of Achilles’, *AJP* 74 (1953), 137–48, 144.

¹⁹ E.g. A. Thornton, *Homer’s Iliad: its Composition and the Motif of Supplication* (Göttingen, 1984), p. 132.

as if he knew exactly what Agamemnon said when despatching his envoys. When rejecting the offer of compensation, Achilles replies (9.312–13):

ἐχθρὸς γάρ μοι κείνος ὁμῶς Ἀΐδαο πύλῃσιν
ὅς χ' ἔτερον μὲν κεύθῃ ἐνὶ φρεσίν, ἄλλο δὲ εἴπη.

It strikes the reader as a bitter irony. For Achilles, too, Agamemnon is 'as hateful as Hades', because 'he has one thing in mind and says another', which is exactly what Agamemnon is doing now through the Embassy. Despite his sending an embassy to lure Achilles back to the battle, there is no word of apology, no change of attitude on Agamemnon's part. Instead, he still thinks Achilles' pride as hateful as Hades, insisting that he is superior to Achilles. Although Odysseus does not report this last part of Agamemnon's speech, Achilles probably knows Agamemnon well enough to sense it from the list of gifts full of royal pride.²⁰ The readers are directed by the poet to see the statements of the two heroes in an unmistakable symmetry which leads us to judge Achilles' rejection completely justifiable.²¹

Meleager's anger is also never quenched. His mother cursed him, praying for his death, because he killed his brother. How? It cannot be anywhere but in the battle between the Aetolians and the Kouretes.²² He has been fighting for the Aetolians when his mother, one of those closest to him, curses him, wishes his death, honouring her brother (despite the fact that he was on the enemy's side) more than her son and thereby causing Meleager's distrust in his family, injuring his honour, shattering all the meaning of his heroic life and his life itself. That is his condition when the Aetolians come to supplicate him, promising gifts, but thinking only about their own safety, without resolving the cause of his anger itself. It is no coincidence that the poet put the supplications of his family in the order given: his father, sisters, and mother. His mother comes last because she is the one who is angry at him herself, and only when she is desperate to survive does she come and plead with her son, whose own life she has already destroyed. The lines lead naturally into his even more infuriated refusal, after his mother's all too selfish plea (9.584–5):

πολλὰ δὲ τὸν γε κασίγνηται καὶ πότνια μήτηρ
ἐλλίσσονθ'. ὁ δὲ μᾶλλον ἀναίνετο.

Similarly, the three sent to Achilles, who are among those closest to him, fail to see the situation from his point of view. They only think about the lives of the Achaeans and their own. 'Your injured honour is nothing compared with the lives of those who slighted you.'²³ – That is the only message Achilles hears from the triple supplication which he could not accept. Nobody in his society could accept such a deal. What Achilles wants is (1) Agamemnon's humiliation and sincere apology, and (2) the full recovery of his own position as the foremost warrior in the Achaean camp. He has an opportunity for (2) now, but (2) should not come before (1), if he is to avoid further humiliation.²⁴

²⁰ Cf. C. H. Whitman, *Homer and the Heroic Tradition* (Cambridge, MA, 1958), pp. 192–3.

²¹ Note also Agamemnon's proud words, βασιλεύτερός εἰμι (9.160) echoed by Achilles' rejection of his daughter's hand, ὁ δ' Ἀχαιῶν ἄλλον ἐλέσθω, ὅς τις οἱ τ' ἐπέουκε καὶ ὅς βασιλεύτερός ἐστιν (9.391–2).

²² As in Bacchylides, 5.127–9.

²³ On the contrary, of course, he has specially asked Zeus to restore his honour *through* the death of many Achaeans. In his eye, the Achaeans who did not check Agamemnon from dishonouring him share the king's responsibility. Cf. *Il.* 16.18, ὑπερβασίης ἐνεκα σφῆς.

²⁴ He has another occasion to recover (2), when Patroclus urges him to save the Achaeans in book 16, but he does not agree to go himself, and sends Patroclus instead, which results in the latter's death. But is Achilles punished for this 'error', as A. Thornton maintains (op. cit. (n. 19),

Putting together the two stories of Phoenix, the Litai allegory and the paradeigma of Meleager, his message seems to warn Achilles that he will be punished by ἄτῃ if he does not accept their supplication. Should we then say, as many do, that Achilles is in fact punished by ἄτῃ resulting in the loss of his beloved friend, because he has rejected the supplication of the Embassy?

