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Olympian Gods



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RESCUING THEIR REPUTATIONS FROM THE SCHOLARS

The human story in the Iliad is elevated beyond the ordinary by a divine story about the authentic, functioning pantheon of the time, a story driven by the character of the various gods, which portrays their individual scope and function through their behavior and how they interact with one another, a story which has been the source and model for all later visions of these divine personalities up to the present day. Homer uses this divine story to set the world of his heroes within a moral universe, to have divine powers available as storytelling tools, to portray the impulsive workings of human motivation and to account for how the powerful yet fragile influence of morale ebbs and flows unexpectedly between fearless aggression and sudden panic as it sweeps through the armies of men. Homer's audience was familiar with the character of these gods and recognized what each represents when they appear. To be on a similar footing, the modern reader should be aware of how Homer perceived a divine presence. Otherwise, modern notions may undermine the meaning. Scholars have been remiss. It is not at all an exaggeration to say that modern scholars are confused by the Homeric gods and have spread defamation through their translations and writings. This article intends to set right this wrong and prepare modern readers to enjoy the Iliad by simply defining the true nature of Homer's pantheon. Scholars are confused because they conflate Homer's reverent masterpiece with silly, cynical, derivative works of later ages and authors, many of which were thrown away in ancient times as rubbish. An example is their claim that the Trojan War was caused by the "Judgement of Paris," an allegory and parody that did not and could not occur in Homer's world. This article reveals the nature of Homer's gods by looking at their conduct as portrayed strictly in the Iliad. Any support for these insights draws mostly from the Odyssey, Homer's sequel to the Iliad, and two Homeric Hymns to Aphrodite, reverent songs from the same oral tradition compatible enough in style and narrative to be prequels to the Iliad.

HOMERIC GODS ARE DIFFERENT FROM THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT

The Iliad transports the reader beyond the horizon of recorded history to an earlier world where gods are indivisible from natural things. The Sky, Sea, Sun, the Earth, the Dawn, the seasons, wind, rain, night, each tree, each stream, love, sleep and death appeared to have a personality. These gods are not spiritual, but are PHYSICAL BEINGS THAT PERSONIFY ATTRIBUTES AND FORCES OF NATURE, much like Mother Nature, a beneficial goddess who can be destructive but never evil. The character of each deity assumes the nature of that which they incarnate in the form of a person, who feels, thinks, sleeps, eats, loves and breeds. Therefore, unlike mortal humans, immortal gods have very discrete personalities, defined by the character of what they personify. Homer had such a wonderful grasp of his gods that each is always portrayed behaving within the scope of their divinity and never beyond.

Homeric gods are ageless and immortal in so far as the attributes they personify exist eternally. They appear as a person in one place at a time, yet move from place to place and between Heaven and Earth as fast as they need to. Homer portrays divine flesh as some sort of immortal substance which can be damaged and feel pain, but quickly heals like new. Gods marry and breed families with other gods and also with mortals. Divine parents have divine offspring; the progeny of gods mating with mortals are completely mortal in every way, yet usually exceptional in look and abilities. Achilles, the main character of the Iliad, is the son of a mortal man and a goddess. This is a big difference between Olympian and Biblical concepts of gods: when the mortal children of gods die, they do not become spirits and join their divine parents in heaven, but rather their lives go down to Hades, and their divine parents, exactly like mortal parents, see them no more. Dreadful grief from the death of mortals dear to them is the only lasting pain Homeric immortals suffer.

The Homeric gods represent the existing order of the real world, as understood by Homer and his audience. Their personalities remain forever distinct in function and complementary in nature, like organs in a body. Their society forms the harmonious order of the cosmos, eternal and overseen by a ruling family dwelling on Olympus, the home of gods, a mountain in the heavens. Warrior aristocracies ruled Homer's society, so naturally their gods are imagined from a model of human nobility.

Homer's society acknowledged the supreme authority of these powerful forces, who live forever and govern the rain, disease and the fortunes of battle. Communal rituals, repeatedly practiced, attempted to please and not offend these forces, who were viewed as supremely virtuous and appeasable, even though greater in excellence and honor and might. With sacrifice and with gentle prayers and with libations and with pleading, the gods could be appeased, when mortals would overstep and fail.

Societies throughout the world perform repetitious ritual as common religious practice. The highest ideals a society holds get projected onto their gods, and their gods are imagined to function in that manner. When a society is not being run according to its supreme principles, when gods are not respected, when oaths and hospitality are violated, when leaders selfishly abuse authority or are unappeasable, see what happens! The virtue of Homer's gods is often not conveyed, because of modern biases, which lead to misinterpretations, which lead to unfaithful translations.

THE ILIAD IS NOT FANTASY AND NOT A FAIRY TALE.

Homer did not invent the Olympian gods any more than Michelangelo invented his figures on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. The Iliad is a legacy of genuine legend. Before the rise of philosophy or science, shared beliefs about legendary ancestors and immortal beings who govern the world served to orient people and organize societies by binding the living to the dead and to what is deathless and everlasting. Sacred narratives provided a reason for the seasons, the motions of heavenly bodies, the origin of rain, earthquakes and plagues, but also revealed mankind's purpose within creation and reconciled the human imagination with the sufferings of life and the inevitability of death. This is true today. Science discovers how the world works, narrative thinking unites societies and informs how we should be.

Unlike Biblical accounts or Viking Sagas, which broadly chronicle the deeds of heroes and gods, the deeds of heroes and gods in the Iliad are portrayed in an EPIC: a narrative beyond the ordinary about the adventures of heroic figures during celebrated episodes from the legendary history of a people, in this case portraying events surrounding a four-day battle during the tenth year of the Trojan War. With its emphasis on dialogue, its well-structured plot, sophisticated themes and cast of complex characters driven to act on events by competing psychological forces, the Iliad, the oldest work of literature from Western civilization, remains entirely satisfying to the tastes and tenets of the modern day.

HOMER'S HEROES EXPERIENCE THE WORLD THE SAME AS WE DO, BUT INTERPRET IT DIFFERENTLY.

A distinguishing and instrumental feature of the Iliad is the wealth of passages where deities directly intervene in human behavior, putting thoughts into a hero's mind, casting strength and courage into his heart, inhibiting his actions or leading him astray. A modern reader should NOT get the notion that these are antiquated fantasies from a bygone day. Homer's deities personify genuine forces which control the natural world and human behavior today as much as in Homer's time. Religious people today often admit that God speaks to them. They do not see God or hear a voice. They get a feeling, which they believe guides them to act in harmony with the supreme principle and with what God wants. When I first read the Iliad, I encountered nothing strange, because I went to Catholic grade school when it was taught by clergy. The nuns said that unseen devils existed in the world with us, who put tempting thoughts into our minds, while guardian angels put thoughts in us to resist these. Some doubt the existence of angels, but no one can doubt that such competing thoughts are real.

