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On Homer's Metaphysics

By

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Abstract:

In this essay I draw out the metaphysical view of Homer, as it exists implicitly in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. More specifically, I show how Homer's metaphysical view is one wherein the reality of particularity and universality—and their analogues—is preserved while maintaining their relationship. This view is contrasted with such views as are attributed to Parmenides and Herakleitos to better suggest how Homer's own view can preserve or exemplify our common experience of the world. Furthermore, this thesis serves to display Homer's previously unconsidered contribution to the ancient tradition of metaphysics.

At the beginning of the Western tradition, there is a figure who is the father of the poetic tradition that we inherit, as well as perhaps the greatest poet within that tradition: Homer. For some approximate two thousand years since the origin of his *Iliad* and *Odyssey*,[1] Homer was considered a worthy thinker in his own right. In modernity,[2] however, Homer's poetry began to be considered 'mere poetry'—i.e., something which is filled with charming images and can invoke the passions, but nonetheless lacks any 'serious' truth.

Only in very recent modern scholarship has Homer begun to be taken as a significant thinker again, and this effort has been largely spearheaded by Peter J. Ahrensdorf, though Ahrensdorf's interests are limited to Homer's political and ethical philosophy (Ahrensdorf 2014 and 2022). In this MA thesis, as compared to Ahrensdorf's work, I will draw out Homer's *metaphysical* view as it exists in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, specifically regarding the relationship between particulars and universals,[3] in contrast to the views of the philosophers Herakleitos and Parmenides.

In this essay, I accomplish the following aims. Firstly and most significantly is the metaphysical point: in drawing out Homer's metaphysical view of the relationship between particulars and universals, I display how Homer's poems implicitly contain a metaphysical worldview which offers an alternative view to those of metaphysicians such as Parmenides and Herakleitos. More specifically, I show how Homer's poems display a non-reductive view of particulars and universals, i.e., a metaphysical view in which each has positive being rather than being exhaustively explained by the other.

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[1] All translations of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in this essay are Lattimore's, unless otherwise stated; the line numbers refer to those in Lattimore's translations, which very closely, but not perfectly, coincide with the Greek line numbers. All of the Greek comes from the editions of the Oxford Classical Texts listed in the Bibliography.
[2] For a succinct history of modernity's problematic decline of taking Homer seriously as a philosopher, see Ahrensdorf 2014, 1-24.
[3] And their other metaphysical expressions or analogues, as shall be commented upon shortly.

Secondly and relatedly, this thesis shows how Homer contributes to the classical metaphysical discourse regarding this question of particulars and universals. This is all the more significant given that modern scholarship and ancient thought alike have heretofore disregarded or failed to recognize Homer's contribution to this discussion, instead focusing—critically or otherwise—on Homer's relationship to Greek culture and theology.[4] I will accomplish these aims through the following investigations.

Firstly (I), I will draw out the metaphysical discourse that is under examination here—namely, the relationship between particulars and universals—as it exists in the views of Parmenides and Herakleitos, in order to set up the later discussion of Homer's alternative to these views. Then (II), to describe how Homer's metaphysical view in the poems exists implicitly, how we access this metaphysical view, and how his use of the poetic form is significant for the metaphysical discourse under examination, I will show how poetry differs from other forms of writing, as is relevant to my aims. Informed by this, I will then turn to interpret especially significant images and themes in the poems, to show how Homer's metaphysical view is revealed, by first (III) examining the image of the cosmos crafted on the shield of Achilles. After this, I will show how this metaphysical view is further supported in the poems through the illustrated nature of the Olympian gods and the structure of the Homeric cosmos as a whole. To do so, I will first (IV) make the proper distinctions regarding the cosmic gods and μοῖρα, before then (V and VI) turning to show how the Olympian gods, as distinct from these other kinds of divinities, support this view by providing a non-reductive metaphysical explanation of particularity and universality. Then, (VII), informed by the discussion of all of these kinds of divinities, I will make explicit the structure of the Homeric cosmos itself, as is

[4] See, for instance Redfield 1983, 1994, and 2021; Rowe and Schofield 2000; Plato *Republic*, Book III; Herodotus *The Histories*, II.50-53.

relevant to this thesis. Finally (VIII), I will make concluding remarks. Before proceeding any further, however, a guiding assumption of this essay must be noted.

Unfortunately, it has become rather impossible in contemporary times to write anything on Homer without addressing in some form or another, even if only to sweep it aside, what has become known as 'The Homeric Question,' regarding the authorship and composition of the poems (Cf. Scott 1921). Regarding this question of business, I can say only that it is a guiding *assumption* of this thesis that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, as we have them more or less stably now, are a complementary pair which, taken together, form one intelligible whole, whether or not the author was one or many. I will consider as sufficient evidence for the wholeness of these two texts the fact that themes can be interpreted consistently across the two poems, such as the interpretation which occurs throughout the rest of this essay. When I use 'Homer' throughout the rest of this thesis I use it to refer to *whatever* the author(s) of the poems is, without making any claim as to what this author is; 'Homer' is, if you wish, a placeholder name for our purposes. Additionally, for linguistic purposes, 'Homer' is used to refer to the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* together at times, again as a simple placeholder. With this being said, I will now turn to discuss the classical metaphysical discourse that Homer's view will be seen as an alternative to.

I: Drawing Out the Discourse

The metaphysical discourse which I am here examining is that surrounding the question of particularity and universality—or, expressed otherwise, unity and difference, stability and

change, order and disorder.[5] Simply said, the question is, 'What is the relationship between these opposite characteristics of reality?'.

In ancient Greek thought, two prominent[6] attempts to answer this question were given by Parmenides and Herakleitos (however self-reflectively the thinkers were aware of the question). According to the view attributed to Parmenides, stability (or universality) is given the place of the first principle of being, and change (or particularly) is simply not real. That is, what is real is stability and unity, for this is what it means to be the first principle of being. Insofar as something is not stable or universal—i.e., insofar as it is changing or particular—it is, per the Parmenidean view, simply a lack or privation of stability or unity (and of being, therefore): or in other words, it is nothing.

On the other hand, according to the view attributed to Herakleitos, change or particularity is given the place of first principle, and—as follows in the manner of the above—stability or universality becomes dismissed as something simply not real.

Both of these views, however, vary from what is given to us through immediate experience—namely, that reality is disclosed to us as something permeated throughout with both

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[5] These pairs, and other synonyms as are used analogously throughout the essay, all refer to unity and difference as it exists in different realms. Although an exhaustive defense of the validity of this claim would not properly fit within the space of this essay, brief indications can be given. For instance, difference and unity can be understood as particulars and universals as follows. A universal is what is *one* and the same across different members of the universal; that is, the universal simply is the *unity* of the being of members of that universal. What is particular to an individual is what is different specifically with respect to that individual (as compared to other individuals) and cannot be common to others; otherwise said, particularity is specific *difference*. Similarly, change and stability can be understood in terms of unity and difference: over time, what is stable is *one* and the same, whereas what changes is what is *different* between two given points of time. Reflection would show that this is true for the rest of our instances. Thus, I use the terms analogously as they linguistically fit best.