One point must be noted. Just as Meleager is not said to be affected by ἄτῃ, but loses his reward through his *anger* (χόλος 9.565), Achilles is said to be affected only by his anger (18.108–11 etc.), not by ἄτῃ. Can we still say, nevertheless, that he has been punished by ἄτῃ? If so, in what way? Before we can answer these questions, we must next investigate the nature of ἄτῃ in Homer.

ἄτῃ in Homer

Although we have two outstanding examples of personified Ἄτῃ (the allegory of Phoenix, *Il.* 9.504ff., and the story of Agamemnon, *Il.* 19.91ff.), the other instances of ἄτῃ do not invest the image of the goddess Ἄτῃ with any personality. In *Il.* 16.805, ἄτῃ is nothing but a physical effect on Patroclus caused by Apollo. It would be very awkward if we had to imagine the god, after hitting Patroclus, hastily calling the goddess Ἄτῃ to come to ‘seize’ him.

ἄτῃ may be talked about as if it could be personalized. There are such expressions as ‘Alexandros’ ἄτῃ’ (*Il.* 6.356, 24.28), ‘his ἄτῃ’ (Agamemnon’s, *Il.* 1.412, 16.274; Eurytion’s caused by wine, *Od.* 21.302), and ‘my ἄτῃ’ (Agamemnon’s, *Il.* 9.115). If each person can have his own ἄτῃ, or even ἄτῃ, ἄτῃ cannot be considered a fully personified deity, but a sort of psychological phenomenon. Odysseus says he was lulled ‘into ἄτῃ’ (εἰς ἄτῃν) at *Od.* 12.372. Such an expression also points to ἄτῃ as a condition of a man, rather than an external force creating the condition.

The noun ἄτῃ and its cognate verb ἀάω are used most often to describe a state of mind of someone who makes a certain mistake. A person under the influence of ἄτῃ can commit murder (*Il.* 24.480–1), and can undertake an unsuccessful adventure (*Od.* 15.233) or a fruitless war (*Il.* 2.111, 8.237, 9.18). Patroclus is in the state of ἄτῃ (ἀάσθη) when he goes too far into the Trojan forces, against Achilles’ advice, to be killed by Hector (*Il.* 16.685). Paris led Helen to Troy because of his ἄτῃ (*Il.* 6.356, 24.28) and she followed him because of ἄτῃ sent by Aphrodite (*Od.* 4.261; cf. 23.223), causing a disastrous war between the Trojans and the Achaeans.

It is because of ἄτῃ that Agamemnon makes his most serious mistake: he seizes Achilles’ war-prize Briseis, so causing him to withdraw from the battle (*Il.* 1.412, 9.115, 16.274, 19.88) resulting in great loss of Achaean lives (*Il.* 19.134–6). It is with this ἄτῃ of his that Agamemnon compares Ἄτῃ who once misled even Zeus into being deceived by Hera’s trick (*Il.* 19.95–133). In his story, Ἄτῃ is fully personified, said to be the eldest daughter of Zeus (19.91), but apparently out of her father’s control. Therefore, after realizing his mistake, which will result in the lifelong ordeals of his beloved son Heracles, he seizes her by her hair and hurls her out of Mt Olympus (19.126–9). This picture of the Zeus–Ate relationship is evidently very different from that in Phoenix’s speech.

pp. 135–6)? On the contrary, I think, Achilles should be commended for his concern for the Achaeans, which makes him send Patroclus to battle. Although Achilles has not received a true apology, (1), which he expects to come soon (*Il.* 11.609–10), he sends his friend and other Myrmidons to save the Achaeans before it is too late. This good will has never been appreciated by anybody in the story, least of all by Agamemnon, and, probably as a consequence, not very often pointed out by critics. However, who can deny that it is the result of his concession, rather than his moral error, that he did save the Achaeans?

ἄτη is also observed in some sort of carelessness or forgetfulness. Oeneus forgets to make an offering to Artemis (*Il.* 9.537) thereby inviting her punishment, and Agastrophus does not keep his chariot at hand at a crucial moment (*Il.* 11.340), both being in the state of *ἄτη* (ἀάσατο).