With the exception of the exceptional lead actor, the demigod Achilles, to whom the divine appear at times undisguised, Homer's heroes, while holding an unquestioning shared belief, do not see or hear gods any more than we do. However, through the vision of Homer, we do witness the divine drama within the Iliad. This is somewhat like a movie soundtrack. An audience hears the soundtrack, and it adds to the movie's performance, but the audience understands that characters in the movie do not hear the music. Even the encounters of Achilles with the divine seem to represent an inner mystical experience isolated from other characters.

HOMER USES GODS TO PORTRAY THE WORKINGS OF HUMAN PSYCHOLOGY.

Modern behavioral psychology argues that humans have a rational will that can analyze and plan ahead, which coexists with an irrational will, driven by emotion and instinct. People like to believe that their conscious rational will has control, but in fact whenever the two wills disagree, the rational is entirely overmatched. We all have experienced this when we overeat, procrastinate, try to quit a habit, lose our temper, lose our nerve, or act in a way that leaves us wondering what could have possibly possessed us to do such a thing.

The ancients, perceiving these human tendencies, diagnosed these influences as immortal gods, because they have power over us to rule behavior and because they exist forever in everyone generation after generation. Each god behaves according to their nature, and so each god may be characterized from the behavior they inspire. Thus a pantheon of distinctive personalities in human form became formalized into a truth beyond what is true, by which the ancients could comprehend their conduct in relation to the cosmic order.

HOMER'S HEROES MOSTLY ACT FROM THEIR OWN MOTIVES WITHOUT INFLUENCE FROM GODS.

Starting on the very first page, Agamemnon, king of the Achaeans, chose ON HIS OWN to refuse a great ransom offered for the daughter of Chryses by her father, a priest of Apollo. Trading his new sex slave for treasure was not pleasing to Agamemnon IN HEART (thymos). A vengeful Chryses then chose ON HIS OWN to pray to Apollo for help, and Homer introduces this awesome god as he descends from heaven, raging IN HEART (car), to inflict a plague on the Achaeans for Agamemnon's impiety. In this case, a god was given an idea and stirred to action by a mortal. These initial decisions made by mortals from their own desires and their own free will without influence by gods are the first two of many that unfold the story of the Iliad, and this point must be stressed: throughout the epic, EVERY CRUCIAL DECISION BY A MORTAL IS MADE WITHOUT ANY INFLUENCE FROM A GOD. Homer made sure that his story is a human one, and that the human characters are solely and fully responsible for every crucial choice.

HOMER INTRODUCES THE GODDESS HERA

After the plague lasted nine days, THE GODDESS HERA PUT ON THE MIND (phrenes) OF ACHILLES to call for a gathering of the Achaeans, because SHE HURT FOR THE DANAANS WHEN SHE SAW THEM DYING. Homer introduces this important divine character by openly explaining her motivation right from the start. Homer repeatedly and openly portrays her concern for the welfare of the Argives. Achaeans also call themselves Argives, people of the city and capital region of Argos in the Peloponnese. They also call themselves Danaans, descendants of Danaus, a patriarchal king of Argos. In the Iliad, Hera has the official title "Hera of Argos" because that area of Achaea is the center of her worship. They are her people and her character functions throughout the Iliad to embody and express the Argive's communal attitudes and hatred for the Trojans.

THE BASIC ELEMENTS OF HUMAN PSYCHOLOGY AS UNDERSTOOD BY HOMER.

Conscious thoughts and feelings (for gods as well) are in or on the phrenes (mind), the root word for such English words as frenzy, frenetic and phrenic. Phrenes are not in the head and brains as modern science has proven, but rather within the breasts, where the heart and lungs are, above the diaphragm, the muscle that goes through (dia) the phrenes (phram). There are two phrenes, a pair, as there are two breasts and two lungs. Thoughts and feelings occur IN or ON the phrenes. Phrenes are a CONTAINER, not an active agent of thoughts and feelings. The ACTIVE AGENTS, aside from the persons themselves, are the cardia (abbreviated car), the etor and the thymus. The cardia is obviously the heart. It beats and can be stabbed and the phrenes goes around it, as lungs go around the heart. The etor may just be another name for the heart, because it can be stabbed, and only acts exactly like the cardia as an agent. The thymus is a fluid which exists INSIDE the phrenes, as breath does inside the lungs. The cardia, thymus and etor behave alike to the extent of interchangeable as agents of thoughts and feelings within the breasts, and correspond exactly to the modern use of the English word "heart" (in addition to being an organ for pumping blood). There are a few times when the thymus acts like breath. It sometimes blows two ways, and twice when characters faint, they breathe out their life (psyche), but then breathe in and gather thymus into phrenes, bringing consciousness back into mind, as if bringing breath into lungs. The thymus might better be called "spirit," if the original Latin meaning of "breath" could be conveyed, as in "respire." But "spirit" in modern English is immaterial and immortal; so it is not suitable for use in Homeric epic.

I exclusively use the word "mind" to translate phrenes, because it is used the same way (we have things "on our mind" and things "in mind") and because phrenes has a verb form as does "mind." The many Greek adjectives that use phrenes as a root behind a prefix are also then simple to translate, such as well-minded, wily-minded, honey-minded, tender-minded or strong-minded. I exclusively use "heart" to translate thymus, cardia and etor, since Homer uses these interchangeably and no other English word will do.

All other translators of the Iliad use "heart" and "mind" and "spirit" and many other English words interchangeably and do not distinguish the phrenes from the active agents, or they drop these Homeric terms from their translation, so that Homer's psychological elements and system cannot be distinguished.

HOMER USES GODS AS STORY-TELLING TOOLS.

