

# AIDÓS IN THE LANGUAGE OF ACHILLES

DAVID B. CLAUS

*Yale University*

The title of this paper is meant to recall a well-known article, “The Language of Achilles,”<sup>1</sup> by the late Adam Parry whose unfortunate and untimely death has been keenly felt by scholars of the Homeric poems. I feel my own debt to Parry’s work on Homer, both his writings and teaching, and I have chosen to focus the discussion of Homeric language that follows on this early work of Parry’s only because the ideas in it remain of central importance to the interpretation of the *Iliad* and cannot be left undiscussed.

What Parry rightly and sensitively draws our attention to in “The Language of Achilles” is the complex quality of formulaic indirectness and formality in the words that are spoken by Achilles to Odysseus in *Iliad* 9 as he tries to state in generalities his reasons for leaving Troy and abandoning his comrades, e.g., 9.315–22:

οὐτ’ ἔμεγ’ Ἀτρεΐδην Ἀγαμέμνονα πεισέμεν οἶω  
οὐτ’ ἄλλους Δαναούς, ἐπεὶ οὐκ ἄρα τις χάρις ἦεν  
μάρνασθαι δηϊοισιν ἐπ’ ἀνδράσι νωλεμές αἰεὶ.  
ἴση μοῖρα μένοντι, καὶ εἰ μάλα τις πολεμίζοι·  
ἐν δὲ ἰῆ τιμῇ ἡμὲν κακὸς ἦδὲ καὶ ἐσθλός·  
κάτθαν’ ὁμῶς ὅ τ’ ἀεργὸς ἀνὴρ ὃ τε πολλὰ ἐοργῶς.  
οὐδέ τί μοι περίκειται, ἐπεὶ πάθον ἄλγεα θυμῶ,  
αἰεὶ ἐμὴν ψυχὴν παραβαλλόμενος πολεμίζειν.

Parry sees in these words and the speech as a whole an apparent inability on Achilles’ part to state clearly his disillusionment with the values of the heroic world, and attributes this failure to a hypothetical inability of oral-formulaic style to discover the distinction—commonly felt in

<sup>1</sup> *TAPA* 87 (1956) 1–7; reprinted in G. S. Kirk, ed., *The Language and Background of Homer* (Cambridge 1964). Quotations from this article are noted in parentheses in the following text.

fifth century writers—between “speech and reality,” or, to use the Greek words applied by Parry, “*logos* and *ergon*.” Exactly what Parry intended by this distinction is not quite clear in his brief remarks. I will suggest here that his terms are somewhat misleading since his discussion does not really concern itself with the ontological confusion of words and objects, a problem not unfamiliar to archaic thought,<sup>2</sup> but with applying a simple linguistic model to formulaic thought. If formulae can be treated as though they are word-like elements of a semantic (and ethical) system, then just as concrete words ideally denote agreed-upon objects<sup>3</sup>—whatever the ontological relationship of word and object—formulae can be thought to denote an analogous world of agreed-upon ideas.<sup>4</sup> If language is common to an unusual degree in the *Iliad* as against ordinary society, perception must be common, and only common perceptions can be expressed: thus “the formulaic character of Homer’s language means that everything in the world is regularly presented as all men (all men within the poem, that is) commonly perceive it” (p. 3). A necessary inference of this thesis, and the point of greatest importance for this discussion, is that each formula—like single, concrete words—must have a meaning that is nearly, if not absolutely, fixed, unambiguous, and directly readable. For it is obvious that the formulae cannot be agreed upon in the profound sense wanted by Parry if they contain internal contradiction and ambiguity. In a semantic world so constricted by these hypothetical limits of meaning and perception in formulaic expression the force of Achilles’ speech in *Iliad* 9 thus depends upon his recognition “of the awful distance . . . between the truth that society imposes on men and what Achilles has seen to be true for himself” and the fact that “Achilles has no language with which to express his disillusionment” (pp. 5–6). Parry concludes, “Yet he expresses it, and in a remarkable way. He does it by misusing the language he disposes of” (p. 6).

<sup>2</sup> See W. K. C. Guthrie, *History of Greek Philosophy* I (Cambridge 1962) 86. For the classic instance of *logos* in Heraclitus see W. J. Verdenius, *Mnemosyne* 13 (1947) 278 and G. S. Kirk and J. E. Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers* (Cambridge 1963) 188–89.

<sup>3</sup> A problematic assertion except for the most non-generic words, and impossible, of course, whenever abstract terms are at issue. Parry’s comparison of the descriptive formulae at the end of *Iliad* 8 with the ethical formulations of Sarpedon overlooks a necessary distinction.