How and why *ἄτη* comes to men is an interesting and difficult question. Zeus, though once hit by *ἄτη* himself, is said by men to be the author of *ἄτη* at *Il.* 19.270, and at *Il.* 2.111, 8.237 and 9.18; and as we have seen, Phoenix says that Zeus sends *ἄτη* to punish men who spurn the Litai, a moral argument about the origin of *ἄτη* not paralleled anywhere else in Homer.

At *Il.* 19.270–4, accepting Agamemnon's explanation that it was Zeus, Moira and Erinys who sent *ἄτη* to him (19.87–8), Achilles says that Zeus sent *ἄται* to Agamemnon because the god wanted to kill many Achaeans. Modern readers might ask themselves, 'But was it not Achilles himself who wished the death of many Achaeans?' (cf. *Il.* 1.409–10). In his mind, however, the whole cycle of events – Agamemnon's *ἄτη*, Achilles' wrath, and its disastrous consequences including the death of Patroclus – was planned by Zeus, who sent *ἄτη* to Agamemnon to start his plan working. This view is apparently shared by the poet, who says Διὸς δ' ἐτελείετο βουλή (*Il.* 1.5) immediately after sketching the disaster of the Achaeans caused by the quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles. Certainly it so happens that Agamemnon is hit by *ἄτη* (to slight Achilles) just after having rejected Chryses' supplication – a formula presented by Phoenix. However, as we have seen above (note 13), he does not offend against the Litai, but against Apollo, and is duly punished for it by the god through the plague, and in the end successfully appeases the god after making up for his offence. The effect of his *ἄτη*, on the other hand, lasts much longer than the Chryses incident. We can find no explanation why Zeus should send such *ἄτη* to Agamemnon and cause the subsequent events.

At *Od.* 15.233–4, Erinys alone is said by the poet to be responsible for Melampous' *ἄτη*. This *ἄτη* also resists moral analysis, for his adventure is successful in the end within the plan of Zeus (*Od.* 11.297). We must assume that it was sent simply to start the god's plan working.

Similarly, we cannot see the reason, moral or otherwise, why Aphrodite sent *ἄτη* to Helen (as Helen claims) to make her run off with Paris to Troy (*Od.* 4.261–2). Surely not to destroy her favourite people? All we can say for certain is that the goddess stirred Helen's love for Paris, which Helen later recognizes as *ἄτη*.

The *ἄτη* which Patroclus experiences at *Il.* 16.805–6 is a physical and mental 'stupor' – as W. Leaf calls it²⁵ – and quite explicitly described by the poet as the effect of Apollo's stroke. The god's immediate purpose in causing it must be to make Patroclus an easy prey to Hector. However, it is not a punishment.²⁶ It is simply his destiny, part of the plan of Zeus, that he is killed by Hector (*Il.* 15.64–5).

If the gods do send *ἄτη* to us for no obvious moral reason, not as punishment for crime, but just as they please, what can we do? We certainly find some sense in Agamemnon's lamenting excuse at *Il.* 19.90–4:

ἀλλὰ τί κεν ῥέξαιμι; θεὸς διὰ πάντα τελευτᾷ.
πρέσβα Διὸς θυγάτηρ ἄτη, ἥ πάντας ἀάται,
οὐλομένην· τῇ μὲν θ' ἀπαλοὶ πόδες· οὐ γὰρ ἐπ' οὐδὲι
πίλναται, ἀλλ' ἄρα ἡ γε κατ' ἀνδρῶν κράατα βαίνει
βλάπτουσι· ἀνθρώπους· κατὰ δ' οὐκ ἑτερόν γε πέδησε.

²⁵ Ed. W. Leaf, op. cit. (n. 10), *ad loc.*

²⁶ Cf. E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley, 1951), pp. 5–6.

The situation looks most pathetic for Odysseus at *Od.* 12.372. Being stranded on the island of Thrinakie with no food left, he goes out of the sight of his companions to pray to the gods for any clue how to get out of their desperate situation (12.336–8):

χείρας νιψάμενος, ὅθ' ἐπὶ σκέπας ἦν ἀνέμοιο,
ἡρώμην πάντεσσι θεοῖς οἱ Ὀλυμπον ἔχουσιν·
οἱ δ' ἄρα μοι γλυκύν ὕπνον ἐπὶ βλεφάροισιν ἔχευαν.