[6] When speaking of the views of Parmenides and Herakleitos, I refer only to the views commonly attributed to these thinkers; it would not be possible to here defend that these were actually the views held by such thinkers (Cf. Plato's *Cratylus* 402a, Aristotle's *Metaphysics* 1010a). For linguistic simplicity, I will often omit the phrase 'attributed to' when speaking of these views, though this is always what I mean. And, while of course these two thinkers are far from representative of *all* metaphysical thought in ancient Greece, they nonetheless exercised large influence over the rest of ancient Greek thought. Additionally—though this claim also cannot be defended here—it appears that many interpretations of Aristotle and Plato, as well as of many other ancient Greek thinkers, threaten to collapse into a position that is fundamentally either Herakleitian or Parmenidean (Cf. Wolfe 2012). For these reasons, then, the views of Herakleitos and Parmenides serve rather well to distinguish what Homer's metaphysical worldview offers in contrast.

universality and particularity, change and stability, unity and variety, together. For instance, one person is, in one sense, the same person over time (as the condition of attributing changes over time to one stable thing), and on the other hand the same person genuinely undergoes changes. The significance of this, then, is that any view which suggests that either only universality or only particularity is real, to the exclusion of the other (such as the views attributed to Parmenides and Herakleitos), does not agree with our immediate experience.

In contrast to such views as these, Homer—as I will show throughout the rest of this essay—does present a metaphysical worldview which preserves the reality of both particularity and universality (and their analogues); thus, Homer's metaphysical worldview preserves the reality given to us in immediate experience. Before proceeding, I must note that I am not claiming here that a metaphysical view *must* preserve what is given to us through immediate experience, as this claim would be impossible to defend here (if at all); my claim is only that Homer's poems *do* do this. Now, to begin showing how Homer's view preserves both particularity and universality, I will turn to examine the significance of Homer's works being poems rather than another written medium.

II: Poetry as a Medium

In order to properly understand how Homer's poems are achieving this work of disclosing a metaphysical view that preserves the reality of both particulars and universals—and, relatedly, in order to understand how *this essay* can show that Homer's poems are doing this work—it is necessary to first distinguish poetry from different modes of writing. Specifically, I will here distinguish poetry from treatises and Platonic dialogues, comparing them with regard to how they can (and cannot) disclose their object, and their relative explicitness.

The first kind of writing under examination is the treatise. A treatise, insofar as it is a treatise, limits itself to syllogistic statements, as Spinoza's *Ethics* or St. Thomas's *Summa Theologiae* primarily do. The method by which the treatise proceeds, thus, is discursive reason; being discursive, this method aims at *validity*, i.e., that one premise follows logically from another. And, while a given treatise might extend beyond this—e.g., the writer might divert from syllogisms to spend time describing illustratively his object—this kind of writing does not proceed according to the (discursive) method of the treatise, but steps outside of this method. In other words, when the writer steps out of the discursive method in this way, no longer is his writing only a treatise, but is something further; namely, his writing takes up poetry's disclosive mode (the details of which will be discussed shortly).

Having stated this, the limitation of a treatise *qua* treatise as is relevant to this project can be seen: namely, a treatise, as a discursive work, is unable to actually disclose the character of its object. Instead, it is only able to refer, point to, or index its object, without actually disclosing its positive character, and is then able to draw out negative logical relations about the object, i.e., the treatise achieves knowledge which operates by negations. At most, the treatise is able to distinguish between parts of its object, and can then perform syllogisms with these parts as the object. Yet regarding these parts, the treatise again can only refer to or point to the part; for now, the part has become the new immediate object of the treatise, but the treatise is still unable to disclose the part's character. Insofar as the reader has knowledge of an object's positive character, it is not by the treatise therefore, but rather by his own experience with the object—direct or otherwise.

This can best be indicated by an example: a treatise discussing erotic love might distinguish between the part of erotic love which desires what is one's own and the part which

desires the beautiful. If someone, whether due to young age or some other reason, had never yet experienced erotic love, the treatise would not be able to give to him the being of what erotic love is. Instead, it could only describe the logical relationship between erotic love and its different parts, such that upon the reader's later coming to experience erotic love and its parts, he could then remark something to the effect of 'Ah, having now experienced this thing, I know it as a whole, and can further see how the previous distinctions made by the treatise were valid.' The treatise, then, assumes the reader's familiarity with the whole of the object and cannot itself disclose that whole. The treatise can, however, explicitly articulate distinctions within this knowledge of the whole. Having identified what belongs to the treatise, let us now turn to the Platonic dialogue to see how it discloses its object.

The Platonic dialogue, in comparison to the treatise, *is* able to disclose the positive character of its object, however, only in a rather specific way: namely, it is able to disclose its object as almost entirely universal, with only a barren particularity. For instance, in Plato's *Republic*, insofar as he is given by the text, Glaucon is the universal of θυμός ('spiritedness'): that is, he *is*—and is almost entirely exhausted by—θυμός (Strauss 1978, 50-53). One might object, however, that we know more of Glaucon than this, for instance, we know of his relationship to Plato and his military involvements: yet, though this is true, we know this from sources external to the dialogue itself (Cf. Howland 2018).

And though this is a limitation of the dialogue, it is a trade-off, so to speak. While the dialogue discloses only the most barren particularity of its object, it also means that one can be certain that any detail in the dialogue related to Glaucon is interpretively significant with regards to understanding θυμός as a universal; the significance of this will become more noteworthy shortly (Strauss 1978, 53-62). Moreover, one can compare the Platonic dialogue to a treatise and

poetry in terms of its explicitness: while less explicit than a treatise with regards to what meaning is to be achieved in reading it, a dialogue can be far more explicit than poetry is. For instance, a dialogue can announce explicitly what the conversation is about in some way, and provide further direction still in ways that poetry cannot (although, of course, one should not think that the esoteric meaning of a dialogue is exhausted in its exoteric statements). This is clear in that, for instance, the *Republic* very clearly shows itself to be a work of political philosophy, whereas the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* do so less obviously.[7] Having now discussed what pertains to the Platonic dialogue, let us at last turn to poetry with respect to its ability to disclose both particularity and universality, in distinction to a treatise or Platonic dialogue.

In comparison to a treatise, on the one hand, poetry does not merely reference or point to its object, but is able to positively disclose the character of its object: the *Iliad*, for instance, truly gives you the character of Achilles' μῆνις ('divine wrath') (Redfield 1994, 103-106). In comparison to a Platonic dialogue, on the other hand, poetry is able to disclose the fullness of the particularity and universality of its object, together.

The method by which poetry proceeds, then, is disclosive rather than discursive: i.e., a poem cannot provide a discursive account and does not demonstrate a conclusion (e.g., that both universals and particulars are real) by chaining together premises, but positively gives its object. That is, while Homer cannot discursively defend a conclusion according to prior premises—wherein this defended conclusion would be that both universals and particulars are real—he can instead, through the poetic form, disclose a metaphysical worldview in which particulars and universals are both given as real. That the poetic form does this thematically can best be indicated by a few examples from the poems.

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[7] Of course, it is not the place within this essay to defend that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are works of political philosophy. For a good defense and exploration of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as works of political philosophy, see Ahrensdorf 2014.

Odysseus is always this particular man—reared on Ithaka, son of Laertes, grandson of the thief Autolykos, veteran of the Trojan war, with all of his history and relations—as well as the universal of μῆτις (*Odyssey* I.1-10, XIX.380-465, IX.360-410; Benardete 2008, 3-4). Xanthos and Balios are always these particular steeds—who were given to Peleus by Zeus as a wedding present and then passed down to Achilles, who wept for young Patroklos after his death, and who remind Achilles of his mortality—as well as the universals of speed, urgency, violence, and freedom (*Iliad* XVI.145-155, XVII.430-455, XIX.400-415, VI.505-511; Nicolson 2015, 158-162). Agamemnon is always this particular man—the son of Atreus, loving brother of Menelaos, filled with greed and fear—as well as the universal of a king whose merit is less than his role demands (*Iliad* I.1-305, VII.105-119, IX.114-161, X.235-240; Redfield 2021; Redfield 1994, 91-98).