<sup>4</sup> Perhaps a further model for this argument is the behavior of the formulaic line itself with its elimination of competing expressions at a given metrical position.

This reading of Achilles' speech as a unique confrontation of *logos* and *ergon* in heroic society and in the life of Achilles himself as a suddenly self-conscious and self-critical member of that society, between the idiosyncratic experience of Achilles and the straightforward, impersonal, and commonly accepted *logoi* of the formulae, goes at once to the interpretation of the poem as a whole. If Achilles has in fact discovered that the values of his society are somehow false because words are only words, that he is able to have feelings not in accord with the simple assertions of the inherited *logoi*, and if that discovery is his and only his, he becomes almost a modern hero: a man who cannot reconcile himself to the world as it is, who questions the truth of received tradition and, in a sense, the capacity of words to know or express truth. Thus, in Parry's view "the disillusionment consequent on Achilles' awareness of this cleavage [between seeming and being], the questions his awareness of it give rise to, and the results of all this in the events of the war, are possibly the real plot of the second half of the *Iliad*" (p. 6).

I have attempted to reconstruct Parry's argument in detail because his own tantalizing brevity leaves much to be worked out, and because, when examined, his ideas seem to me to be ones that go with particular directness to the heart of Homeric criticism: How are we to go about interpreting an oral-formulaic text? What is, and what is not, meaningful and interpretable in the context of formulaic rigidity and repetition? How do such texts differ from ordinary *literary* experience? Parry's discussion of Achilles' speech has the great virtue of forcing us to ask these questions. But the answers that Parry gave seem to me untenable in themselves and inimical to our understanding of the text, both in their premise about the imposed unity of perception and of *logos* and *ergon* in the *Iliad*, and in the meaning of Achilles' speech.

In my view there are three substantive objections to this analysis of the nature of Achilles' words. First, the supposition that Homeric formulae are ordinarily perceived as fixed and unambiguous in meaning is at odds with the simple fact that they are used in the poem as a means of communication between individuals. From the point of view of function, therefore, formulae must be perceived by their speakers as capable of differing in meaning according to context, since intelligible speech cannot occur unless meaning is something only potential in words until used. Formulae used for communication must, like words,

be capable of expressing not only explicit referential meaning, but meaning derived from all of the contextual forces present at the moment of speech: the action, stated or not, that the speech is intended to motivate, the social relationship of speaker and respondent, the speaker's feelings about what he is saying, his anticipation of the respondent's attitude and the like.<sup>5</sup> Secondly, I do not see how the formulae can have agreed-upon meanings to the degree wanted by Parry unless the reality they deal in itself confronts them with no complex or contradictory situations to analyze or describe. In point of fact heroic behavior is self-evidently subject to contradictory demands and impulses, the formulaic expressions of which must be evaluated and then reconciled or discarded. Odysseus expresses this perfectly at *Iliad* 11.404 ff., when left alone in the fight:

ὦ μοι ἐγὼ, τί πάθω; μέγα μὲν κακὸν αἶ κε φέβωμαι  
πληθὺν ταρβήσας· τὸ δὲ ρίγιον αἶ κεν ἀλώω  
μοῦνος·

There are, clearly, two paths of formulaic wisdom open to him—"It is shameful to retreat" and "It is shameful to be defeated"<sup>6</sup>—neither of which, obviously, can be "in perfect accordance with reality" (p. 4). They are reconciled, for Odysseus, by following a third formulaic idea, most extensively developed by Idomeneus (13.275 ff.), that shame is avoided even in death if one dies properly. But for Menelaos, in an analogous situation, they are reconciled by allowing the second to stand and amending the first to say, in effect, that it is not shameful to give way before an enemy who is palpably aided by a god (17.91 ff.). For these speakers it should be evident that the formulae do not describe or create a perfect and inflexible world of thought patterns that can be regarded as reality—a system of ideas one need merely memorize and subscribe to—but are instead regarded by them as partial and perhaps contradictory truths that must be used and manipulated by the mind to confront adequately the hard facts and contradictory demands of the world of experience. Thirdly, the notion of a near-perfect unity of *logos* and *ergon* in Homeric society seems to me to eliminate the possibility of interpreting the poem with any subtlety. Every state-

<sup>5</sup> See particularly the useful discussion of this point in R. Jakobsen, "Linguistics and Poetics," in T. Sebeok, *Style in Language* (Cambridge 1960).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Il.* 17.335-37; *Il.* 8.147-50; *Il.* 2.297-98.