Why did Homer have Hera put on the mind of Achilles the idea for a gathering? Achilles did not see or hear the goddess. He just got an idea. Homer's heroes are never sure if an idea they get comes from a god or their own heart, and if things go wrong they are often quick to blame a god. Homer made Hera the source of this idea for two reasons. First, as has been said, Homer wished to introduce Hera by portraying the most important aspect of her character: her concern for the Achaeans. The second reason is to make us, the audience, aware that Achilles is sincere. At the gathering, Achilles asks that a prophet give an oracle to reveal the cause of the plague and a remedy. When the oracle reveals the wrath of Apollo and that Agamemnon must give back the girl without any ransom in return, Agamemnon suspects that the prophet and Achilles have conspired to dishonor him. In retaliation, by his own choice and stirred by the anger that filled his phrenes, he confiscates the equally beautiful slave girl that had been awarded to Achilles as a prize, thus giving rise to the wrath of Achilles. Within the world of the Iliad, men are quite fond of their women and afford them great value. It is a very bad choice to steal a woman from another man. We, the audience of Homer, know for certain that Agamemnon is in the wrong. We know for certain the reason for Apollo's wrath and we know that Achilles is sincere.

HOMER INTRODUCES THE GODDESS ATHENE

As Achilles ponders whether to draw his sword and kill Agamemnon or stop his gall and halt his heart, Hera sends the goddess Athene from heaven, because both men are dear to her. This second divine influence is a special scene, which more than any other defines the character of Athene. She stands right behind Achilles and grabs him by the hair, APPEARING ONLY TO HIM, no one else in the gathering sees her. Achilles is amazed (the standard reaction to a god appearing undisguised) and asks why she came. She replies that she came to stop his anger, IF HE WILL BE PERSUADED, and advises only to insult Agamemnon with words. She promises such a response to the hubris of Agamemnon will gain great reward in the future. The few times he is guided by gods, Achilles always chooses the best path. When led by his own heart, things often go wrong.

This scene is special in several ways. First, HOMER INTRODUCES ATHENE DEFINITELY as the personification of a rational force in human nature able to bridle instinctive reactions, passions and desires, and choose a more useful courses of action. It is Athene who inspires men beset by the horrors of battle to bridle their terror, so that they may distinguish themselves conspicuously by acts of gallantry at the risk of life above and beyond the call of duty, and that is why the image of Athene is on the Congressional Medal of Honor. This scene also establishes definitively that MORTALS HAVE FREE WILL. They are able, if they choose, to halt their own heart and they are able, if they choose, to reject the direct influence of a deity. Notice that Athene could not dictate. She could only persuade and advise a path of action that the heart of Achilles already pondered as one of two options. This scene also definitively shows that the ENCOUNTERS OF ACHILLES WITH GODS PORTRAY AN INNER MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE, isolated from other characters. He has further encounters later, but the word-frugal Homer lets the isolated, mystical nature be understood without being repeatedly restated. The scene also establishes THE SPECIAL CHARACTER OF ACHILLES. Achilles, as Homer's leading actor, is uniquely exceptional. He is a demigod to whom gods may appear undisguised. He can summons his mother, a goddess, from the sea. He drives immortal horses and wears invulnerable armor. Only two other demigods, Aeneas, the son of Aphrodite, and Helen, a daughter of Zeus, have similar experiences with gods, but nowhere near as extensive. Even so, while exhibiting extraordinary prowess, Achilles remains entirely human and never in any way supernatural. Nor do his horses when driven into battle ever act beyond the normal.

HOW GODS INFLUENCE MORTALS BY DIVINE INSPIRATION.

At a time of very low morale among Achaean, Hera again sends Athene from heaven. The goddess finds Odysseus, stands beside him, speaks directly to him and tells him to stop the Achaeans from deserting. Odysseus does not see or hear the goddess. Homer says he REALIZED THE VOICE OF THE GODDESS speaking. Inspired by Athene, with his commanding presence, his capable leadership and his gift for stirring oratory, Odysseus rallies the Achaeans. Homer shows Athene especially favoring Odysseus, because he possesses such talents, and also shows Odysseus especially able to exploit these talents, because he is favored by Athene. The divine and human reflect one another.

Only two other times, in Book Seven, when the Trojan prince Helenos, a seer, REALIZES IN HEART THE PLAN of Athene and Apollo, and in Book Ten, when Diomedes REALIZES the voice of Athene, does the word-frugal Homer explicitly describe how gods communicate this way with mortals. In all other occasions when gods put or cast thoughts or emotions into a mortal, how this happens is understood, but not explicitly stated. Later, after Odysseus has rallied the Achaeans, Athene speeds through them, flaunting the aegis of Zeus, to stir fervor into each IN HEART to battle and to fight, so that battle sweeter came to be than return in hollow ships to their dear fathers' earth. Homer uses Athene to personify the force of mob psychology. People are stirred up by her, but it is understood that no one sees or hears her.

HOW GODS INFLUENCE MORTALS BY IMPERSONATION.

Homer also introduces in this scene how gods will IMPERSONATE A MORTAL in form and voice, so that they may be seen and heard and interact. To support Odysseus as he spoke before the crowd, Athene stood beside him, LOOKING LIKE A HERALD, and to silence urged the folk, so that the foremost and also last sons of Achaeans could hear his speech and would mind his plan. We, the audience, are always aware of such divine impersonations, but people in the story stay unaware, although some at times suspect afterward, and the demigods Aeneas and Helen quickly see through divine disguises.

The language Homer uses plainly states that AN IMPERSONATION IS THE GOD IN HUMAN FORM, and this practice among gods is a recurring storyline in Homeric lore. In the Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite, for instance, the goddess in the form of a Phrygian princess, decked out in her finest outfit, suddenly appeared before the Trojans Prince, Anchises (the father of Aeneas), while he was pasturing cattle in a remote mountain vale. She had to come up with an explanation of how she got there (divine rapture) and how a Phrygian princess speaks the Trojan language perfectly (a Trojan nanny). Divine impersonations in the Iliad, however, need no explanation. EVERY PERSON IMPERSONATED WOULD BE EXPECTED TO BE THERE. THEY DO AND SAY WHAT THAT PERSON WOULD BE EXPECTED TO DO AND SAY. IT IS NEVER QUITE CLEAR THAT THIS IS NOT THE REAL PERSON, inspired or possessed by a god.

Homer does not name the herald, but we know it is Eurybates of Ithaca, who was standing beside and assisting Odysseus earlier in Book Two. A similar impersonation occurs later in Book Two, when the goddess Iris, looking like Polites, son of Priam, warns the Trojans that the Achaeans are marshalling. But the real Polites had been stationed as a lookout on a high forward place above the Achaean camp. Iris performs the very task Polites would be expected to do at that time in that situation.

Again in Book Three, Iris in the form of Laodice, a sister-in-law of Helen, comes to her chamber with news that Helen's present and former husband are about to fight a duel over her in full view of the city tower. Iris also casts longing in heart for her former man and town and parents. But is it not normal for the real Laodice to come with that news, and for that news, even from a mortal, to cast longing in heart?