In response to Odysseus' prayer, the gods (according to him) send γλυκὺς ὕπνος (he calls it νηλεὲς ὕπνος later at 12.373) which leads him to disaster. He goes back to where his companions are and knows that they have slaughtered the cattle of Helios. He cries out (12.371–3):

Ζεὺ πάτερ ἡδ' ἄλλοι μάκαρες θεοὶ αἰὲν ἐόντες,
ἦ με μάλ' εἰς ἄτην κοιμήσατε νηλεῖ ὕπνω,
οἱ δ' ἔταροι μέγα ἔργον ἐμητίσαντο μένοντες.

The gods sent him sleep which was sweet when it came, but later Odysseus, having discovered the disaster it has caused, calls it ἄτη. It can hardly be his mistake, but rather a misfortune which has fallen on him. What he sees here is the 'blessed gods' as arbitrary dispensers of ἄτη.²⁷

We do not know, however, how far we can take this image of 'happy, cruel gods' seriously, for, in a similar situation elsewhere, Odysseus blames only his companions and himself. On the way to (in fact, very close to) Ithaca from Aeolia, his companions open the bag of winds through their misconception that it contains some gifts from Aeolus, while Odysseus is asleep. Then their ship is blown back by the released winds to the island of Aeolus, this time to be sent away coldly. Odysseus explains his situation to Aeolus in this way (*Od.* 10.68–9):

ἄασάν μ' ἔταροι τε κακοὶ πρὸς τοῖσί τε ὕπνος
σκέτλιος.

Here 'ἄασάν με', means more or less 'brought me to ruin (ἄτη)' and he says it is due to his sleep and ἔταροι κακοί – which should be translated as 'useless companions' rather than 'wicked companions'. It is clear from his recollection, looking back to this event in his narration, that he considers himself also responsible, apparently because of his untimely sleep (10.27 αὐτῶν γὰρ ἀπωλόμην ἀφραδίῃσιν). But he does not blame the gods at all this time.

We get more suspicious about the gods' responsibility for ἄτη when Elpenor says (*Od.* 11.61):

ἄσέ με δαίμονος αἴσα κακὴ καὶ ἀθέσφατος οἶνος.

Even though 'αἴσα κακὴ of some god' is ultimately responsible for his accidental death, it is obvious that he drank too much wine and fell from the roof because of that. His ἄτη can hardly be the responsibility of anybody but himself. Antinous the suitor also points out the effect of wine which brings forth ἄτη, referring to the episode of a drunken Centaur (*Od.* 21.293–302; 296 ἄασ', 297 ἄασεν, 301 ἀασθεῖς, 302 ἄτην).

Another testimony of ἄτη of completely human origin is at *Il.* 10.391. Having been caught by Odysseus and Diomedes, Dolon blames Hector:

πολλήσιν μ' ἄτησι παρέκ νόον ἤγαγεν Ἔκτωρ.

²⁷ Cf. J. M. Bremer's observation in *Hamartia* (Amsterdam, 1969), pp. 111–12: 'The Homeric conception of *ate* relates the error to an arbitrary and malicious interference of the gods with human action, causing infatuation in man and resulting in disaster.'

By saying πολλῆσιν ἄτῃσι Dolon means nothing more than an inviting promise of reward for his adventure.²⁸ We have already seen other examples of ἄτῃ as motivation towards unsuccessful adventures at *Il.* 2.111, 8.237, 9.18 and *Od.* 15.233.

The ἄτῃ of Oïlian Ajax at *Od.* 4.503ff. (503, 509 ἀάσθη) is definitely not sent by the gods. He boasts that ἀέκτετι θεῶν φυγέειν μέγα λαῖμα θαλάσσης (504). Hearing this, Poseidon, who has had no bad intention towards him until then, brings him the final destruction.

From these examples we can now conclude that all ἄτῃ is a temporary state of mind (including sleep) which brings a person into unfortunate situations, regardless of whether it comes from gods or men. The only common factor in all the examples seems to be that they all result in misfortunes.