ment made in the poem, if the theory is pressed, must be one that supports entirely what are taken as the fixed ideas of the society, or it cannot be spoken. Every participant in the poem must be either a supporter of those same ideas, or he must be someone who rejects them in their entirety, since their very fixity prevents gradations of meaning to which men might attach themselves before becoming utter dissidents from society. It is perhaps no accident, therefore, but a consequence of his theory of Homeric language that Parry is led to characterize Achilles not as someone who defines and tests values for himself, but as someone who has simply rejected totally the values of others. The gifts are "meaningless" to him, he sees "no value" in the glory that society offers, he undergoes "final isolation" from a society that has become "alien" to him (p. 7). This view of Achilles is, I believe, fundamentally wrong and results in large part from a theory of oral-formulaic language that by definition rules out any effort to deal with the large amount of tacit information and potential meaning implicitly available to the society as a whole in the apparently simple statements of the heroic code. It ignores the need to read the contextual components of speech that transform mere words, formulae or not, into functioning language.

Unfortunately, Parry did not offer a detailed reading of the speech of Achilles in order to show the basis in language for his understanding of its meaning. I shall not impute any specific interpretation to him. I shall instead try to show that both the generalizations about the heroic life and the quality of the specific accusations against Agamemnon found in Achilles' speech are compatible with the implicit attitudes of other heroes, notably that of Sarpedon at 12.310 ff., and thus demonstrate the existence among Homeric speakers of a shared sense, conscious or unconscious, of complex meaning in traditional heroic formulae. If Achilles is acting as a linguistic or semantic innovator it is, I believe, only in the sense of making explicit here ideas that are tacit but crucial ambiguities present elsewhere in heroic speech.

The bulk of Achilles' speech is a recital of specific grievances and threats directed to Agamemnon and the Achaeans. He has suffered much on behalf of the Achaeans and not profited thereby (321-33). He has been deprived of Briseis whom he loved and is sensitive to the irony of losing his own *alochos* on an expedition to retrieve an *alochos*

of the Atreidae (334-44). He will not come to the aid of Agamemnon but will depart (345-63). He has many possessions in Phthia and will take others now, excepting, of course, Briseis, whom Agamemnon has taken away (364-69). He will never help Agamemnon or accept his gifts (370-92). He will, if he returns home safely, marry a woman and enjoy the possessions of Peleus (393-400). Only at the beginning and end of the speech (318-20, 401-16) are there reflective comments on the heroic life that do not seem directed specifically to Agamemnon. The first of these, however,

ἴση μοῖρα μένοντι, καὶ εἰ μάλα τις πολέμιζοι·  
 ἐν δὲ ἰῇ τιμῇ ἤμὲν κακὸς ἤδὲ καὶ ἐσθλός·  
 κάτθαν' ὁμῶς ὃ τ' ἀεργὸς ἀνὴρ ὃ τε πολλὰ ἐοργώς.

although it *may* be read as a negative transformation of the ordinary heroic injunction to fight without giving thought to death (that is, "Why fight since we die whatever we do?")<sup>7</sup> is plausibly consonant with the attitude of Achilles at 1.352 ff., particularly since the following line (321) resumes the subject of the gifts:

οὐδὲ τί μοι περίκειται, ἐπεὶ πάθον ἄλγεα θυμῷ,  
 αἰεὶ ἐμὴν ψυχὴν παραβαλλόμενος πολέμιζειν.

In his speech to Thetis at 1.352 ff. Achilles makes an explicit connection of *timê* and death: "Since you bore me to be shortlived, Zeus ought to give me *timê*." While it is hard to deny that the lines in *Iliad* 9 suggest a more general level of thought on Achilles' part, they nevertheless can be seen to repeat the earlier thought if applied to Achilles himself: "Although I have accomplished much I too must die and ought therefore to be compensated by a great *timê*" (now denied, of course, by Agamemnon). If these later lines are in substantial agreement with the earlier attitude of Achilles, the only undeniable case for an attack on heroic values in general comes down to the final lines of the speech (401-16) in which Achilles first states that gifts are not worth a man's life, and then describes, for the first and last time in the poem, the two fates given him by Thetis:

<sup>7</sup> The rhetorical subtlety of these lines is astonishing. In 318 *μοῖρα* can mean either "death" or "portion:" (1) "Death is the same for a man whether he fights or holds back;" (2) "A man's portion is the same (fighting for Agamemnon) whether he fights or holds back." Lines 319 and 320 then state separately these two possible interpretations, thus making *μοῖρα* a seemingly deliberate pun.