Homer and Homer's audience and the characters within Homer's human story understand natural phenomena, whether an outbreak of plague, a sunrise, the appearance of an eagle in flight, or the stirrings of internal motivations, as the work of unseen divine personalities. We, the people in Homer's audience, see these divinities at work through Homer's vision. The characters in Homer's story do not. The natural phenomena behave naturally, as do the characters, even when beneath the influence of a god. THROUGHOUT THE EPIC, CHOICES MADE FROM DIVINE INFLUENCE WOULD HAVE BEEN MADE BY THAT CHARACTER AT THAT TIME IN THAT SITUATION ANYWAY.

HOMER INTRODUCES THE GODDESS APHRODITE

Later in Book Three, Aphrodite impersonates an old trusted servant woman to summon Helen to bed with Paris, who had returned to his chambers. This old woman is exactly the person who Paris would send to summon his wife. When Helen sees through the disguise, while the Trojan women around her stay unaware, Homer sets up a scene very similar to the encounter of Achilles and Athene. Helen, with a heart divided two ways between desire and shame, struggles with SEXUAL DESIRE PERSONIFIED BY APHRODITE, and at first refuses, but like Achilles, finally is persuaded that the best way is to heed divine advice.

DIVINE ROLE IN THE HUMAN CONFLICT

Conflict between societies in the human story of the Iliad arises from an all too human motive: a Trojan desire for himself an extremely beautiful high-ranking Achaean woman, who belongs to another man. The society of Homer's heroes blamed such desires on the character of Aphrodite and, as in almost every society, strict taboos were imposed to control her erotic powers. An instinct for law and order, for social propriety and respect for authority, personified by Hera, the embodiment of the chaste wife, contained the works of Aphrodite within the confines of marriage, as fire is contained within the hearth. Societies depend on fire also for survival, but if allowed to run free, it can destroy everything. The force of human nature personified by Athene provides people with enough rational self-control to value civility and respect customs of hospitality and diplomatic embassies that allow mutually beneficial commerce. When violations occur and embassies between nations fail, like the one undertaken by Menelaos and Odysseus, war becomes the continuation of politics with other means. At first political aims and a mutually beneficial warrior code of civility, sanctioned by the warrior goddess Athene, may hold sway, but the toll of death tends to make these give way to the virile powers of Ares, as battle comes to be a lust for blood and vengeance.

Conflict among the Achaeans also arises from purely human motives, which is typical within human societies, where interchangeable and short-lived mortals compete for status and thus make hierarchies unstable. Agamemnon, worried about his honor among Achaeans, confiscates a woman from Achilles. Achilles, defending his honor among Achaeans, withdraws his support. Without their star warrior, the Achaeans compete badly against Trojans. Agamemnon from self-interest makes amends and Achilles from self-interest returns, motivated by vengeance. The Trojans, who had followed a strategy of not confronting Achilles on the battlefield, having grown overconfident after three days of success, see too late the wisdom of their previous strategy. All this occurs without divine influence.

THE DIVINE CONFLICT

CONFLICT IS NOT NORMAL AMONG THE DIVINE, where there is one everlasting hierarchy of immortal harmonious personalities dwelling in the heavens. People have always seen heaven as the realm of gods because it is eternal. While all on earth changes, the movements and positions of the Sun, Moon, planets and stars continue in the same unending cycles, generation after generation. Like organs of a body, gods are not interchangeable. Each is unique and complementary in function. For example, in an episode in Book 14, Hera cannot seduce her husband, Zeus, without actually putting on the charms of Aphrodite. This episode where HERA, MIMICKING APHRODITE, descends to Mount Ida to seduce Zeus closely mimics the descent of Aphrodite to Mount Ida to seduce the Trojan Prince Anchises, the father of Aeneas, as told in her Homeric Hymn. The account that survives in the hymn is more recent than the Iliad, but the story is obviously older. Both descents begin with the goddesses getting decked out and dolled up. They both go to Ida and beguile by lying about their reason for coming, while employing Aphrodite's charms, so that the males think the seduction is their idea. Both goddesses pretend at first to be hesitant, but then go along. After sex, both put their partners to sleep, and when the males awake, both are surprised to find things not as it seemed. But Hera, the divine wife, had an ulterior motive for sex with her husband. Aphrodite, the goddess of love, CANNOT have an ulterior motive for sex. Hera had CHASTE SEX with Zeus to beguile him. Aphrodite beguiled Anchises to have ILLICIT SEX with him, because she was in love. In Homeric lore, Aphrodite has two lovers: Anchises, a godlike mortal, and divine Ares. In the stories he tells about both affairs (Ares in the Odyssey and Anchises in her Homeric Hymn), Homer portrays her love as illicit and absolutely sincere, so there is no mistaking that her character is oblivious to any authority, social propriety or sexual taboo.

APHRODITE behaves exactly like the instinctive, purely attractive power she personifies: the persuasive, beguiling, single-minded and life-promoting sex drive. This is not a mood; this is her. Her character possesses all the qualities of sex appeal: overwhelming beauty, blooming youth, and a delightfully agreeable, affectionate, fun-loving nature. As a consequence of her persuasive, purely alluring, life-giving character, she is inherently without prowess and incapable of inflicting harm. Homer explicitly portrays her as consummately feminine, and therefore defenseless, even against mortals. HERA, AS FOREMOST GODDESS by right of birth and marriage, is all about the instinctive desire for authority, propriety and taboo. She personifies the visceral outrage and disgust incited by sexual scandals. She encourages Achaeans to take violent vengeance and eagerly inflicts violence on any goddess who challenges her authority.

By contrast, ATHENE'S SELF-POSSESSED NATURE makes her inherently immune to the passions of Aphrodite. She CANNOT have sex to the same extent that blind men cannot see. As a divine enforcer, she readily inflicts punishment on gods, but is only capable of violence toward mortals through human agency, while Apollo and Ares may inflict harm on gods and mortals alike. Her outrage is rational and principled. The Trojans threaten civilized society by violating the customs of hospitality. Athene NEEDS them punished, and she needs mortal men to be the agents of her wrath, so that other men and those later born will shudder at the thought of harming a host. Aphrodite and Hera CANNOT be rational; they are pure instinct.