And the reader of Homer's poems will know that it is not merely in a few instances such as those listed above, wherein both universality and particularity show up as real; but rather, the reality of particulars and universals is permeated throughout the whole of Homer's poems. The significance of this for this essay is rather immediate: namely, that Homer's poetry, *being poetry*, discloses the reality of both universality and particularity throughout the whole of the poems, in a way that the other writing mediums described above cannot.

Before proceeding further, though, I must note two limitations of poetry as compared to those other mediums. Firstly, the poem's ability to include particularity introduces a hermeneutic problem that the Platonic dialogue (and certainly the treatise) do not face. What is completely particular cannot, by definition, be thematic in the way that a universal can be. A difficulty lies, therefore, in identifying what belongs to a given character or object's particularity as compared to its universality. Does Agamemnon's strange flighty quality, for example, necessarily and

universally belong in some way to being a king, or is it merely some quality which belongs to him particularly?

Secondly, as compared to the dialogue, and especially in comparison to the treatise, the poem is *horribly* inexplicit, such that it is difficult to answer the question of what exactly the poem is about. This difficulty has surely lent itself to Homer's metaphysical worldview remaining unexamined for so long. More seriously, however, this quality of being inexplicit means that the poem cannot itself make explicit its organizing themes; rather, it requires some other work to, through interpretation, make explicit its implicit themes.

In light of this, then, I can more carefully describe the function of the rest of this essay. Beyond the whole poem's disclosing particularity and universality in the way above identified, there are further key images and structural themes which further perform this disclosive function. The rest of this essay, therefore, will interpretively draw out especially significant images and themes, as they are important to the poems' disclosure of the reality of particularity and universality: firstly, in the image of the cosmos wrought on Achilles' shield, then in the presentation of the Olympian gods, and lastly within the Homeric cosmology as a whole. Let us now turn, then, to the examination of Achilles' shield.

III: Achilles' Shield

In the *Iliad*, Homer provides the reader with a direct image of the cosmos, and adds divine authority to this image by enclosing it within the shield of Achilles that is made by the god Hephaistos (Redfield 1994, 187). As I will show, this image of the cosmos—through the poetic expression of the characters of strife and peace—is significant for this project, as it presents both unity and variety as real. The focal point of this image of the cosmos—constituting

116 out of the 130 lines spent on the description of the shield—and what we are concerned with here, is a description of two paired cities (XVIII.478-607). The first city is described as follows:

> And there were marriages in one, and festivals.
> They were leading the brides along the city from their maiden chambers
> under the flaring of torches, and the loud bride song was arising.
> The young men followed the circles of the dance, and among them
> the flutes and lyres kept up their clamor as in the meantime
> the women standing each at the door of her court admired them.
> The people were assembled in the market place, where a quarrel
> had arisen, and two men were disputing over the blood price
> for a man who had been killed. One man promised full restitution
> in a public statement, but the other refused and would accept nothing.
> Both then made for an arbitrator, to have a decision;
> and people were speaking up on either side, to help both men.
> But the heralds kept the people in hand, as meanwhile the elders
> were in session on benches of polished stone in the sacred circle
> and held in their hands the staves of the heralds who lift their voices.
> The two men rushed before these, and took turns speaking their cases,
> and between them lay on the ground two talents of gold, to be given
> to that judge who in this case spoke the straightest opinion. (*Iliad* XVIII.491-508)

The first portion of this city's description shows the city filled to its edges with marriage and song; otherwise said, peaceful activities such as weddings and singing are dominant in the city. The extensive description of marriage serves to show the harmony of the community: for in marriage, not merely the wedded couple is brought together into a new relationship, but so too are their immediate families and even their more distant kinsmen and friends (Cf. *Iliad* VI.119-236). A marriage transforms disparate or distinct units within the city into parts of a new whole. This is why so many political alliances between kings or previously opposed communities have been sealed with a marriage: marriage can turn what is foreign or other into what is one's own (*Odyssey* VII.302-328). Furthermore, the mention of 'the loud bride song,' 'the circles of the dance,' and 'the flutes and lyres' all serve to quickly but effectively fill the passage with the harmony and order of music and dance (*Iliad* XVIII.493-495).

And, the other phrases in this compact passage serve to show us how far into the city the effect of the marriage extends. That is, the joyous integration of a newly joined life (and the new children traditionally hoped to follow) are not limited merely to the wedded couple and their kinsmen, but their union affects the city more broadly: we are told that the marriages are further witnessed by, and gladden the hearts of, women watching from the distance in their doorways (XVIII.495-496).

We transition rather abruptly, however, to learn of something transpiring simultaneously within this city: in the law courts, a civil dispute is taking place over a killing (XVIII.497-499). A crime has been committed: crime is, more significantly, a violation of the customs and ways of life common to a community, and thereby inflicts a wound onto the common life of the community. Only once restorative justice is enacted can the community begin to heal from this wound, as its ways are thus reestablished. We are introduced to this section of the city only after the crime has already been committed, and we hear that the two involved men are locked in civil strife and discord, unable to reach a just resolution, even with the aid of judges (XVIII.497-505). And Homer never gives us a resolution before proceeding on; the two men are left here, in perpetual dissolution, never resolving the crime and thus never restoring the proper harmony of the city's ways.

Thus, the first portion of the description of the first city shows us new relationships being happily formed among citizens, while this second portion shows us the destruction of civil relationships. That is, even in the city where peace is dominant, a pocket of strife still exists. In the following, I will show that this—the existence of both peace and strife—is thematic with regards to the second city of the shield as well. In order to properly draw out this theme from the passage describing the second city, I will address the passage in smaller portions rather than

quoting the entire passage in full, as it is much longer than the description of the first city. The description of the second city begins as follows:

> But around the other city were lying two forces of armed men
> shining in their war gear. For one side counsel was divided
> whether to storm and sack, or share between both sides the property
> And all the possessions the lovely citadel held hard within it.
> But the city's people were not giving way, and armed for an ambush.
> Their beloved wives and their little children stood on the rampart
> to hold it, and with them the men with age upon them, but meanwhile
> the others went out. And Ares led them, and Pallas Athene.
> These were gold, both, and golden raiment upon them, and they were
> beautiful and huge in their armor, being divinities,
> and conspicuous from afar, but the people around them were smaller. (XVIII.509-519)

Here, we are introduced to a city currently under siege. Rather than being filled with music and harmony, both sides strain toward conflict with each other. War and strife are thus dominant for this city. Children and wives are not in their homes enjoying domestic happiness, but instead are positioned defensively on the wall, presumably ready to open the gates for their men or to report any enemies attempting to scale the wall (XVIII.513-516, cf. VI.431-439, VIII.507-522). Thus, children and wives, the fruits of love and peace, are converted into agents of war. Thereby, the introduction to the second city serves to establish it as dominantly filled with strife between opposing forces, the defenders and invaders. The passage continues to evince this theme, as follows:

> These, when they were come to the place that was set for their ambush,
> in a river, where there was a watering place for all animals,
> there they sat down in place shrouding themselves in the bright bronze.
> But apart from these were sitting two men to watch for the rest of them
> and waiting until they could see the sheep and the shambling cattle,
> who appeared presently, and two herdsmen went along with them
> playing happily on pipes, and took no thought of the treachery.
> The others saw them, and made a rush, and quickly thereafter
> cut off on both sides the herds of cattle and the beautiful
> flocks of shining sheep, and killed the shepherds upon them.
> But the other army, as soon as they heard the uproar arising
> from the cattle, as they sat in their councils, suddenly mounted