οὐ γὰρ ἐμοὶ ψυχῆς ἀντάξιον οὐδ' ὅσα φασὶν  
 ἴλιον ἐκτῆσθαι, εὖ ναιόμενον πτολίεθρον,  
 τὸ πρὶν ἐπ' εἰρήνης, πρὶν ἔλθεῖν υἱᾶς Ἀχαιῶν,  
 οὐδ' ὅσα λάϊνος οὐδὸς ἀφήτορος ἐντὸς ἔργει,  
 Φοῖβου Ἀπόλλωνος, Πυθοῖ ἐνι πετρῆεσσι.  
 ληῖστοι μὲν γάρ τε βόες καὶ ἵφια μῆλα,  
 κτητοὶ δὲ τρίποδες τε καὶ ἵππων ξανθὰ κάρηνα·  
 ἀνδρὸς δὲ ψυχὴ πάλιν ἔλθεῖν οὔτε λειστή  
 οὔθ' ἐλετή, ἐπεὶ ἄρ κεν ἀμείψεται ἔρκος ὀδόντων.  
 μήτηρ γάρ τέ μέ φησι θεὰ Θέτις ἀργυρόπεζα  
 διχθαδίας κῆρας φερέμεν θανάτοιο τέλοσδε.  
 εἰ μὲν κ' αὖθι μένων Τρώων πόλιν ἀμφιμάχωμαι,  
 ὦλετο μὲν μοι νόστος, ἀτὰρ κλέος ἄφθιτον ἔσται·  
 εἰ δέ κεν οἴκαδ' ἴκωμι φίλην ἐς πατρίδα γαῖαν,  
 ὦλετό μοι κλέος ἐσθλόν, ἐπὶ δηρὸν δέ μοι αἰὼν  
 ἔσσεται, οὐδέ κέ μ' ὦκα τέλος θανάτοιο κιχέη.

In the context of a society in which, as A. W. H. Adkins has described<sup>8</sup> (and which is attested here by the general approval given the sending of the embassy and its offer of gifts, the paradigm of Meleager adduced by Phoenix, and the fact that Achilles cannot in the end leave Troy as he threatens), a man esteems himself primarily in terms of the *aretê* which he achieves by his success in battle, and relies upon the formal recognition of that *aretê* by others rather than a private sense of worth or intention for his self-satisfaction, it is clear that Achilles' portrait of a life of "goods" apart from battle is a patent challenge to ordinary heroic behavior and values. And it is one so apparently blunt that it seems a strange insistence on Parry's part to say that Achilles "has no language with which to express his disillusionment."

But however well this simple "results" oriented view of Homeric society may account for the meaning of words like *aischros* and *agathos*, and however well it may account after the fact for what has happened in the poems, it is not a little reductive when it tries to analyze the mental and emotional path followed by any individual hero as he

<sup>8</sup> *Merit and Responsibility* (Oxford 1960) 30–57. See now the thoughtful criticisms of A. A. Long, "Morals and Values in Homer," *JHS* 90 (1970) 121–39. Although exaggerated and idealistic, the views of W. Jaeger in *Paideia* (New York 1945) 1–14 who always keeps in mind the symbolic quality of Homeric transactions are still valuable. W. Sale, "Achilles and Heroic Values," *Arion* (1963) 86–100, accepts a highly pragmatic formulation of Homeric values and, accordingly, finds Achilles completely at odds with his society by the end of the poem.

decides the course he will take, or examines the nature of his position. We must surely distinguish, as Adkins does not, between the Homeric value system itself and the *responses* of the heroes to it. It should be obvious that for any given individual or in any given instance anticipation of the ultimate application of an objective "results" standard may generate responses and thoughts that are importantly at odds with it in nature or in effect. We do not need Herodotus<sup>9</sup> to tell us that the attitude of the Trojans to Paris is governed by anything but rational calculation of results. Moreover, heroes appear to find personal submission to a pragmatic or objective "results" standard undesirable, if not insulting, to the point that even where it would be flattering to accept such a calculation of worth the hero may disdain to do so. Thus Glaucus in the simile of the leaves in *Iliad* 6 disdains the importance of genealogy in general—before recounting his own—despite the fact that his ancestry is one of extraordinary distinction and doubtless sufficient on its own to gain the regard of Diomedes. More predictably, but still worth noting, the negative imposition of a "results" standard may be actively resisted. An extraordinary statement of Hector to his allies (17.220 ff.), perhaps a response of sorts to the fresh accusation of Glaucus that he has failed to repay Sarpedon for his efforts on behalf of Troy by retrieving the fallen body, illustrates the illusions that a heroic speaker may willfully place between himself and such objective standards. Hector claims that he has not gathered his allies out of need or in want of their numbers:

