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*Gods and Men in the Iliad and Odyssey*

By: Wolfgang Kullmann

General Summary: Kullmans’ article centers around distilling distinctive differences and examples therein, between the theologies of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey.* In his conception, these differences are primarily evident in the role the gods play in either epic. With the gods of the *Iliad* representing a way to rationalize the seeming randomness of mortal suffering, as the emotions and rivalries of the gods are brought to bear in the mortal world, with heroes dying or living because of their involvement in either side of the conflict. Conversely, the divinity of the *Odyssey* plays a more moralizing role, one which emphasizes that the gods exist either to punish wrong action or to reward good action, The Suitors or Odysseus. In the theological differences that emerge from these two texts by the same ‘author.’ From that, Kullman wonders if some kind of reevaluation might be necessary, that the Homeric tradition might have a single authorship that could explain the theological differences contained in it.

Iliadic Theology: Evidence and Talking Points

* The Gods primarily work to rationalize the random tragic accidents of fate that characterize human life.
  + The Trojan War at base occurs because Athena and Hera feel spurned in the judgement of Paris and are determined to see the ruin of Troy
    - Therefore, any suffering that occurs randomly at Troy is because of the Godly disagreement that ultimately prompted the war
  + Another example of this cruel randomness of fate that the gods represent is shown in the scene in book 4, where Hera promises Sparta, Argos, and Mycenae to Zeus if he allows her to destroy Troy
    - Here, as above, the Gods are shown to intervene in human affairs only as it allows them to settle their own scores or prove their own points. They aren’t a moralizing force as contemporary culture views god, but rather as a force that seemingly exists to use humans as playthings or poker chips
  + The Third example here is Poseidon’s disdain for Troy, a disdain which arises for Kullmann out of the slight of Laomedon long ago, but one for which no players in the current Trojan War are responsible
    - So his actions, again are not representative of any sort of broad morality, but rather are indicative of a divinity that uses violence against humanity as a way to settle scores.
* Men, for their part take a transactional view of the Gods as well, one that doesn’t appeal to the moral sense of the Gods, but rather speaks to the deference inherent in a relationship that is characterized by violence
  + Ex: When Chryses prays to Apollo, seeking punishment for the Greeks taking his daughter Chryseis as a slave, he doesn’t invoke any morality in his prayer, but rather says something to the effect that, I’ve always sacrificed to you, now please help me
  + Ex: When Hector accepts his death and realizes the role of Athena in prompting it, he accepts his fate
    - The moral system that emerges here, if you can call it that seems to prioritize the establishment of deference as the primary prerequisite for divine help, rather than any sort of appeal to a higher ideal of justice as the modern viewer would come to expect. here the reasoning seems to rely on an idea that humanity is weaker and smaller than the gods, and can only expect help in a transactional context, not one based on benevolence or morality
* ALSO… While the Gods interact with Humans primarily by adopting the form of someone they know and thus prompting humans a particular decision, the humans are still held as fully responsible for their actions, and the divine role is somehow ignored, or chalked up to fate
  + Pandarus’ arrow: That is, Athena appears to Pandarus and induces him to take the shot that restarts the trojan war, however Athena’s role in the incident is ignored and blame is placed solely on pandarus

The Theology of The Odyssey: Evidence and talking points

* Conversely, the *Odyssey* is at least ostensibly a more moral work, the first book begins with a council of the gods, discussing the situation between Aegisthus and Orestes, a situation analogous to what Odysseus will experience with the suitors, and one which establishes that the gods can interfere with matters of justice, or when good judgement is ignored as is the case for Athena and Odysseus and for Aegisthus and Orestes
* Additionally, the gods’ interactions with man have at least some groundings in an ideal of Justice, that is, Poseidon only attacks Odysseus because of his attack on Polyphemus, and his hubris in revealing his own name
  + Thus, the issue of divine justice is forced, Poseidon is the father of Polyphemus, and now knows who attacked him forcing a retribution which is not random, but rooted in some familial justice
  + Similarly, the wrath that occurs because Odysseus’ men of Helios occurs primarily because the men broke the oath of Odysseus, again situating the gods as the conductors of justice, not just the agents of a cruel and random fate
* And in a convenient opposite to the prayer of Chryses in the *Iliad,* the prayer of Telemachus to Zeus about the suitors in the *Odyssey*
  + But I will call upon the Gods that are forever, if haply Zeus may grant that deeds of requital may be wrought. Without atonement then you would die in my halls
    - Here the prayer of the Telemachus seemingly speaks to a godly system that operates with a mind toward justice not just random anger or spite
    - It is in Kullmann’s words a system which:
      * “Gives something like a metaphysical foundation for the principle of justice”
        + The idea that “deeds of requital may be wrought” points to both a distinct wrong, and a solution, aided by gods

Homeric Authorship: rectifying the differences in interaction between gods and man

* Summary: Kullmann synthesizes several perspectives in his analysis of the differences between the gods of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*
  + “It is widely held that the differences between the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* represent a new epoch or an organic development from *Iliad* to *Odyssey”*
    - View proposed by Werner Jaeger, E. R. Dodds, A. W. H. Adkins
      * Kullmann disagrees with this view, citing the fact that the differences in conception are too vastly different to have an organic relationship
        + Also, the tragedy experienced by the heroes in the *Iliad* is distinct from the other poems of the time (ie. *Aethiopis)*

Where dead heroes are granted immortality in a softer divinity

* + The ultimate end of the analysis of the perspectives is that, in line with Walter Burkert, the Iliadic and Odyssean perspectives were probably illustrative of two different but concurrent religious schools
    - Instances in both texts of the other conception
      * *The Odyssey:* “I realized that some god contrived bad works”
      * *The Iliad:* when Zeus’ lightning bolt is considered to be used to punish legal wrongdoing, points to some kind of a justice framework