> behind their light-foot horses, and went after, and soon overtook them.
> These stood their ground and fought a battle by the banks of the river,
> and they were making casts at each other with their spears bronze-headed;
> and Hate was there with Confusion among them, and Death the destructive;
> she was holding a live man with a new wound, and another
> one unhurt, and dragged a dead man by the feet through the carnage.
> The clothing upon her shoulders showed strong red with the men's blood.
> All closed together like living men and fought with each other
> and dragged away from each other the corpses of those who had fallen. (XVIII.520-540)

In this passage, everything that was latent in the previous section comes alive in full force. An ambush—a dishonorable tactic—is employed by the offenders, and they fall upon the happy shepherds and their flocks, slaying them and bringing their lives to a dark close (XVIII.526-30, Cf. X). Now, battle breaks out in full force between the invaders and the defenders of the city. The strife from the previous passage has grown more violent and boiled over the divisions marked by the city wall: it has erupted into outright and direct conflict as men clash in bloody combat with each other in the open plain (XVIII.530-40). On both sides, children, parents, and wives will not welcome their loved ones back again. And yet here, at the peak of battle, the narrative shifts again to describe another part of the city, presumably on its rural outskirts:

> [Hephaistos] made upon [the shield] a soft field, the pride of the tilled land,
> wide and triple-ploughed, with many ploughmen upon it
> who wheeled their teams at the turn and drove them in either direction.
> And as these making their turn would reach the end-strip of the field,
> a man would come up to them at this point and hand them a flagon
> of honey-sweet wine, and they would turn again to the furrows
> in their haste to come again to the end-strip of the deep field.
> The earth darkened behind them and looked like earth that has been ploughed
> though it was gold. Such was the wonder of the shield's forging. (XVIII.541-549)

Here, we turn from violence and combat to the simple pastoral pleasures of tending to the land, caring for it through sweat and difficulty, and having the land return a bounty for one's efforts. Of course, we are aware of the darker truth—namely, that these farmers could have,

instead of the shepherds, been the target of the raiding ambush. Nonetheless, away from the clamor of battle, a peaceful and idyllic life still tarries along despite the war nearby. In other words, this narrative turn resembles that seen in the city of peace: Homer establishes first in the city one dominant mode of life—peace in the first city, strife in the second city—only to soon after show the simultaneous existence of the other mode of life. In the city of peace, strife existed; so too, even in the city of war, peace sustains as well. This theme repeats itself in the rest of the description of the second city. First, Homer lingers and describes further the pocket of peace that this second city enjoys:

> He made on it the precinct of a king, where the laborers
> were reaping, with the sharp reaping hooks in their hands. Of the cut swathes
> some fell along the lines of reaping, one after another,
> while the sheaf-binders caught up the others and tied them with bind-ropes.
> There were three sheaf-binders who stood by, and behind them
> were children picking up the cut swathes, and filled their arms with them
> and carried and gave them always; and by them the king in silence
> and holding his staff stood near the line of the reapers, happily.
> And apart and under a tree the heralds made a feast ready
> and trimmed a great ox they had slaughtered. Meanwhile the women
> scattered, for the workmen to eat, abundant white barley.
>
> He made on it a great vineyard heavy with clusters,
> lovely and in gold, but the grapes upon it were darkened
> and the vines themselves stood out through poles of silver. About them
> He made a field-ditch of dark metal, and drove all around this
> a fence of tin; and there was only one path to the vineyard,
> and along it ran the grape-bearers for the vineyard's stripping.
> Young girls and young men, in all their light-hearted innocence,
> carried the kind, sweet fruit away in their woven baskets,
> and in their midst a youth with a singing lyre played charmingly
> upon it for them, and sang the beautiful song for Linos
> in a light voice, and they followed him, and with singing and whistling
> and light dance-steps of their feet kept time to the music. (XVIII.550-572)

Here, Homer combines imagery from both the peaceful descriptions of the first city, as well as the peaceful imagery just used to describe the farmers of the second city. The agricultural theme abounds, and children and youths are brought together into a happy cultivation of the land

(XVIII.554-556). The king, going freely among his people, is happy (XVIII.556-557). Orderly dance and music returns to fill the scene with harmony, stamped and sung out by girls and boys in the bloom of youth (XVIII.567-572). More specifically, the song they sing—that of Linos—is an ancient and traditional song, and thereby affirms the common ways of the community (Herodotus *The Histories*, II.79). In line with what has been said above, though, peace does not ever exist alone, so Homer proceeds:

> He made upon it a herd of horn-straight oxen. The cattle
> were wrought of gold and of tin, and thronged in speed and with lowing
> out of the dung of the farmyard to a pasturing place by a sounding
> river, and beside the moving field of a reed bed.
> The herdsmen were of gold who went along with the cattle,
> four of them, and nine dogs shifting their feet followed them.
> But among the foremost of the cattle two formidable lions
> had caught hold of a bellowing bull, and he with loud lowings
> was dragged away, as the dogs and the young men went in pursuit of him.
> But the two lions, breaking open the hide of the great ox,
> gulped the black blood and the inward guts, as meanwhile the herdsmen
> were in the act of setting and urging the quick dogs on them.
> But they, before they could get their teeth in, turned back from the lions,
> but would come and take their stand very close, and bayed, and kept clear. (*Iliad* XVIII.573-586)

With this, we see that as quickly as Homer established and anchored the peaceful agricultural theme, safe away from the violence of men, he then establishes that, here too, peace does not exist alone. Instead, even the peaceful pocket of life which the rural men occupy, at a distance from the war assailing the urban center of the city, is mixed with the existence of a natural strife: namely, the biological competition between living things, which must consume and thereby destroy other living things to sustain their own lives. After this, Homer rounds out his description of the second city with one last section:

> And the renowned smith of the strong arms made on [the shield] a meadow
> large and in a lovely valley for the glimmering sheepflocks,
> with dwelling places upon it, and covered shelters, and sheepfolds.
> And the renowned smith of the strong arms made elaborate on it

> a dancing floor, like that which once in the wide spaces of Knosos
> Daidalos built for Ariadne of the lovely tresses.
> And there were young men on it and young girls, sought for their beauty
> with gifts of oxen, dancing, and holding hands at the wrist. These
> wore, the maidens long light robes, but the men wore tunics
> of finespun work and shining softly, touched with olive oil.
> And the girls wore fair garlands on their heads, while the young men
> carried golden knives that hung from sword-belts of silver.
> At whiles on their understanding feet they would run very lightly,
> as when a potter crouching makes trial of his wheel, holding
> it close in his hands, to see if it will run smooth. At another
> time they would form rows, and run, rows crossing each other.
> And round the lovely chorus of dancers stood a great multitude
> happily watching, while among the dancers two acrobats
> led the measures of song and dance revolving among them. (XVIII.587-605)

Here we see the subject wrap back around, as if completing the circle—all the more reasonable, given that the shield in which these images are set is in fact circular in shape—to that of the first portion of the description of the first city: marriage. In the first portion of the description of the first city, we were told of the weddings occurring, and here, we learn of young men attempting to woo beautiful girls, hoping to win marriages in the future (XVIII.593-596). The harmony of dance and music return again to the scene, and fine craftsmanship—the result of stable culture—is given detail as well (XVIII.590-601).