οὐ γὰρ ἐγὼ πληθὺν διζήμενος οὐδὲ χαρίζων  
 ἐνθάδ' ἀφ' ὑμετέρων πολιῶν ἤγειρα ἕκαστον,  
 ἀλλ' ἵνα μοι Τρώων ἀλόχους καὶ νήπια τέκνα  
 προφρονέως ῥύοισθε φιλοπτολέμων ὑπ' Ἀχαιῶν.  
 τὰ φρονέων δώροισι κατατρύχω καὶ ἔδωδῃ  
 λαούς, ὑμέτερον δὲ ἐκάστου θυμὸν ἀέξω.  
 τῷ τις νῦν ἰθὺς τετραμμένος ἢ ἀπολέσθω  
 ἢ σαωθήτω· ἢ γὰρ πολέμου δαριστὺς.

Although Hector plainly has no objection to imposing the simplest standard of "results" on his allies ("I gave you food, now you must fight") and although he himself by any conceivable measure of such sort has a tangible and calculable obligation to his allies for their aid—

<sup>9</sup> Herodotus 2.120.



indeed it is surely *he* who is obligated and not they—he attempts to transform the relationship into one in which it is his actions that are gratuitous, not theirs. The assertion is bizarre, and the lines in which it is made are, not unsurprisingly, obscure in their meaning. (Is a benefit of sorts implied in *προφρονέως*?) But the impulse on Hector's part to evade the pragmatic subservience and obligation of his position is clear enough.

It is precisely this same need on the part of the hero in regard to his self-esteem to preserve room for gesture and to avoid direct identification of himself from moment to moment with simple calculations of his worth and position that seems to me to lie at the heart of the most extensive statement of the heroic "code," that of Sarpedon in 12.310 ff., a passage used by Parry to show the clarity of heroic values. This most important speech does not simply express the existence of a "perfect correspondence" between the heroes' deeds and honors, and that "the hero's awareness of the imminence of death . . . leads him to scorn death in action" (p. 3). Rather it juxtaposes those two ideas in order to suggest implicitly or tacitly that the motivation to heroic deeds is substantially gratuitous. In a rhetorically complex opening Sarpedon first asks Glaucus to recognize that being an *aristeus* brings great status as against the common man, and that at the same time it requires greater risk of death than other kinds of lives:

Γλαῦκε, τίη δὴ νῶϊ τετιμήμεσθα μάλιστα  
 ἔδρη τε κρέασίν τε ἰδὲ πλείους δεπάεσσιν  
 ἐν Λυκίῃ, πάντες δὲ θεοὺς ὥς εἰσορόωσι,  
 καὶ τέμενος νεμόμεσθα μέγα Ξάνθοιο παρ' ὄχθας,  
 καλὸν φυταλιῆς καὶ ἀρούρης πυροφόροιο;  
 τῷ νῦν χρὴ Λυκίοισι μέτα πρώτοισιν ἔοντας  
 ἐστάμεν ἡδὲ μάχης καυστείρης ἀντιβολῆσαι,  
 ὄφρα τις ὧδ' εἴπη Λυκίων πύκα θωρηκτῶν·  
 "οὐ μὰν ἀκλέες Λυκίην κάτα κοιρανέουσιν  
 ἡμέτεροι βασιλῆες, ἔδουσί τε πίονα μῆλα  
 οἶνόν τ' ἔξαιτον μελιγδέα· ἀλλ' ἄρα καὶ ἔς  
 ἐσθλή, ἐπεὶ Λυκίοισι μέτα πρώτοισι μάχονται."

These lines are then followed directly by an exhortation not to shun death because death is ultimately unavoidable and comes only when allotted (cf. *Il.* 6.487–89), an idea here transformed rhetorically into an *adynaton*,

ὦ πέπον, εἰ μὲν γὰρ πόλεμον περὶ τόνδε φυγόντε  
 αἰεὶ δὴ μέλλοιμεν ἀγῆρω τ' ἀθανάτω τε  
 ἔσσεσθ', οὔτε κεν αὐτὸς ἐνὶ πρώτοισι μαχοίμην  
 οὔτε κε σὲ στέλλοιμι μάχην ἐς κυδιάνειραν·

which, of course, is quickly rejected,

νῦν δ' ἔμπηγς γὰρ κῆρες ἐφ' ἐστᾶσιν θανάτοιο  
 μυρίαί, ἃς οὐκ ἔστι φυγεῖν βροτὸν οὐδ' ὑπαλύξαι,  
 ἴομεν, ἥ εἴ τω εὖχος ὀρέξομεν, ἥ εἰ τις ἡμῖν.