In other words, even if one makes a mistake in conduct or judgement, but does not meet any obvious misfortune, it is never regarded as ἄτῃ. Agamemnon's moaning that Zeus sent ἄτῃ to him to lead him to Troy for nothing (*Il.* 2.111, 8.237, 9.18) is a good example. It is, in fact, *not* ἄτῃ that made him come to Troy because he will win the war eventually, but for the time being everything seems a failure to him – hence, he thinks, his decision must have been ἄτῃ.

On the contrary, although he is regretful about his quarrel with Achilles already shortly afterwards and says it is a hardship sent by Zeus (*Il.* 2.375–8), he does not call his state of mind at the time of the quarrel ἄτῃ until he sees its disastrous consequences (9.115 ἄτας, 116 ἀασάμην, 19.88 etc.). A disastrous result of a mistake or of misconduct comes first, and then the state of mind which has brought forth the result is retrospectively called ἄτῃ – that seems to be the Homeric logic.

ἄτῃ can be sent from some deity (not only Zeus), be caused by men, or come by itself out of nowhere, often for no obvious reasons. It can be just a phenomenon or a personified goddess. This peculiar nature of ἄτῃ seems somewhat easier to grasp if we compare it with a similar case of shaky personality, that of ὄνειρος.

Zeus sends a false dream to Agamemnon (*Il.* 2.6ff.), again to start his plan working. He summons and addresses the Dream as a fully personified being (οὐλε "Ὀνειρε 2.8). Editors will naturally choose to spell "Ὀνειρος with initial capital here (2.6, 8, 16, 22, 56). However, when Nestor refers to the very same dream as 'the dream', they choose

²⁸ Cf. Leaf, *op. cit.* (n. 10), on 10.391: 'ἄτῃσι is so far peculiar here that it is used of "blinding", deception, of a purely human origin; ἄτας ἔφη τὰς ἐπὶ κακῶν ὑποσχέσεις, Schol. BT. In every other instance it conveys the idea of some divine or mysterious blindness.' Dodds (*op. cit.* [n. 26], p. 19 n. 20) does not accept the view that this passage is an exception, maintaining that ἄται means 'a symptom of Hector's own condition of (divinely inspired) ἄτῃ' and not that 'Hector's unwise advice produced ἄτῃ in Dolon,' on the ground that ἄται as 'acts productive of infatuation' is 'a unique psychology' and 'a unique use of ἄται'. His interpretation has two major problems. First, ἄτῃ always involves disastrous consequences for the person who acts under its influence, whereas the present situation is Dolon's disaster and not Hector's. Therefore, even if Hector's suggestion was a strategic error, Hector cannot be considered the victim of ἄτῃ. If it is to be interpreted as Dodds proposes, namely that Hector is hit by ἄτῃ but not affected by it himself, we are indeed dealing with a unique use of ἄτῃ. Also in this context, it is difficult to visualize 'many' ἄται on Hector's side. Secondly, although Dodds has successfully eliminated two possible meanings of ἄται here, namely, one as 'temporary blinding of mind (produced in Dolon)' and one as 'acts productive of infatuation', he has failed to take account of another aspect of ἄται, i.e. as 'deluders', as *agents* causing mental malfunction. If we interpret πολλὰι ἄται here as Hector's *many* words of dazzling promises (which caused Dolon to lose his head), all the difficulty is dissolved. It seems, therefore, by far the best to take the ἄται as 'producers of infatuation'. I find Dodds' analysis of ἄτῃ in Homer generally sound and accurate, except that he does not make it explicit that ἄτῃ is defined by its consequences, not by its origin.

not to do so (2.80), because it is conceived as an everyday experience common to all human beings. In all other instances of dreams in Homer, there is no further indication that *ὄνειρος* has any personality.