However, one artifact is particularly noteworthy: the young men are described as carrying "golden knives that hung from sword-belts of silver" (XVIII.598). Being made of gold, these knives are largely, if not entirely, ceremonial; nonetheless, "[t]he ceremonial sword is still a sword" (Nemoianu 2013, 41). That is, though the scene is largely one of peace, filled with youth and the prospect of happy marriage-life, the daggers on the men's hips establish the presence, even if only symbolically, of violence and war: that is, even during life's most peaceful times, violence is always present and threatening, even if only on the periphery (Redfield 1994, 99-103).

Thus, in the image of the cosmos on Achilles' shield—wherein the nature of the cosmos is presented mainly through the images of the cities—there is in each city a mode of life that is dominant: in the first city, it is peace, and in the second city, it is strife, as has been seen. In each city, though, this dominant mode of life does not exclude its opposite, such that both characteristics—strife and peace—are always present. The suggestion, thus, is that strife and peace are both to some degree natural in the cosmos, such that each always exists. Having sufficiently examined the two cities, I can now draw out the significance of what has been seen, as is relevant for this thesis.

These images of peace and strife serve, among other things, as poetic expressions of unity and difference. Peace is unifying: it gathers its parts together into one harmonic and organized whole. Strife, on the other hand, is a principle of variety and difference: insofar as there is strife among things, they are not organized together into a whole under one end, but are fragmented off into difference and multiplicity.[8] Therefore, through this poetic expression, the image of the cosmos here on Achilles' shield discloses a view wherein both peace and strife—i.e., unity and difference—are both disclosed as metaphysically real, without one being explained and exhausted by the other. Having now shown how Achilles' shield serves to disclose this metaphysical view, I will now turn to show how the Olympian gods additionally support this view. Before examining the Olympian gods, however, I will first identify what belongs to the cosmic gods and to μοῖρα so that, afterwards, the Olympian gods can properly be understood in distinction to these.

IV: Cosmic Gods and μοῖρα

[8] To support this reading, we can point out that other, later thinkers adopt this way of poetically characterizing unity and variety, as love and war or strife. See Empedocles' principles of Love and Strife in his "On Nature" fragment (included in *Parmenides and Empedocles* in the bibliography), for instance, as well as the opening speeches of Plato's *Laws*, 624a-626e.

There are three[9] different kinds of divinities in Homer that are especially important to the purposes of this thesis: the cosmic gods, μοῖρα, and the Olympian gods. I will spend only a brief amount of time describing the cosmic gods, because their main significance—as is relevant to the concerns of this thesis—is only with regards to the purpose of better identifying what belongs to the Olympians by comparison. Since, on the other hand, μοῖρα will be of large significance for my later discussion of Homeric cosmology, I will describe μοῖρα in detail here before proceeding on to describe the Olympian gods.

In Homer, the cosmic gods—such as the sun, the moon, etc.—are universal principles with very limited particularity. The poetic expression of this can be seen in the following example taken from the *Odyssey*.[10] When Odysseus' men have eaten the sun's cattle, the sun turns to Zeus and says:

> Father Zeus, and you other everlasting and blessed
> gods, punish the companions of Odysseus, son of Laertes;
> for they outrageously killed my cattle, in whom I always
> delighted, on my way up into the starry heaven,
> or when I turned back again from heaven toward earth. Unless
> these are made to give me just recompense for my cattle,
> I will go down to Hades' and give my light to the dead men. (*Odyssey* XII.377-383)

What is suggested by the sun's appeal to Zeus for punishment of the suitors is that the sun himself only has one available activity: namely, shining light, and he can only do so either on all living mortals and gods alike, or on all the dead in Hades (XII.381-383). That is, the sun here suggests he cannot act so particularly, as an Olympian, such as Zeus, can: i.e., the sun cannot smite *these* guilty men (the crew of Odysseus) in particular, as the Olympian gods can, and as Zeus shortly after does (XXII.403-453). This example brings to light some of the significant

[9] Briefly stated, local divinities such as the naiads are not of significance because—being determinate to a single locale, such as a particular pond—they are not sufficiently universal as causes for our interests here. The Titans, other than Thetis, Kalypso, and Kirke, who do not seem different in kind than the Olympians, are not active (i.e., not principles of causation) in the poems, and therefore lie outside of this thesis' realm.

[10] I am indebted to Seth Benardete for the following example and surrounding discussion of the sun as a cosmic god (2008, 5).

differences between a cosmic god—here, the sun—and the Olympians. Firstly, we see that a cosmic god like the sun only has one sort of activity; the Olympian gods, by contrast, have two opposite kinds of activities (as will be seen soon). Secondly, the sun is extremely universal, almost to the exclusion of particularity: at one time, he applies either to all living things, or all dead things, and there is no possibility of further distinctions or particularity within this. The Olympians, on the other hand, are much more particular causes, as will be seen in the following sections. Now I will turn to examine μοῖρα.

In Homer's poems, μοῖρα[11] is a principle concerned with the deaths of mortals. More precisely, μοῖρα dictates either that a mortal must die *eventually*, or that he must die at a specific moment. We can see how this is evinced in the poem in the following example. In his famous rejection of Agamemnon's embassy, Achilles informs us of the knowledge his divine mother imparted him with:

> For my mother Thetis the goddess of the silver feet tells me
> I carry two sorts of destiny [κῆρας] toward the day of my death. Either,
> if I stay here and fight beside the city of the Trojans,
> my return home is gone, but my glory shall be everlasting;
> but if I return home to the beloved land of my fathers,
> the excellence of my glory is gone, but there will be a long life
> left for me, and my end in death will not come to me quickly. (*Iliad* IX.410-416)

The term here translated by Lattimore as "destiny"—κῆρας, the accusative plural of κήρ—is more accurately translated as 'particular death' (Cf. Redfield 1994, 134). The significance here is that Achilles, despite his semi-divine lineage, is determined by μοῖρα as all other mortals are: namely, that at some point, he will die a particular death (a κήρ), whether it will be here on the battlefield of Troy, or many years later, having grown old in his homeland. As a principle, then,

[11] In Homer, μοῖρα and αἶσα appear to be two terms for the same thing, used interchangeably, and I follow this use (Redfield 1994, 133). For simplicity's sake in this essay, I have chosen to use the one term μοῖρα unless otherwise quoting or referencing a passage which uses αἶσα. Both of these terms are best left untranslated when possible, but 'fated' is used for the verb.

μοῖρα does not determine or explain exhaustively what a mortal is, or how his life unfolds, but only determines the farthest limit of his life—namely, that he will die at some point.

Before proceeding further, though, an additional qualification must be made. There is a certain ambiguity throughout the poems as to whether or not μοῖρα determines that mortals must die only generally, or whether more specifically it determines that a specific man must die at a specific time. With Achilles in the passage above, it seems the former case is true; let us consider an alternate case, however, regarding the death of Sarpedon, a son of Zeus. In Book XVI of the *Iliad*, during Patroklos' ἀριστεία ('episode of excellence'), Sarpedon turns to face Patroklos in battle. Before either of them casts his spear, however, we witness the following interchange between Zeus and Hera:

> And watching them the son of devious-devising Kronos
> was pitiful, and spoke to Hera, his wife and his sister:
> "Ah me, that it is destined [μοῖρ'] that the dearest of men, Sarpedon, must go down under the hands of Menoitios' son Patroklos. The heart in my breast is balanced between two ways as I ponder, and set him down still alive in the rich country of Lykia,
> or beat him under at the hands of the son of Menoitios."
> In turn the lady Hera of the ox eyes answered him:
> "Majesty, son of Kronos, what sort of thing have you spoken?
> Do you wish to bring back a man who is mortal, one long since
> doomed by his destiny [αἴσῃ[12]], from ill-sounding death and release him?"
> (XVI.431-442)

Here, Zeus and Hera speak as if Sarpedon's death is at this point unavoidable. Indeed, the following passages suggest that Zeus' wish to rescue Sarpedon from this death is more of an empty or rhetorical wish (i.e., 'Would that it be otherwise!') rather than a statement that Zeus could actually overcome μοῖρα. In other words, Zeus' expression suggests his vexation at being unable to overcome or change μοῖρα rather than suggesting Zeus' having the ability to actually do so (Redfield 1994, 133-135). Regardless, the statement that Sarpedon's death is here fated suggests that in some cases—though not all, per the Achilles example above—μοῖρα determines

[12] The dative singular form of αἶσα.

not only *that* a mortal must die, but perhaps also *when* he must die. Regardless of this ambiguity, however, the more general point is the same: μοῖρα sets only the outermost limit of a mortal's life—whether this be that he must die at some point generally, or at a more specific point—and does not determine how he positively lives his life within this limit.