The effect in these lines of transforming the traditional homily on death into an *adynaton* is substantial. If we accept the obligation to interpret the lines in the context of the speech as a whole the rhetorical figure can, I believe, have two possible relationships to its preceding lines. Either it can *devalue* the preceding lines ("The life of an *aristeus* is good but falls short of immortality and we therefore see its limitations") or it can *increase* their value ("The life of an *aristeus* is so good that only immortality itself could be preferred"). Although the first interpretation is possibly in Achilles' mind to a degree from beginning to end of the *Iliad* (cf. 1.352 ff. and 24.525 ff.), it is sufficiently at odds with Sarpedon's recital of the concrete joys and benefits of the warrior life that we should here almost certainly understand the second. But even this second reading hints at the existence of some paradox in the heroic life. For the exhortation to disdain death has become a value statement: only immortality could be better than the life of an *aristeus*; but since we know, of course, that immortality is impossible, no mortal expectation can be supposed better than the life of an *aristeus* and sufficient to deter him from seeking to enjoy its benefits or from risking his life. As the limiting term of the *adynaton* "immortality" thus has the peculiar ability to value the goods of the heroic life and simultaneously to prevent the hero from supposing the existence of any valid reason for shunning death including, necessarily, enjoyment of the goods so valued. The effect of the *adynaton* is thus to link the two themes of the speech, the enjoyment of honors and risking of death, in a complex whole whose meaning is less obvious than that of either half taken singly, and it is one that looks directly to the issue of "calculation" in the life of heroes. If the importance of the hero to society is principally, as Adkins argues, his readiness and ability to fight in the

interests of the community, society can envisage no real end to the warrior's status as its protector or *aristeus*. If by fighting, therefore, one achieves the highest honors, the honors must never be regarded as enough in themselves to deter one from further fighting. Any strictly calculative formulation of the hero's relationship to his honors and gifts—i.e., a man fights in order to acquire them—may lead at once to the further calculation that when one has obtained them one no longer needs to fight. It seems no accident, therefore, that in the first part of the speech Sarpedon uses a rhetorical format that evades any outright equation of goods and deeds, but through its questioning, its openness of connection, and its contextual assumption of a viewpoint different from that of ordinary men, forces Glaucus to obligate himself rather than submit to the imperative of a rigid system, or view his acts as a simple *quid pro quo*.

If this reading of Sarpedon's words is accepted as plausible and indicates, like Hector's words to his allies, significant resistance on the part of Homeric heroes to viewing their *own* acts in terms of calculative standards, it is not difficult to see why Achilles does not simply reject Agamemnon's offer of gifts in *Iliad* 9 but becomes infuriated by it. Achilles knows, as does Sarpedon and therefore other heroes, that no possessions are "worth a man's life," but that heroes nonetheless accept death and the risk of death in fighting for them out of a more fundamental loyalty to intangible standards of behavior. Achilles' attitude towards the gifts here and elsewhere in the poem is neither inscrutable, irrational, nor interpolated but consistent with what he has always seen to be the true meaning of the heroic *logoi*. That is, simply, that while he regards them as a *necessary* condition for his participation in battle he can never regard them as a *sufficient* condition without abandoning his aristocratic belief that heroic behavior is ultimately something self-imposed and gratuitous, taking place between men who treat each other as equals. By depriving Achilles of his *geras* in *Iliad* 1 Agamemnon has not only removed a necessary condition of fighting and publicly insulted him, but he has transformed the gifts from their proper status as a mere symbol of Achilles' *aretê* into a practical measure of it. In *Iliad* 9 Achilles recognizes that despite the reversal of situations and the value now placed upon his participation in battle his worth continues to be regarded by Agamemnon and the

others as something that can be calculated and obtained by an adequate enumeration of gifts, when he knows himself that his efforts and willingness to die can only be a gesture offered freely, out of *charis*, ultimately unanswerable except by other gestures. Simply put, he must be paid, but he cannot be bought.

If we recognize the relationship of Achilles' speech to the presence of such meaning in the heroic code the sequence of its ideas and images is not "passionate" and "confused," as Parry calls it (p. 5), but purposeful and lucid. Virtually all that he says in the speech conforms to the intangible standards which he feels the code demands of himself and of others, and places him therefore within heroic society—as he believes it ought to be in any case—not against it. He is like the bird who tended its young while itself starving (that is, he showed *aidōs* for his comrades). He has many possessions in Phthia (that is, he does not need to fight for gifts any more than he would in fact fight for gifts). He would not take the gifts of Agamemnon if they were as many as the sand (that is, it is not for gifts a man fights). All the possessions of Troy would not be worth his life (that is, there is no ultimate compensation for mortality). And finally, his reiteration of the choice given him by Thetis states obliquely that men of his stature fight by choice, not necessity, however impossible it may be as a practical fact to define a society apart from battle in which Achilles could live.