The TWO MAJOR NARRATIVES in the Iliad (the human and divine stories) arise out of the two distinct conflicts that Homer defines in the first five lines of the epic. The human one is about how the WRATH OF ACHILLES puts countless pains upon Achaeans. The divine story is about THE FULFILLMENT OF ZEUS'S PLAN to end the wrath of Achilles by putting countless pains upon Achaeans until their King, Agamemnon, and Achilles make amends. The two conflicts parallel one another. In the human one, the Achaeans are united against the Trojans, until the supreme Achaean leader alone creates conflict by going against Achilles. The gods also are substantially against the Trojans (8:548-52), until Zeus, the supreme divine leader, alone creates conflict by siding with Achilles against the Achaeans, which puts him at odds with other major gods.

The very rare state of conflict among gods created an opportunity for Homer to compose THE ONLY EPIC IN EXISTENCE ABOUT THE OLYMPIAN PANTHEON with all the major gods and many minor interacting together. It is charming how Homer reveals the differing characters among the pantheon to drive the narrative, using his gods as story-telling tools and wonderfully portraying each behaving strictly according to their nature. Since the nature of each god is the same as the nature of what they embody, the modern reader can discover what each god embodies in the pattern of their behavior. The occasions when gods influence the thoughts or emotions of a mortal, such as Hera inspiring Achilles, or Athene inspiring Achilles and Odysseus, or Aphrodite appearing to Helen, have more to do with the divine story than the human. The mortals could have thought for themselves as they usually do. But Homer uses these divine interactions as signature scenes to define the character of these gods to his audience.

The divine story is about the gods; the human story is wholly human, yet each supports and enriches the other. Divine effects within the human story are accomplished through human agency and limited to influences on psychology and morale. Some hits and misses of arrows or spears are credited to divine effect, but no one on the ground can tell. Homer explicitly states in Book 14:386-87 that GODS DO NOT MINGLE IN THE DISMAL CONFLICT OF MEN, when Poseidon, impersonating a herald, is encouraging an Achaean counterattack. But his presence does inspire morale in Achaeans and terror in Trojans. Only the exceptional lead character, Achilles, bridges the divine and mortal world to interact directly with gods, but these encounters seem to represent an inner mystical experience isolated from other characters. The demigod Achilles possesses superior prowess and divine favor, yet never acts beyond human bounds.

Homer does, however, insert FIVE EPISODES WHERE GODS DIRECTLY INTERFERE WITH EVENTS ON THE GROUND. These portray the duel of Paris and Menelaos in Books 3 to 4:220, the excellence of Diomedes and his duel with Aeneas in Book 5, the events surrounding the beguiling of Zeus from the start of Book 13 through to Book 15:366, the duel of Achilles with Aeneas in Book 20:79-352, and the battle of gods in Book 21:211-525. Each is an important part of the divine story, but ultimately has no consequence for the human narrative. With all the excitement going on in these episodes, where some miraculous acts occur, most readers overlook the reality that all the effects from divine interference are countered by succeeding divine interventions, so that the situation at the end of each episode goes back to the way it was at the start. Only the individual mortals involved, Diomedes in Book 5 and the demigods Helen in Book 3, Aeneas in Books 5 and 20 and Achilles in Books 20 and 21, become aware of anything miraculous. This is not by chance. Homer made sure that his human story is a totally human one.

THE CONFUSION AMONG SCHOLARS

Reading through the introductions in many translations of the Iliad and also commentaries about the Iliad reveals how confused Classical scholars are by Homer's divinities. Rather than seeing the Olympian gods as personifications of genuine transcendent forces, scholars by convention describe Homer's pantheon on the level of comic book superheroes, as if these are fantasy characters who possess, rather than embody, some special powers, which they lightly misuse. They overrate the influence of gods and question whether Homer thought of his heroes as possessing free will. They do not see the systematic way Homer uses gods to portray the working of human psychology. Instead, they seem to see the interactions as if they are watching some little league game where the parents often run onto the field and interfere.

Scholars also seem forever baffled by Homer's use of fate as a storytelling tool to add perspective for approaching events that his audience already knew must happen. They cannot fathom, for instance, how Zeus can infuse such pathos into a scene from his foresight of what will happen in the future (which for Homer is the past), and yet, though the supreme god, he is powerless to change the future (which for Homer is what happened and in hindsight will forever be fated to happen and unchangeable).

Scholars by convention mistranslate "the plan of Zeus" in the fifth line of the Iliad as "the will of Zeus" and then imagine this as some unexplained purpose that looms over the epic (see my discussion on the plan of Zeus in the Translations Comparison section of this website). The plan of Zeus is the straw that stirs the divine narrative and is well explained by Homer. It cannot be taken back or be untrue or unfulfilled and it was supposed to be accomplished in a single day, but it took a little longer, because mortals, having free will, prove unreliable and wrath rules over reason.

Among scholars it is an obsession that the Trojan War was caused by a silly jealous quarrel between Hera, Athene and Aphrodite that led to the Judgement of Paris, an event that is nowhere mentioned by Homer in the Iliad or Odyssey. Based on inferior stories by authors from centuries after the time of Homer, we are asked to believe that these three goddesses entered into a petty quarrel over personal vanity, and then decided that the one person to settle this quarrel was the Trojan Prince Paris, a nobody. After he chose Aphrodite, we are asked to believe that Hera and Athene nursed an endless genocidal hatred against Paris and his entire Trojan race because of spite over a trifle. Scholars are somehow blind to the human story that Homer took such care and craft to portray as a human one, in which the human characters are solely and fully responsible. Instead, they present the Iliad as a fairy tale inhabited by petty, malicious fairies and men without free will prone to evil spells.

When I read the discussions about gods in many introductions to translations of the Iliad, and in other commentaries by scholars, I do not see the gods portrayed by Homer. Instead, I see the silly, cynical and satirical versions found in derivative works from later centuries. Scholars, it seems, having been overexposed to such inferior works, come to the Iliad with a prejudiced view. The power of suggestion, it seems, from their own prejudice prevents them from judging Homer's gods on their own merit. They cannot accept that Homer set his epic within a moral universe. They cannot recognize the tremendous crime Paris committed by violating his oath of hospitality and the sex scandal he created that is still infamous three thousand years later. They cannot see a reason for the hatred of Hera and Athene against the Trojans, even though the motive is obvious and repeatedly explained. Instead, scholars interpret every action by Hera or Athene as evidence of their spite over the Judgement of Paris, an event that did not and could not happen in Homer's world.