And, because the gods interact with—and to some degree care for—mortals, μοῖρα therefore also acts as a limit on the gods. As with mortals, μοῖρα only determines a negative limit for the gods: specifically, it determines that they cannot prevent a mortal's death when it is fated—whether generally or more specifically (Cf. *Iliad* I.573-579, XV.110-118; Redfield 1994, 244). Within this outer limit—i.e., within not killing or saving a mortal when it is fated to be otherwise—the gods are able to freely act however they wish. Thus we see, following the death of Sarpedon, Zeus has Sarpedon's body transported to his country Lykia for purification and burial (*Iliad* XVI.666-683). Another similar instance will be seen later in the discussion of Homeric cosmology, when examining Poseidon's interaction with Odysseus in the *Odyssey*. Now given this discussion, we can proceed to see how the Olympians are distinct from the cosmic gods and μοῖρα—after a brief comment regarding this essay's relation to theology.

It is necessary here to address whether the metaphysical view of Homer requires belief in Homer's specific pantheon of gods as real gods in the world. Rather simply, the answer is no: whether or not Homer believed in the gods as he depicted them, or intended the audience of his poem to believe in these gods, our philosophic treatment of them in this essay does not depend on belief. Rather, as had become somewhat popular by *at least* the time of Heraclitus,[13] we can treat Homeric divinities allegorically, treating only what they can show us as metaphysical

[13] Heraclitus the first-century A.D. commentator on Homer, author of *Homeric Problems*, not the pre-Socratic earlier referred to in section I.

principles, without ever posing the question of whether this divine incestuous family is actually amuck in our cosmos (Heraclitus 2005).

V: The Olympians as Metaphysical Principles

In this section, I will show how the Olympian gods are presented in Homer as having metaphysical principles of both unity and variety, and thus serve to disclose the metaphysical view in which the reality of both is preserved. In order to do so, I will investigate the nature of the Olympians through two examples—Athena and Poseidon—identifying the ways in which the poem expresses their nature as having metaphysical principles which preserve the reality of unity and variety. I will then show the significance of this metaphysical nature by comparing them to Herakleitian and Parmenidean principles. I will begin, then, with Athena.

Within Homer's poems, Athena is the goddess of the city. More specifically, she is the goddess of the unity and order of the city; and she is also, with regards to the city, the goddess of political strife and warfare (Slatkin 2011, 109-110). That is, with respect to the city, Athena is shown to have two natures, as both a city's unity and its strife. In order to show how the poems present Athena with these two natures, I will first draw out how the poems (though this side of hers is emphasized more in the Odyssey) present her as a goddess of unity and order for the city.

The central project and problem of the *Odyssey* is returning Odysseus to Ithaka and properly reuniting him with his family. Additionally, the poem focuses on the restoration of the proper political harmony between the house of Odysseus and Ithaka as a whole, as the suitors have been violating and disrupting this harmony through their disrespect of Odysseus' house and consumption of his substance (Slatkin 2011, 111). Regarding these projects, Athena is the origin of Odysseus' return and a principal agent of the project in its steps toward completion. First, she brings to Zeus the concern for Odysseus' return, thus setting his homecoming in motion

(*Odyssey* I.26-104, V.1-42). A short while later, once Odysseus has arrived in the land of the Phaiakians, it is Athena who directs Nausikaa to go to where Odysseus lies, and puts courage in Nausikaa's heart so she can help Odysseus; thus doing, Athena acts to secure Odysseus' transport to the city and an audience with the queen and king of Phaiakia, which are necessary for his return to Ithaka (VI. 4-40, 139-210). Moreover, Athena surrounds him with a mist to protect him from unwanted eyes or comments while he moves through the town of Phaiakia, and so that he can supplicate queen Arete without hindrance (VII.14-152). In these actions, then, we see how Athena first affects Odysseus' return back to his native country.

Once back on Ithaka, Athena continues to be indispensable to the restoration of the proper order of Odysseus' household and Ithaka as a whole. Firstly, she disguises Odysseus as a beggar, so that he may properly test who among his household and the suitors are loyal to him or fair (XIII.429-438, XVII.360-364). Shortly after, Athena puts it into the mind of Penelope to set up the contest of the bow, which puts into Odysseus' hands both the symbol by which he can identify himself—no one else before has strung the bow but Odysseus—and the weapon with which he can begin slaying the suitors (XXI.1-4, 404-430). Then, after he has revealed himself, Athena helps Odysseus in the fight with the suitors so that his family and household, and not the suitors, comes out successful: the suitors are thus punished for their crimes (XXII.205-309). After the battle, in perhaps her most caring deed in either poem, Athena then holds back the dawn so that the lovers Penelope and Odysseus can have sufficient time together: with husband and wife reunited in this way, the household is restored after twenty years of his absence (XXIII.241-246).

However, following the slaying of the suitors, the families of these young men are angered. It remains, therefore, to set into order Ithaka as a whole, which Athena then begins

doing: the final scene of the poem shows her bringing about faith, friendship, and peace between the people and Odysseus' family (XXIV.472-548).[14] Thus, by Athena's actions, Odysseus is restored to his homeland, and his household and the island as a whole are set back to proper order. In these ways, then, the poem displays Athena as the principle of unity of the city.

We must remember, though, that Athena is also the goddess of political strife and warfare with regards to the city. This can be seen first in her involvement with the Greeks in the Trojan war. Athena's motivation for wanting the destruction of Troy is seemingly her vexation (along with Hera's) at Paris' having judged Aphrodite the winner in the contest of beauty (*Iliad* XXIV.25-30, XX.310-317; Redfield 1994, 226). Notably, this places Athena on the side of an offensive rather than defensive war: rather than defending and upholding a community as the Trojans and their allies are, Athena aims to *destroy* a unified community. Thus, Athena's warring anger shows up as directly in opposition to the unifying aspect of her nature that we have just seen. Athena's motivation to destroy is so strong that, when the Greeks were rushing to their ships to return to their homelands and peaceful lives which they so greatly desired, she wings down and sets about causing the Greeks to stay at Troy (II.155-181). Shortly after, she also changes the hearts of the Greeks: "She kindled the strength in each man's / heart to take the battle without respite and keep on fighting. / And now battle became sweeter to them than to go back / in their hollow ships to the beloved land of their fathers" (II.451-454).

Further still, as the primary bearer of the aegis, Athena also bears its characteristics: "Terror hangs like a garland, / and Hatred is there, and Battle Strength, and heart-freezing Onslaught / and thereon is set the head of the grim gigantic Gorgon" (*Iliad* V.739-741, Slatkin

[14] In this passage, however, Athena is not so simply establishing peace in Ithaka; I will return shortly to discuss what else this passage suggests regarding Athena's nature.