Even at the level of individual words Achilles seems able to absorb the issue of the gifts into a diction that reveals obliquely the full meaning of the implicit heroic contract as he characterizes it in the division of himself and Agamemnon. Achilles is a man who suffers at heart (*θυμῶ* 321). His *geras* is a wife dear to his heart (*ἄλοχον θυμαρέα* 336). A man who is *ἀγαθός* and *ἐχέφρων* loves and cares for his wife (*τὴν αὐτοῦ φιλεῖ καὶ κήδεται* 342) as he does for Briseis (*ὥς καὶ ἐγὼ τὴν / ἐκ θυμοῦ φίλεον* 343). Agamemnon, for want of Achilles, has constructed a wall and a ditch and driven stakes but not even so will he hold back the *σθένος* "Ἐκτορος ἀνδροφόνιοιο (351). Agamemnon could give as many gifts as dust or sand (*ὅσα ψάμαθός τε κόνις τε* 385) but not even so will he move the *θυμός* of Achilles until he has paid back the heart-rending outrage (*θυμαλγέα λώβην* 387). Let him choose another bridegroom who is kinglier (*βασιλεύτερος* 392). Achilles will choose a dear wife in Phthia (*φίλην ἄκοιτιν* 397). Often

his *θυμός* urged him to do so, to enjoy (*τέρπεσθαι* 400) the possessions Peleus won. Troy and its possessions are not worth his *ψυχή*, nor all that the stone threshold of Pytho contains. Cattle, sheep, horses, and tripods are *ληϊστοί* and *κτητοί*, but a man's *ψυχή* is not (*ἀνδρὸς δὲ ψυχὴ πάλιν ἐλθεῖν οὔτε λείσση / οὔθ' ἐλετή* 408). What this diction suggests is not a complaint against possessions gained by heroic means, but against possessions that are wrongly valued, possessions as they are used by people who do not have the respect for feeling and gesture that Achilles has. He creates in the reiterated words and enumerated details a portrait of himself as a man of *θυμός* and *ψυχή* as against Agamemnon as, in every sense, a man of "things." Despite the formality and rhetorical predictability of his overt statements, he manages to suggest a division of the heroic world into men who feel and love, who can fight, who have proper joy in their possessions, and those who rely on "things" to defend themselves against heroic *σθένος*, who seek to be kinglier than others, whose possessions are nothing good to them, who do not even know what a life is worth. Again, while this rejects Agamemnon and all his ways, it leaves the heroic code, at least as Achilles idealizes it, intact.

To conclude, if these arguments are accepted it should be unnecessary to argue any further that the way Homeric formulae, particularly those centering on the heroic code, function does not differ radically from that of ordinary language. Indeed, it would be hard to find an area of Homeric formulae more likely than that surrounding the heroic code to arouse regularly in the minds of speakers hosts of implied and potential meanings. For it is in them that necessarily the most subtle and potentially divisive communications and transactions of the Homeric society must be carried out, and it is they that must deal with the most intractable aspects of the human situation. Thus, when in *Iliad* 9 Achilles speaks it is not as a recent and somewhat confused entrant into the world of seeming and being, but as a speaker fully alive to the tacit seeming of his own language and that of others, and therefore able to expect his listeners to know that his rejection of the gifts, his threats to leave, and his concern for his life have a basis in patterns of *aidōs* and the heroic code which they either do know about or ought to, whether or not they agree with him. Achilles' point of view is not, as Parry held, utterly at odds with that of his society, even though it

perhaps pushes one conception of the heroic system to extremes, nor does he now need to view the traditional *logoi* as meaningless to him in any accepted way in order to establish it. Whether or not, therefore, the use of formulaic speech implies thought patterns less flexible than those of non-formulaic speech—a question we have not dealt with here, of course—the proposition that they bring with them a system of thought and values that is wholly inflexible seems, on examination, to be impossible.