This prejudiced view of Homer's pantheon in an introduction poisons a reader's attitude right from the start, and poisons the translation itself. Translators habitually practice an extravagant laxity in choosing words, which allows them to SUPPLANT Homer's words in any verses that conflict with their modern biases (see my discussion on a passage in Book Nine in the Translations Comparison section of this website). Mistranslations caused by modern biases

have led to the mistaken notion that Homer's gods are lacking in morals, and are too human or even comic, and too much distinction between divine influence and individual choice gets drawn, where Homer originally portrays the human and divine as reflections of one another.

Throughout my own translation, I am scrupulously faithful to Homer's words and I include a wealth of annotated notes regarding the gods to help the reader enjoy the Iliad. I also end this article by providing a three-page summary of the Homeric cosmos and leading gods, so that the modern reader will be familiar and prepared to enter Homer's world on an equal footing with Homer's audience. First, however, I want to dismiss for good the Judgement of Paris.

THE JUDGEMENT OF PARIS

Homer's Account of How a Choice of Paris Caused the Trojan War

In Book 3 of the Iliad, Homer recounts how Paris started the Trojan War from the points of view of Paris, Helen, Hector, Menelaos and Priam. The Trojan prince Paris, the son of king Priam, sailed to Sparta on a trading mission, and received the hospitality of Menelaos and his wife, Helen, in their palace. Hospitality constituted a sacred covenant, sanctioned by the gods. An oath between host and guest obliged them to do no harm to one another. Violations were much worse than violations of diplomatic immunity today. Helen, born by the Spartan queen, Leda, was known as the daughter of Tyndareus, king of Sparta, but was in fact a daughter of Zeus by Leda, and the most beautiful woman who has ever lived. Paris was another prince of the Trojan race favored by Aphrodite with god-like beauty and irresistible charm. From the influence of Aphrodite, Paris and Helen fell in love. After Menelaos was called away on official affairs, PARIS CHOSE TO VIOLATE HIS OATH. He took advantage of his position as a guest to steal away with Helen and many properties of his host. He thereby earned the wrath of Athene, who sanctions and enforces the civilizing custom of hospitality, and the wrath of Hera of Argos, whose outrage expresses and personifies the outrage of the Argives.

Paris and the Trojans had a chance to make amends when Menelaos and Odysseus, a most persuasive speaker, sailed to Troy on an embassy and demanded the return of Helen on moral grounds (3:205-6). The Trojan elders refused, thus making all Trojans accomplices and equally guilty. The response to the Trojan refusal was war. The brother of Menelaos, Agamemnon lord of all Achaeans, called together the armies of all the Achaean kingdoms to launch against the Trojans an armada of a thousand ships, fifty thousand men. Nothing could save the Trojans after that, because HERA GAVE HER PROMISE TO MENELAOS that he would sack Troy (5:715-6). Homer does not say how she conveyed her promise, but based on other passages in the Iliad, it was probably with some portent that signified she had heard his prayer. As promises of Zeus cannot be taken back, or be untrue, or unfulfilled (1:526-7), so it is with promises of Hera (4:25-29, 58-61).

The Version Popular Among Scholars of How Paris Caused the Trojan War

According to scholar's favorite version, Eris, the goddess of strife, caused a dispute between Aphrodite, Hera and Athene about which is the most beautiful at the wedding feast of Thetis and Peleus, where all the gods were in attendance. The contesting goddesses agreed to let the Trojan prince Paris be the judge. But rather than a beauty contest, the goddesses offered gifts consistent with their character. Hera offered him kingship, Athene success in war and Aphrodite offered the most beautiful woman in the world. After Paris chose Aphrodite, the other two held an eternal bitterness toward Paris and the entire Trojan race.

The Absurdity of the Scholar's Version

The absurdity of this tale is immediately obvious from its lack of a coherent storyline. The marriage of Thetis and Peleus, the mother and father of Achilles, occurred a generation before the Trojan War, before Achilles and probably Paris was even born. Why anyway would an unreliable nobody like Paris be appointed? But it is not even a beauty contest! Paris does not judge. PARIS CHOOSES WHICH GIFT HE MOST DESIRED.

The Absurdity of the Judgment of Paris in General

The story can be dismissed without discussion on this principle: IT IS NOT POSSIBLE IN HOMER'S WORLD FOR APHRODITE, ATHENE AND HERA TO ENGAGE IN A BEAUTY CONTEST. Athene personifies the force in human nature able to rise above such irrational, unproductive pettiness. Agreeable, affectionate Aphrodite, the goddess of love, by nature is incapable of contesting or disputes. Hera, who enforces the everlasting divine hierarchy, where each god complements rather than competes with all the others, would not allow such a rivalry.

Homer's gods are a genuine functioning pantheon. If goddesses could be jealous of each other's qualities and fall into vindictive quarrels over nothing, the cosmos could not function.

The motivation for Hera, Athene and Aphrodite have already been well explained. Now let us examine their natural loyalties. When Zeus asks Hera directly in Book 4 why she hates the Trojans, she answers by naming the three cities most dear to her. These are Mycene, the home of Agamemnon, leader of all the Argives, Sparta the home the Menelaos, the offended husband of Helen, and Argos, home of the Argives. Thus, her loyalties are with the Argives. Aphrodite has a mortal son who is a leader among the Trojans. Does the goddess of love need another reason for supporting the Trojans?

Athene, of course, is loyal to the Achaean kingdom of Athens. But the inclusion of this level-headed goddess in this nonsense is especially out of place. In both the Iliad and Odyssey, Homer uses Athene in a leading role as the driving force behind the central conflicts, which begin with violations of hospitality by guests against the wife of a host. In the Iliad, she inspires Odysseus and other Achaeans to launch their ships against the Trojans to avenge the abduction of Helen from the house of Menelaos. In the Odyssey, Athene arranges the return of Odysseus to Ithaca to act as an agent of her wrath against fifty men violating the hospitality of his house.

Iliad Passages that Refute the Premise of the Judgment of Paris

In Book 9:388-90, Achilles says that he will not wed the daughter of Agamemnon even if she is as skilled as Athene and as beautiful as Aphrodite, thus judging the latter most beautiful. The supreme beauty of Aphrodite is common knowledge. Athene and Hera take no offense!

In Book 14, Hera needs Aphrodite's charms to seduce her husband (14:187-223) and admits this to Aphrodite without shame.

There are numerous occasions when Homer describes Hera's concern for Achaeans, but critics may say that she only cares for Achaeans because of hatred for Trojans. But in Book 18:347-9, Zeus mocks Hera explicitly by saying she treats the Argives as if they were her own children, born from her own body.