2011, 110). Whoever Athena bears the aegis against, however orderly they were before, are all of a sudden struck into chaos. For instance, in the *Odyssey*:

> Athene waved the aegis, that blights humanity,
> from high aloft on the roof, and all their wits were bewildered;
> and they stampeded about the hall, like a herd of cattle
> set upon and driven wild by the darting horse fly
> in the spring season, at the time when the days grow longer;
> but the other men, who were like hook-clawed, beak-bent vultures,
> descending from the mountains to pounce upon the lesser birds;
> and these on the plain, shrinking away from the clouds, speed off,
> but the vultures plunge on them and destroy them, nor is there any
> defense, nor any escape, and men are glad for the hunting;
> so these men, sweeping about the palace, struck down
> the suitors, one man after another; the floor was smoking
> with blood, and the horrible cries rose up as their heads were broken. (*Odyssey* XXII.297-309)

Similarly, in the Iliad, with Athena's having wrapped the aegis around him, the mere sight of Achilles and the sound of his shout become so terrifying that the Trojans are thrown into complete disarray, so much so that "twelve of the best men among them perished / upon their own chariots and spears" (*Iliad* XVIII.202-231).

And, while what was said previously about Athena's unifying role in the *Odyssey* was all true, it must be qualified by the following. Surely, it seems that, to some degree, Athena's motivation for restoring order on Ithaka arises out of something like a desire for justice (*Odyssey* V.5-12, cf. II.239-234). On the other hand, however, Athena does not suggest some other means of resolution besides the slaughter of the suitors; or, if the slaughter is necessary, she does not express regret or pity (or even righteous indignation) at this necessity. Instead, Athena only expresses a desire for strife and bloody violence: "I look for endless / ground to be spattered by the blood and brains of the suitors" (XIII.394-395). This description of Athena as craving violence and destruction is additionally emphasized by Ares' description of her in the *Iliad*. When reproaching her behavior to Zeus, after Athena encouraged Diomedes to wound both Ares

and Aphrodite, Ares says, "you brought forth this maniac daughter / accursed…this child of perdition" (*Iliad* V.875-880).

Further still, Athena's characteristic violence can be seen in the last lines of the *Odyssey*, which were referenced before—when describing her unifying role—but now will be treated in full. With half of the people of Ithaka, "sorrowful at heart," and angrily taking up arms against Odysseus and his family for their having slaughtered the Ithakans' sons and brothers (the suitors), Athena asks Zeus "Will you first inflict evil fighting upon them, and terrible / strife, or will you establish friendship between the two factions?" (*Odyssey* XXIV.420-437, 475-476). Zeus responds:

> Now that noble Odysseus has punished the suitors, let them
> make their oaths of faith and friendship, and let him be king
> always; and let us make them forget the death of their brothers
> and sons, and let them be friends with each other, as in the time past,
> and let them have prosperity and peace in abundance. (XXIV.482-486)

As was stated before, Athena does in fact comply with Zeus' command. Before she establishes peace and friendship among the Ithakans, however, she first instructs Laertes to kill Eupeithes, one of the townsfolk, and gives Laertes the strength to do so (XXIV.517-532). That is, while Athena does ultimately restore peace and harmony to Ithaka, she seems to insist on getting one last kill in first. And, as the poem makes no indication of Eupeithes' death being necessary for peace in Ithaka, it seems we can rightly attribute this final killing to the satisfaction of Athena's desire for violence.

Thus, as has been seen, Athena is both a cause of unity and of disorder. With regards to unity, she is a cause in that she is a principal agent of Odysseus' return and the restoration of the order within Odysseus' household and Ithaka as a whole. With regards to strife, particularly exemplified in her possession and use of the aegis, Athena is a cause in that she brings about

sudden disorder or violence among men when otherwise they had been orderly or set on peace. Thus, rather than having an ontological principle explain merely the reality of unity or stability to the exclusion of strife or variety, or vice versa—as the views attributed to Parmenides and Herakleitos do—Homer's Olympian gods, as has been seen here with Athena, provide a metaphysical view wherein both the reality of unity and that of variety are preserved.

To show that the nature of the Olympians—as having metaphysical principles of unity and variety—is not limited to Athena, but instead is thematic for the Olympians, I will now show how the Olympians' having this nature is expressed with Poseidon, god of the sea. Specifically, I will show this by examining Poseidon's interaction with Odysseus off the coast of the land of the Phaiakians. At this point, Odysseus had been sailing to this land from Kalypso's island, and for the first seventeen days of his voyage, the sea behaved regularly (V.269-281). On the eighteenth day, however, returning from a feast of the Aithiopians, Poseidon discovers Odysseus' raft, and now Poseidon's dormant anger at Odysseus' having blinded his son Polyphemos boils over (V.282-290, I.64-75, IX.335-536). In his wrath, Poseidon thus

> pulled the clouds together, in both hands gripping
> the trident, and staggered the sea, and let loose all the stormblasts
> of all the winds together, and huddled under the cloud scuds
> land alike and the great water. Night sprang from heaven.
> East Wind and South Wind clashed together, and the bitter blown West Wind
> and the North Wind born in the bright air rolled up a heavy sea. (V.291-296)

The enraged Poseidon thus transforms the sea's calm order into a violent storm; the sun vanishes from the sky, and storm winds crash into each other, churning the ocean into chaos. From here, Poseidon then further disrupts the previously peaceful character of the sea: though no swell had been present before, Poseidon raises three successive waves, sending them crashing against Odysseus and his raft until the raft is splintered into pieces (V.313-379).

What is significant here is that, as the god of the sea, Poseidon causally explains its characteristics and behavior (Cf. Redfield 1994, 225-226). And, as we see in immediate experience and in the poem, the sea has, to some degree, both stability—i.e., somewhat predictable tides, swell patterns, etc.—and variety or disorder as characteristic: i.e., even with these semi-predictable tides or swell patterns, the sea will suddenly produce (out of previously peaceful conditions) a violent set of rogue waves (Cf. Herodotus *The Histories*, VIII.126-129). Said in this way, this simple conclusion seems somewhat unstriking: since the sea has both the character of stability and of disorder, then Poseidon as the god of the sea causally explains both its stability and its disorder (Cf. *Odyssey* IV.499-511). However, when seen in comparison to the views attributed to Parmenides and Herakleitos, this is rather significant: rather than explaining away either the stability or the disorder of reality—here, with respect to the sea—as a mere lack or privation of being, Poseidon as a metaphysical principle preserves the reality of both the sea's unity and its disorder.

Thus, taking Athena and Poseidon as examples, we have seen that Homer's Olympian gods have metaphysical principles which preserve the reality of both unity and variety. In the next section, I will examine more deeply the underlying metaphysical structure of the Olympians. And, while this does not directly contribute to this thesis—that is, it does not serve to further show how Homer's poems disclose particularity and universality as real—it is integral for showing *how*, metaphysically, the Olympians can be causes of two opposites (namely, unity and variety). To do so, I will first show how the poems illustrate the Olympian gods as personal beings, and then turn to the metaphysical significance of the Olympians' personhood.

