
The Civic Law and How It Developed Through Time in Iliad

When contemplating the ultimate nature of the Greek gods and the ensuing roles they play in human affairs, it is helpful to view instances of divine intervention through the actions of the goddess Athena. Athena occupies a central place in The Iliad, The Odyssey, and the Oresteia. Each work elucidates various traits of Athena, which can be better understood within the context of the different stories. While Athena's overall persona remains constant throughout each of the stories, various, and at times contradictory attributes manifest themselves as the main themes of each work fall into place.

Within The Iliad Athena represents the Greek army and fervently backs them, both on the battlefield and on Mt. Olympus. She is characterized by her war like persona, fighting and positioning herself at the forefront of the action. Athena demonstrates her leadership abilities throughout the Iliad and also her resourceful and diplomatic nature. During the beginning of The Iliad, Athena intervenes in the story instructing Achilles that she has "come to check your rage". The Iliad as a whole represents a more contentious epic conflict and war are all permeating aspects of the work. Thus, Athena's actions within the Iliad portray her more as a proponent of war, under the dark backdrop of the story of the Trojan War, as told in the Iliad.

The war driven nature of the Iliad can be contrasted with the almost hyper-civilized tone of Homer's Odyssey. Central to this is the theme of hospitality. Hospitality is used to establish an expected code of conduct in each character within the Odyssey. A characters given balance, or lack thereof, in this virtue drives both conflicts and resolutions within the story. Being too hospitable or not hospitable enough causes different sufferings and resolutions. It is imperative to note that this society is not at war, as was the society of the Iliad. Virtues such as gift giving, hospitality, and possessing the ability to speak well are all latent within the text.

The suitors also exemplify a violation of a host-guest relationship on the role of host. What is important is that Athena is in fact driving their lack of hospitality. She does this because she understands that by making them unfit hosts, they will eventually have to pay severely; this is part of the resolution process that ensues. Athena gives the reader and Odysseus a chance to see exactly what kind of hosts the suitors are: "And stirred him to go collect his bits of bread from the suitors and so to learn which of the, were fair." On both sides, the suitors the suitors have created imbalances in their relationships and this drives the major conflict within the Odyssey.

Further illustrating this different approach to life from the Iliad to the odyssey is the interplay and mirror relationship of Athena and Odysseus. Athena within the odyssey represents the traits of a

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more evolved civilization. She is the dominant figure among the gods, and is extremely eloquent and diplomatic throughout the epic. These same qualities she shares with Odysseus, whose oratory skills, and craftiness transcends mortals. Both Athena and Odysseus represent wit, wisdom and leadership abilities. While her battle skills and inclinations towards war marked the Athena of the Iliad, the Athena of the Odyssey represents the mental over the physical. Within the Odyssey Athena evens shows genuine affection to Odysseus and even admiration as she tells him,

Anyone who met you, even a god, would have to be a consummate
Trickster to surpass you in subterfuge. You were always an obstinate,
Cunning, and irrepressible intriguer. So don't propose, even in your
Own country, to drop the tricks and lying tales you love so much!
But no more of this. We both know how to get her own way: in the
World of men you have no rival in judgement and argument, while I
Am pre-eminent among the gods for ingenuity and ability to get what
I want (201).

This is additionally true of the other gods as well. Their kinder nature reflects a newfound intellect and civil tone. This divine presence is seen as even Zeus and Poseidon interacts with statesmanship and compromise at times. While it is a more civil divine presence manifested within The Odyssey, the role the Gods play in human affairs in The Oresteia is a further synthesis of this civility into a modern formative justice. The Oresteia represents the most far reaching development of civilization that from a primitive legal code based on vengeance, as represented by the furies, and also a new conception of civil justice, as introduced by Athena. It is this contrast of forms of resolution that are prevalent in the Oresteia.

It ultimately is the cyclical nature of violence that seems un-mutable that leads the God's to find a more evolved solution that will further civil progress. Athena's introduction to the modern legal code in the Eumenides is tantamount because it symbolizes the development of a new more advanced order to solve binding disputes.

I will appoint the judges of manslaughter,

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Swear them in, and found a tribunal here

For all time to come.

My contestants,

Summon your trusted witnesses and proofs,

Your defenders under oath to help your cause.

And I will pick the finest men of Athens,

Return and decide this issue fairly, truly?

Bound to our oaths, our spirits bent on justice (Aeschylus 253).

The above passage exemplifies the main developments of this increasingly progressive society, as reformed by Athena. Again, we see Athena as a crafty orator who demonstrates fairness and ultimately the transition of justice from primitive norms to that of modern codes of legality. This new conception of Justice, as furthered by Athena, illustrates the transition of justice from *The Agamemnon* to *The Eumenides*. Within Aeschylus first play of the trilogy, justice is upheld through the more primitive modules of punishment and retribution, whereas *The Eumenides* tells of a sophisticated system of legal fairness and early examples of western due process. This system of law is complete with a Jury of mortals. As Athena states, "by all rights not even I should decide a case of murder-murder whets passions" (Aeschylus 486-487).

Each of the three works compared within this essay represents a different worldview. These various perspectives at society bring forth the characterization of the God's, based on the themes of each work. *The Iliad* is marked with contention and is a dreary epic. Thus, the Athena we see in the *Iliad* is much more concerned with actively supporting the Greek army, than the more civil and diplomatic Athena within *The Odyssey*. *The Odyssey* as a whole, represents a much-needed break from the era of the Trojan War, and shows a more genteel world. *The Oresteia* represents a synthesis of these two worlds. While *The Agamemnon* is centered on primal justice and perpetuating a seemingly endless cycle of violence, Athena's presence in the final play of the trilogy demonstrates the conscious elevation to a more judicially sound future.

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