In Book 24:25-30, six verses state that HERA, ATHENE and POSEIDON hold a hatred for Ilion, because of the folly of Paris, who scorned the goddesses and approved Aphrodite when they came to his courtyard. Scholars like to claim that this verifies the Judgment of Paris. In fact, it does exactly the opposite. Poseidon is mentioned among the group of haters, but he was not in any beauty contest. The passage very definitely says nothing about a beauty contest. The "courtyard" refers to the embassy where Menelaos, favored by Hera, and Odysseus, favored by Athene, gave Paris one last chance, but he chose Aphrodite, scorning the goddesses, who were rightly outraged.

A BRIEF CHARACTERIZATION OF LEADING HOMERIC GODS

Homer's society conceived of their universe as consisting of three realms: everlasting heaven above, the forever changing earth and sea in the middle and an eternal abysmal world of the dead below. Three brothers rule these realms: Zeus, Poseidon and Hades, all sons of Kronos and the goddess Rhea. These three brothers with the aid of their mother Rhea and other gods from their generation overthrew their father and his generation, called the Titans, and cast them down to the deepest depths below Earth. This event is often referred to in the Iliad, but without further backstory or detail. Gods did not create the world. The world came to be out of chaos like a cloud from air and then succeeding generations of immortal beings were born from it through sexual reproduction. Homer mentions that a huge river, personified as Ocean and his sister wife Tethys, flowing around the ends of Earth, generated the Titans. Homer also refers to Earth and Night as divinities, but without personalities.

The forces personified by the three sons of Kronos are as awesome and godlike today as in Homer's time. All life on land depends on weather, yet to this day mankind has no control of weather nor of sea currents, nor of tides, nor of earthquakes, nor is there a cure for death.

Zeus in heaven, the eldest brother, personifies the weather. Naturally, as the rain god, he is sexually prodigious, for he fertilizes the Earth. He is therefore the supreme father figure, who occupies Olympus like his royal palace in the sky with his harem of many consort goddesses and the many divine sons and daughters he got by his consorts. By many mortal women as well he fathered many of the heroes of Greek mythology. As the supreme father figure he is naturally the supreme authority figure over both immortal gods and mortal men. He holds the aegis, a goatskin shield, his badge of authority. He has epithets referring to thunder and lightning and clouds, and he is called "father Zeus" and "father of men and gods," and also "aegis-holding Zeus" and "Olympian Zeus" and "schemer Zeus."

In the Iliad, most of the heroes are descendants of Zeus. Agamemnon, the Achaean king, is a descendant of Tantalus, a son of Zeus. Priam, the Trojan king, is a descendant of Dardanos, a son of Zeus. Sarpedon, the Lycian king, is Zeus' son by the Lycian princess Ladameia. Helen of Troy is Zeus' daughter by the Spartan Queen Leda. All of the major leaders on both sides are descendants of a son of Zeus: Achilles, Ajax, Odysseus, Menelaos, Hector, Paris. Aeneas is a descendant of the Trojan patriarch Dandanos on his father's side and his mother is Zeus' daughter Aphrodite. With the Trojan War crowded with progeny, Zeus stayed neutral. The Iliad recounts the one time he favored the Trojans, as a plan to force Agamemnon to make amends with Achilles.

Poseidon, the brother of Zeus, personifies the powers of the sea and the tectonic forces that move the Earth. His epithets are "shaker of the Earth" and "Earth-holder." The authority of Zeus he accepts, while considering himself an equal, and he is treated as such. As Greece is in an active earthquake zone and the Achaeans were a maritime society, Poseidon is a major deity and a valuable story-telling tool for Homer as a formidable adversary. He opposes the Trojans in the Iliad and Odysseus in the Odyssey. With Poseidon present, Zeus is not omnipotent. Zeus reigns by divine right, because he is the eldest and strongest, but if opposed by Poseidon in league with other gods, Zeus can be overthrown. This is the tension in the divine story of the Iliad. The promised plan of Zeus must be fulfilled to preserve cosmic order and it needs to be fulfilled soon to prevent an overthrow of cosmic order.

Hades, the third brother, whose name means The Unseen, never appears as a character but he is named many times throughout the Iliad, because of all the deaths. When Homer's heroes are killed on the battlefield, they are said to go to the House of Hades. His wife, Persephone, is mentioned in relation to fulfilling curses for sins against family.

Hera, the foremost Olympian goddess, eldest daughter of Kronos and Rhea, sister of Zeus, Poseidon and Hades, is the lawful wife of Zeus. Mating among gods was often with relatives, although never between parents and children. Kronos and Rhea were siblings as were their

parents, Ocean and Tethys. This custom puts Zeus and Hera as a reflection of Heaven and Earth. Homer makes clear that contention between her and Zeus is the normal state of affairs. Hera is a check on Zeus' supreme authority. She embodies the nagging, demanding wife, who insists that her husband treat her as his equal. Yet both value each other as a spouse and yield to each other often. Zeus treats peace with his wife as a measure of his judgement. As goddess of marriage, Romans called her Juno and homage to her continues today with the custom of June weddings, the month named after her.

Athene, a daughter of Zeus, personifies the force in human nature able to bridle instinctive reactions, passions and desires, so that rational thought may lead to more useful courses of action. Without her, people would not be able to live in cities, and there would be no acts of gallantry above and beyond the call of duty. Her character makes Athene the guardian of cities and an enforcer of the civil customs that enable civilization. Her image, a virgin maid in full armor, with Zeus' aegis on her shoulders as a badge of authority, represents an unconquered city, under lawful authority and surrounded by defensive walls. The word for "city" in Greek has a female gender. In those times, women wore head veils for modesty and a figure of speech referred to elders of a city as protectors of its head veils, while to sack a city was said to remove its head veils. Temples of Athene were situated in a city's center on their acropolis, a city's high point and citadel. The most famous is the Parthenon in Athens. Her image is widely used today as an emblem of civic and democratic virtue. A statue of an Americanized Athene stands atop the capitol dome in Washington DC as goddess of freedom.

Homeric Athene is virginal, because, as incarnate reason, she is immune to passion. She is "one of three goddesses whom Aphrodite is unable to persuade or beguile." By nature she is also "one of those goddesses who reigns in battles of men and subdues the ranks of heroes toward whom she is vengeful." She inspires men to provide a protected place for cultivation of civil society. She is also a goddess of the crafts of civil culture: weaving arts performed by woman, and the art of carpentry for building ships, by which cities establish trade.