Like *ἄτη*, *ὄνειρος* claims 'multiple authorship'. Penelope's dream at *Od.* 4.804ff. is an *εἰδωλον* sent by Athena. Another one at *Od.* 19.535ff. of an unknown origin is a different sort of dream from the one above or the one Zeus sends to Agamemnon. Unlike the previous examples, it is not a 'dream-figure' standing at the bedside to deliver a message, but a dream scene in which Penelope herself is involved. In other words, this *ὄνειρος* is her *experience* and not a divine or human figure.²⁹ At *Od.* 20.87, she says that some god sends her *ὀνείρατα κακά*. One of the 'woeful dreams' she has just had is the vision of her husband sleeping beside her. This figure itself (which she calls *ὄναρ* at 20.90) could be *ὄνειρος* the god sent by Athena or by some other god, but such a singular imagery would not be consistent with the plural *ὀνείρατα*. Evidently Penelope is thinking of plural dreams, perceived as new each time, sent by some god to disturb her mind, rather than a single dream-god visiting her again and again. Her story about the double gate of dreams (19.562ff.) also confirms the plurality of dreams. We all have many dreams; some are sent by some gods, and others come from no known source.³⁰

If we think of the similarity between the two phenomena *ἄτη* and *ὄνειρος*, the analogy we can draw from the usage of *ὄνειρος* is significant for understanding that of *ἄτη*. Zeus or other gods can send *ἄτη* or *ὄνειρος* to men to achieve their purposes. Both of them are something we experience frequently, and in both of them our rational mind does not function as normal. We know what exactly has happened only after having recovered from the experience. Then we often think that we have acted or thought in a strange way compared to what we would normally do.

Because of this mysterious nature they have in common, both are often, but not always, believed to be god-sent by the Homeric characters, and described as such by the poet. However, because their names are obviously descriptive of the respective phenomenon, they fail to acquire full personality, and because of their ubiquity, the Homeric man or the poet does not seem to find it necessary or possible to pinpoint how and why every single *ἄτη* or *ὄνειρος* visits a person.³¹

We can now conclude the following: (1) that Zeus does seem to care for suppliants to some extent; (2) that *ἄτη* does not necessarily come from the gods; (3) that the gods, including Zeus, sometimes do send *ἄτη* to men to achieve their ends. This makes the Litai–Ate 'theory' of Phoenix possible, if not entirely convincing. When he says that *Ἄτη* always goes ahead of *Λιταί*, he is referring to the common and arbitrary nature of her visits: 'She goes everywhere and harms men' (*Il.* 9.506–7), without suggesting any punitive motivations. Then, his hypothesis seems to go, since Zeus is the god of suppliants and capable of mobilizing *ἄται*, he may well one day punish those who spurn suppliants using *ἄται*. However, while it seems possible, it is never proved by any evidence in Homer. This being the case, it will be safer for us to read it as an expression of human expectation of divine justice and protection, a persuasive 'theory' of Phoenix, than a well-established theology. We may, on the other hand,

²⁹ We see another example of a dream as an experience in the simile at *Il.* 22.199–200.

³⁰ On dreams in Homer, see Dodds, op. cit. (n. 26), pp. 104–7.

³¹ Cf. R. D. Dawe, 'Some Reflections on Ate and Hamartia', *HSCP* 72 (1967), 89–123, 100: 'The division of responsibility between men and gods has long been properly understood to be an irresolvable problem in Homer...the Homeric poets did not recognise any contradiction between assigning responsibility for a particular event to the gods in one line and to men in the next.'

separate ourselves from those who claim that the concept expressed there is completely alien to the rest of the epic.³² Unless it was acceptable to the audience at least as a possible theory, it would not have found its place in its context.

Is Achilles punished through ἄτη?

Finally, we are ready to discuss the main point of this paper, the most popular interpretation of the Litai–Ate allegory of Phoenix, that it symbolizes what happens to Achilles in the following course of events. Those who hold such a view argue that ‘Achilles is obdurate to the pleas of the envoys, and is then himself smitten by Atê, for instead of helping the Achaeans out of their great crisis he sends his best friend into the battle, where he is killed’.³³

We have now come back to the question whether Achilles is actually hit by ἄτη. There is no statement by any characters or by the poet that Achilles is ever affected by ἄτη. Why? We can only assume that it is because he is not. What is often forgotten by those who maintain the contrary is that not all misfortunes or mistakes are the result of ἄτη.