The foregoing arguments prompt a brief addendum on Achilles' instructions to Patroclus at *Iliad* 16.49–100. If the heroic recipient of gifts properly looks upon them as a necessary but never sufficient motivation to do battle, Achilles' attitude toward the gifts in this vexed passage and in other parts of the poem where they are at issue may well express a consistent view of heroic values, one that eludes us if, like Grote and others since,<sup>10</sup> we focus our attention only on the gifts themselves. Such consistency is self-evident in 19.145–214 when Achilles first disdains before he will accept the gifts forced upon him by Agamemnon and Odysseus, and again in 24.552–70 when—almost inexplicably—he begins to grow angry with Priam after the latter has brought attention back to the gifts of the ransom. He knows, Achilles says, *καὶ αὐτός* to give back the body.<sup>11</sup> But when Achilles tells Patroclus at 16.84–86 to fight “so that you may win me great *timê* and *kudos* . . . and they may give back the beautiful girl and give glorious gifts besides” he seems at first not only to have an entirely different interest in the gifts from before but to speak in total ignorance of the offer made to him by the embassy. If, in a pair of lines, Achilles can now simply reverse the point of his earlier tirade to Odysseus we are confronted either with an erratic change of heart about the value to him of the girl and the gifts on Achilles' part, or, as has been repeatedly argued of course, an interpolated text in *Iliad* 9. But if we have read him correctly Achilles has not said earlier that he does not want or value the gifts and the girl—indeed he says the opposite when he calls Briseis his *ἄλοχον θυμαρέα*—rather that he will not give his

<sup>10</sup> See Parry's extensive note on the debate over these lines (p. 7).

<sup>11</sup> At 24.592–95 Achilles justifies to Patroclus giving up the body on the grounds that the offered ransom was not unseemly. Again, this shows that Achilles is not indifferent to the proper functioning of gifts, merely angered by attempts to use them coercively

services in a calculated exchange for her or anything else. If he does not wish to reverse himself, Achilles' dilemma in *Iliad* 16 is not simply that of wanting to help the Achaeans and not wanting to forgive Agamemnon, but the more specific one of wanting to help the Achaeans without appearing to have given his services in exchange for an enumerated list of tangible benefits. When Achilles agrees in response to Ajax's appeal of friendship at the end of the embassy to stay on but not to fight until the fire reaches his own ships, he not only intends to punish the Achaeans further, I would suggest, but once again to show his disdain for the gifts that might be given him for his help. For, having listened to Phoenix's recital of the Meleager paradigm, he not only disregards the intended moral but takes an oath to fight only when, if the paradigm is true, he can expect to be given nothing for what he does since he will be acting in his own defense. Just as Meleager delayed fighting until his own bedchamber was assaulted and thus lost the proffered gifts Achilles will delay until the fight reaches his own ships. Hard as it may be, this plan is nevertheless a rational compromise between *aidôs* for his comrades and rejection of an obligatory relationship with Agamemnon, since it simply eliminates the issue of gifts altogether. When Achilles is led to abandon this plan in *Iliad* 16 through the pleading of Patroclus his help is once again gratuitous and he is obliged, whether he likes it or not, to deal anew with the problem of the gifts or in fact act in a way that would be regarded universally as sollipsistic and intolerable for an *aristeus* of Homeric society. After all, Myrmidons are going to risk death and *timê* must be given them when they do. Although Achilles might have preferred the simpler plan of disdaining the gifts entirely and disgracing the Achaeans totally by waiting until the last moment, he cannot act as he now does without accepting a heroic exchange, one in which he represents, of course, not only his own interests but that of his followers. But the decision to send Patroclus into battle now becomes fortuitously the one way Achilles can retrieve the girl without giving up his point about the nature of heroic exchanges. Unlike Achilles, Patroclus has been promised nothing for his help, nor is he in the impossible position of receiving back as an exchange for services from Agamemnon a *geras* that is already his. Whatever is owed by Achilles in exchange for the return of Briseis will be owed to Patroclus

and the Myrmidons, not Agamemnon, and if the Achaians give new gifts as well Achilles will be able to reward them richly in a proper distribution of *timê*. Under this condition and only this, I suggest, does Achilles allow his interest in the girl to resurface.

The continued obsession of Achilles with observing the proprieties of heroic exchange can be seen in his final injunction to Patroclus. Patroclus may only restore the *status quo* in battle before the quarrel—a condition the *timê* for which already belongs in a sense to Achilles—he may not assume the prerogative of Achilles by striking out on his own for Troy. To be leader of the Myrmidons Achilles must distribute its *timê*, but he can only properly distribute that which he has himself had a part in earning, a nicety of conduct never grasped by Agamemnon. Patroclus must only reduplicate Achilles' acts, not usurp his role by fresh accomplishments in which Achilles has no part, real or hypothetical. This is, perhaps, tolerably close to imposing calculative standards on Patroclus, but if so Achilles must be judged not an irrational or distraught egoist who sends others to perform what is properly his task and then denies them compensation. He is, rather, a rational and compassionate man attempting to operate within a complex system of mannered behavior.