Aphrodite, a daughter of Zeus by the goddess Dione, personifies the attractive power of nature, forceless yet overwhelming and inescapable, which stirs together male and female in animals, humans and gods for the purpose of creating life. Homer portrays her as a wholly feminine, sweet-natured, cheerful, peerless beauty at the peak of her maiden bloom, who has a propensity for rescuing mortals from certain death.

You may be aware that Aphrodite (who the Romans named Venus) was famously born from the sea. There are many famous paintings and sculptures of this event, but in these images the goddess is fully grown. A Homeric Hymn describes, but does not explain, this event and it is ritually reenacted in another Homeric hymn and also in the Odyssey. It is true, and Homer also establishes as officially true that she is "Zeus' daughter" begot by Zeus and born from a mother, the goddess Dione. But all this is too involved to explain here and has nothing to do with the Iliad.

Scholars are confused by this celebrated goddess more than any other. They almost universally view her with utter scorn as a minor silly temptress who lures mortals and gods alike into sin. The stabbing, the beating, the spurns and mocks she suffers in the Iliad lead scholars to the notion that Homer deliberately shames Aphrodite and treats her with disrespect. A broader outlook reveals a truer vision. Aphrodite is the one divinity who suffers miseries of the mortal world as she strives to overcome the necessity of death with her powers of everlasting life.

To appreciate the literary character of Aphrodite in the Iliad requires the recognition that she is a special goddess of immemorial antiquity. Throughout the ancient Near East, thousands of years before the time of Homer, she was the preeminent goddess of Sumerians, Babylonians and Assyrians. As a Phoenician goddess, she was worshipped by King Solomon (Kings 1:11:5) and introduced to Greece through the Isles of Cyprus and Cythera, which became centers of her worship (Herodotus 1:105). This is why Homer at times refers to her as Cypris or Cytherea.

Aphrodite appears only four times in the Iliad within four of the distinct episodes about Olympian gods directly interfering in the course of battle. Even within these four episodes, her four sudden appearances constitute discrete short narratives in which she suddenly plays a leading role. Her three rescues of males dear to her, after they were struck down, as well as her key part in the beguiling of Zeus, have obvious recurring story patterns drawn from the archetypal pattern of her ancient lore. The duels of her mortal son, Aeneas, with Diomedes and Achilles are also discreet narratives with obvious parallel patterns and miraculous features. Aeneas appears scarcely in the rest of the epic, Aphrodite not at all.

Through her four special scenes, Homer celebrates this special goddess, who literally opposes and overcomes death. Her life-giving character inherently has no ability to inflict harm (“she is a god without prowess”), and so her rescues, in which she descends from heaven to the mortal realm, where she willingly risks and suffers degradation and violence, make her the only deity that Homer portrays as heroic.

Ares, a son of Zeus and Hera, personifies the inherent instinctive aggressive force of nature that drives males to compete and fight with each other over status, mating rights and territory. Males of every species do this. This most virile of gods is the sweetheart of Aphrodite, the most feminine of goddesses. The visceral archetypes of a rugged, formidable, combative male and a gentle, attractive, life-giving female are irresistibly drawn to one another.

The name of Ares is synonymous with war. He never appears in the human story, but is repeatedly named. Heroes have epithets such as Ares-like (warlike) and dear-to-Ares and disciple of Ares. Men sometimes at foes hurl threats to glut Ares with their blood. War itself is called the travail of Ares. Ares does appear in person, however, in the divine story, in three of the five episodes about divine interference on the ground. In these he is shown to be controlled by two goddesses. Aphrodite turns his attention from fighting to affection. Zeus gives Athene authority to keep Ares under control by reasonable persuasion or by force, using superior weaponry symbolic of her authority. Both sides claim the loyalty of Ares. He has twin sons among the leaders of Achaeans and Hera is his mother, but Aphrodite is his sweetheart and his homeland is Thrace. Ares stays neutral and out of the fighting, until someone dear to him is harmed, in which case he erupts into a murderous rage.

Apollo, the son of Zeus by the goddess Leto, and the twin brother of Artemis, the virgin goddess of the wild and of the hunt, is an awesome divine enforcer used by Homer as a very versatile story-telling tool. He is the primary divine protector of the Trojans and acts as a counterbalance to Athene and Poseidon. He also starts out Book 1 as a protector of his priest, Chryses, by inflicting with his bow a plague on the Achaeans for Agamemnon’s impiety, without any complaint from gods protecting the Argives. This is clearly a personal matter apart from the Trojan War, and other gods respect his jurisdiction. In his prayer, Chryses calls him “Apollo of the silver bow” and “of the mouse” (meaning he inflicts plagues of mice). His most common epithets are “striker-from-afar” and “worker from afar,” which refer to both his archery and his concern for boundaries. “Phoebos” is for him simply another name, the meaning of which was lost to the ages even in Homer’s time. The many places named by Chryses as under the protection of Apollo, all in Asian Minor in the vicinity of Troy, and his twice-used epithet “Lycian-born” (Lycians are allies of Trojans), hint at a native origin for his loyalty. While Apollo may protect Trojans, he does not hate Achaeans, as Athene, Hera and Poseidon hate the Trojans. Apollo himself reveals through an oracle the curing remedy for the Achaeans’ plague, and once this is performed, he is appeased and sends a favoring breeze on their sail home. At the end of Book 1, he entertains the gods on Olympus by playing his lyre to accompany the singing of the Muses.

Scholars are thoroughly confused by his versatility and do not know what to make of this god of plagues, and of oracles, and of healing, and of archery, and of music. (He is not the sun-god, by the way, as many are wrongly taught at school. For Homer, Helios is the sun-god and his sister, Selene, the moon-goddess). Even Poseidon is baffled by Apollo and at one point directly asks why he protects oath-breaking Trojans, but gets no answer. Apollo’s function and scope

go beyond the immediate conflict. He is concerned with what is right on a cosmic level. Homer gives us Apollo's signature scene in Book 5 when the god warns the Achaean hero Diomedes to "withdraw and not equal to gods wish to be minded, since not ever is the tribe the same of immortal gods and ground going men." On the third day of battle, when Zeus has forbidden gods from going as aiders among Danaans or Trojans, Apollo stalks the battlefield inspiring Trojans to counter the counterattack inspired by Poseidon and then acts further as an agent for the plan of Zeus. On the fourth day of battle, Zeus again sends Apollo to the battlefield to make sure that nothing occurs "above fate."

Discovering the character of Apollo requires looking at his actions within the context of his many lengthy scenes, which cannot be done in this brief summary. My translation, though, has thorough annotated notes every time he appears, so the reader will be able to recognize the awesome character of this special divinity.