For example, Hera has not only deceived Zeus by ἄτη. In the ἄτη story recounted by Agamemnon, Zeus declares Eurystheus king instead of Heracles (*Il.* 19.95ff.) as a result of being deceived by Hera, and the agent of the deception is ἄτη. But in another similar situation, the agent is sleep. Having had Zeus put to sleep by Sleep, Hera stirs a storm to blow Heracles’ ship far off course (*Il.* 14.249–56). After he has woken up and seen what has happened, Zeus hurls around the gods in a rage and, just as he throws Ate to the ground in the other episode, he might have thrown Sleep into the sea (14.258). True, untimely sleep is sometimes associated with ἄτη, as we have seen (*Od.* 10.68, 12.372), but neither this episode nor the ἀπάτη episode following it, also engineered by Hera with the help of Sleep (14.161ff.), claims that Zeus is affected by ἄτη. What is, then, the difference between the two Heracles stories? The only significant difference we can see is that the unfortunate consequences of the Ate episode are irreversible, while those of the Sleep episodes are reparable. Therefore, ἄτη seems to be what leads to major disaster with irreversible, or, at least, very grave, consequences.

This seems to enhance the view that Achilles’ loss of Patroclus is the result of his ἄτη. It is indeed the most irreversible disaster. Then, why is its cause not called his ἄτη? We must now go back to another aspect of the definition of ἄτη. It is a state of mind, malfunction of mind, which prompts misjudgement or misconduct. What misjudgement can we find in Achilles through the course of losing Patroclus? When sending out his friend to the battle? Before he sends his friend out, he specially emphasizes the heart of his advice (*Il.* 16.83):

πεῖθεο δ’ ὥς τοι ἐγὼ μύθου τέλος ἐν φρεσὶ θεῖω.

³² The theory does not, therefore, serve as decisive evidence for interpolation. Hope for divine justice is often expressed by human characters in Homer, though the gods themselves do not always live up to their expectations. For example, while human beings believe that Zeus is the guardian of oaths who punishes liars (*Il.* 4.235–9), it is he who prompts Athena to cause the truce to be broken (*Il.* 4.68–72).

³³ H. Fränkel, *Early Greek Poetry and Philosophy*² (tr., New York, 1951), p. 63. Cf. C. M. Bowra, *Tradition and Design in the Iliad* (Oxford, 1930), p. 17: ‘The theme is how Achilles’ temper leads him both to disaster and to moral degradation’; H. Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus* (Berkeley, 1971), p. 27: ‘... both Agamemnon and Achilles receive rough justice for their injustice to each other and the rest of the Achaeans perpetrated during their quarrel’; J. A. Arieti, ‘Homer’s *Litae* and *Atê*’, *CJ* 84 (1988), 1–12, 4: ‘... when Achilles refuses the *Litae* in Book 9, he is in the grip of *Atê*...’

That is (87):

ἐκ νηῶν ἐλάσας ἰέναι πάλιν.

He says, even if Zeus gives you glory, you should not continue fighting. Do not get carried away by victory, do not go to the city, lest some god, especially Apollo, intervene (87–94). I fail to see any misjudgement in his instruction. He knows exactly what will happen, what will cause what, if Patroclus does not follow his instruction. His advice is completely logical and blameless. And when he sees the first bad sign of the reversed charge on the battlefield, he recalls the prediction of Thetis that one of the bravest Myrmidons will be killed before Achilles himself. From this divine knowledge, he deduces what has happened (18.12–14):

ἦ μάλα δὴ τέθνηκε Μενoitίου ἄλκιμος υἱός,
σχέτλιος· ἦ τ' ἐκέλευον ἀπώσασθαι δῆϊον πῦρ
ἄψ' ἐπὶ νῆας ἔμην, μηδ' Ἑκτορι ἔφι μάχεσθαι.

The absolute clarity and accuracy of his reasoning is even tragic. It is a tragedy of perfect knowledge, not that of Sophoclean irony. Despite the perfect clarity of his mind and his sound perception of the situation at the time when he sends Patroclus out, he loses his friend. Why? Because he could not predict that Patroclus would be affected by ἄτη of an unknown origin (16.685), be carried away, and ignore Achilles' advice. Achilles also knows, in theory, that it is Patroclus who is to blame (σχέτλιος – he is impossible!). However, he blames himself, out of love, out of sorrow, and out of his responsibility to protect his friend.³⁴ 'I should have been there defending him!' he blames himself. Indeed, now, for the first time, his mind is blinded by love, refusing to see the fact that there was little danger for Patroclus and that therefore Achilles was not needed, provided Patroclus did not go too far. It is Patroclus' ἄτη which destroyed him.

Is Patroclus' ἄτη, then, the punishment of Achilles for his refusal of the Embassy's plea? It is certainly another popular interpretation.³⁵ But which event to follow this has not been ordained in advance? Achilles is destined to live a very short life.³⁶ It is fated that his death shortly follows that of Hector. Hector is to die by the time of the fall of Troy at the latest (because Aeneas will be the only royal survivor) which is imminent in any case, since Troy is destined to fall in the tenth year of the war. And Achilles is to see the death of the 'best of the Myrmidons' under the Trojan wall. Everything is all pre-ordained, including the death of Patroclus before Achilles'. Whatever Achilles does, his loss of Patroclus was inevitable.

On the other hand, despite his self-accusation, Achilles knows what was responsible for his absence at the crucial moment for his friend: Agamemnon's ἄτη which caused Achilles' anger. Achilles wishes that anger would disappear from the world completely, in his wailing regret. However, he never says 'I am sorry that I became angry'. His logic is 'I am sorry that he angered me' (18.111). He expresses his regret for Agamemnon's ἄτη again later (19.270–3). It is by no means Achilles' ἄτη – even

³⁴ Cf. S. E. Bassett, *The Poetry of Homer*, p. 201: 'Like all noble natures, he forgets the shortcomings of others, and thinks only of what he believes to be his own.'

³⁵ E.g. A. Thornton, op. cit. (n. 19), pp. 135–6: 'According to the plea of the goddesses of supplication to Zeus (I 512), Blind Madness "follows" Achilles, and it does so by attacking his "substitute", his beloved friend Patroclus. ... The death of Patroclus is the punishment (I 512) which Zeus inflicts upon Achilles for rejecting the supplications of the Embassy and of Patroclus ...'

³⁶ There was once an alternative of long and less glorious life, but the choice apparently is already made. Thetis says to Zeus: 'Please give honour to my son who is destined to be short-lived' (II. 1.505–6).

after the 'disaster' he does not perceive any. Thus his disaster does not fulfil another condition of ἄτη. He does not look back and see he acted in a wrong way. No. His anger at Agamemnon was, in his perception, an inevitable and automatic consequence of Agamemnon's ἄτη. Even blinded by tears, Achilles does not make any concession on this point. He simply sees no more point in making a fuss about his still-injured honour. Although he does not want any compensation himself (19.147ff.), he does receive it in the end, because it is obvious to everyone that Agamemnon was to blame (19.172–83).³⁷ He is not angry at the king any more, simply because it does not matter now.

Instead, Achilles blames himself for his ignorance of something impossible to know – the fate of his friend, predicted by Thetis in an obscure way, fixed a long time ago, and inescapable. What can be, then, more tragic than Achilles' situation? He must blame himself forever for not being capable of something impossible. It is not ἄτη, a temporary malfunction of mind, but the eternal blindness of humanity that let Achilles down. If Zeus has accomplished it all, he has done it through his ever inscrutable plan, and in accordance with fate, not as punishment through ἄτη.³⁸

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NAOKO YAMAGATA

³⁷ Cf. Poseidon's comment on Agamemnon at *Il.* 13.111: ἀλλ'... καὶ πάμπαν ἐτήτυμον αἴτιος ἔστιν...

³⁸ See the poet's report on Zeus' reaction to Achilles' prayer at *Il.* 16.249–50, emphasizing his ignorance. And also his comment that Zeus' νόος is stronger than men's (16.688). The dying Patroclus says that μοῖρα and Apollo are ultimately responsible for his death (16.849); cf. G. S. Kirk, *The Songs of Homer* (Cambridge, 1962), pp. 379–80: '[The poet] is emphasizing the power and the pathos of fate, the way in which Achilles's anger involved those he least expected to involve, and the inevitability of retribution once Patroclus had exceeded his orders and his nature'. Besides, those who argue that Patroclus' death and the sorrow for it have been intended by Zeus as the punishment of Achilles will have difficulty in explaining the god's 'pity' for him. Zeus pities Achilles (*Il.* 19.340) when he laments Patroclus, and sends Athena to feed him (19.341–8). Why does the god try to lighten Achilles' suffering, if it is his punishment?