VI: Personhood

In the poems, the Olympians are expressed as personal beings in that much of the Olympians' actions in the poems are shown as unfolding according to their personal desires, attachments, and perhaps even their follies (Redfield 1994, 226-229; cf. Redfield 2021). In Book I of the *Iliad*, for instance, after Agamemnon has abused Chryses—a priest of Apollo—and refused to return Chryses' daughter to him, Chryses calls on Apollo to harm the Greeks:

> Hear me,
> lord of the silver bow who set your power about Chryse
> and Killa the sacrosanct, who are lord in strength over Tenedos,
> Smintheus, if ever it pleased your heart that I built your temple,
> if ever it pleased you that I burned all the rich thigh pieces
> of bulls, of goats, then bring to pass this wish I pray for:
> let your arrows make the Danaäns pay for my tears shed (*Iliad* I.36-42)

In this, Chryses does not appeal to Apollo by saying anything such as 'the Greeks have violated what is due to you as a god,' nor by referencing any violation of what belongs more specifically to Apollo as described by his epithets. Rather, Chryses motivates Apollo's aid by reminding Apollo of how he *personally* had been benefited by all of Chryses' sacrifices. Having been appealed to in this way, Apollo complies, and rains deathly plague onto the Greeks (I.43-52). That is, the Olympian's actions here do not follow from his principles of unity and variety, but from personal motivations—here, from something like the desire to return the favors Chryses had done him.[15]

And this kind of action based on personal motivation is not limited to this instance with Apollo, but is thematic for the Olympians. We can see further instances of such action in the poems as follows: Athena and Hera's violence against Troy, as was mentioned before, is due to their hatred of Paris for his having chosen Aphrodite in the contest of beauty (XXIV.25-30,

[15] This desire could not be described as the Olympian's having to follow a principle of justice (in the sense of giving or returning what is owed), for the Olympians are not bound by any such principle: with some occasion, they expressly do *not* return favors for offerings (e.g., *Iliad* VI.297-311, XXIV.33-54).

XX.310-317); Kalypso kept Odysseus on her island for seven years seemingly out of nothing other than her erotic desire for him (*Odyssey* V.118-128); Zeus does not agree to Thetis' request to give glory to Achilles because he thinks the request a particularly just or good one (indeed, he seems to hesitate on this front) but simply because he owes Thetis a personal debt after she saved Zeus from being bound away (*Iliad* I.393-404, 503-530); and Poseidon's wrath against Odysseus is out of revenge for his son Polyphemos, though Polyphemos and not Odysseus was a transgressor against laws of supplication and ξενία ('guest-friendship') (*Odyssey* I.64-75, V.282-290, IX.268-278, 335-536).

Thus, what has been seen is that the Olympians' actions often follow from personal desires which do not stem from their two principles—each's principles of unity and of variety. Since an Olympian's actions follow from something that is not his two principles—namely, his personal desires—what is suggested is that each Olympian is not *merely* his two principles, but is something further than this: namely, a person, who transcends his principles.[16] To better show what metaphysical work this account of the Olympians as persons is doing, I will show what would be the case if the Olympians were not persons, but merely were their two principles. I will do so by considering what the different possible metaphysical relationships between these two principles would be.

If an Olympian were simply his two principles with *no higher organization* between these principles, then he would *simply be* two opposites—namely, unity and variety, with respect to the same object (e.g., Poseidon would be merely the unity and variety of the sea). To be two

[16] This account seems to most resemble the understanding of transcendence and personhood as it exists in Christianity, and perhaps more specifically in Pascal (Cf. Nemoianu 2010 and 2013). There, the understanding of transcendence was reached via the incarnation of Christ, wherein Christ is fully God, and fully man. The account articulated here is that this is not a contradiction, because Christ is not either or both of these natures simply (wherein it would be a contradiction), but Christ is a *person*. Personhood, here, transcends both of these natures (the divine nature and the human nature), such that Christ truly *has* both natures, and has them as non-contradictory, since neither must be final, but is organized within the higher order—namely, that of personhood. I include this only for illustrative purposes, to show *analogously* what I mean by the Olympians' having personhood.

opposites with respect to one and the same object, however, is to be a contradiction. This relationship, therefore, is logically invalid.

If there were simply no organization or relation between the two principles, such that they are completely heterogeneous, with an infinite gulf between them, they would not be in opposition to each other. While this would avoid the problem of a contradiction within the being of the Olympian gods, this contradicts what earlier was said: namely, that the principles are in relation, specifically as trying to both explain the same object. That is, Poseidon's principles of unity and variety, for instance, are both of the sea, and thus are related in this way. In other words, this option is also logically invalid, for it contradicts our earlier premises regarding what the Olympians are—namely, that both of the Olympians' principles are in the relationship of explaining one and the same object.

If, for the third option, the principles were not in a relationship of mere opposition but rather were in a hierarchical relationship—i.e., one principle is prior to and explains the other—then a contradiction within the being of the Olympians would be avoided. In this case, though, the Olympians as principles would collapse into a Parmenidean or Herakleitian view, for either order or variety would have to be explained as merely the lack or privation of the other.

Thus, if the Olympians were not persons who have their two principles, but *merely* were their principles, the Olympians would either collapse into contradiction on the one hand, or a Parmenidean or Herakleitian view on the other. The Olympians as persons, however, do not have this problem, for, as a person, an Olympian has his two principles transcendently; i.e., since neither of these principles must be final, but are organized within the higher order of personhood, neither needs to exhaustively explain the other, nor are the principles in outright opposition with each other, thereby avoiding contradiction. Thus, by being persons, Homer's Olympians are able

to account for the reality of both universality and particularity without falling into contradiction, and without reductively explaining one as the mere privation or lack of the other.[17]

Now, having seen in full how Homer presents both μοῖρα and the Olympian gods, I will now turn, in light of this, to Homer's cosmology as a whole, and display how it preserves the reality of particulars and universals.[18] To do so, I will proceed by first identifying how the poem identifies the Olympians as contingent—i.e., as *not* the first principle in the cosmos—and then I will subsequently consider the role of μοῖρα as the first principle.

VII: Homeric Cosmology

Within the poem, the Olympians who are not Zeus or his siblings are biological children or grandchildren (or nieces and nephews) of Zeus or his siblings. And although Homer never provides us with such a succinct family tree as Hesiod does in the *Theogony*, the family relations are gleaned from the epithets and certain askance comments made throughout the poems (Hesiod *Theogony*, 116-620 ff.). For instance, Zeus bears the frequent epithet "father of the gods and men," and is referred to by other Olympians as "our father" (e.g., *Iliad* I.544, 578). Additionally, Ares refers to Athena (in an above-quoted passage) as the daughter of Zeus, and even mortals know that she has Zeus as her father; Apollo and the Muses are also referred to as the children of Zeus (V.870-900, X.278, VII.37, II.491-492). In other words, all of those Olympians who are not siblings of Zeus are contingent upon Zeus and his siblings, being generated from them; that is, these other Olympians are not ultimate or final within the cosmos.

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[17] At this point, I should return to the theological connection earlier mentioned. This conclusion suggests that, to explain opposed characters of reality without falling into contradiction or having to explain one as the mere lack of the other, that you must have personal metaphysical beings as causes; it does not seem necessary, though, that you must have *this* pantheon of personal metaphysical beings as causes.

[18] I should note that this section differs from the earlier interpretation of the image of the cosmos on Achilles' shield in that it shows the organization of the Homeric cosmos through a more general interpretation of the cosmological organization of the beings presented in Homer's poems.

It is just as true, though, that Zeus and his siblings are *also* contingent: they were born from Kronos (Cf. *Odyssey* XIII.128-145). Thus, as generated and therefore contingent things, Zeus and his siblings also cannot be what is final in the cosmos. Thus, as all the Olympians have now been shown to be contingent and limited, we can conclude that the Olympian gods are not what is final in the Homeric cosmos.

There is nothing in the poems, though, which indicates anything beyond μοῖρα in the cosmos (i.e., μοῖρα is not contingent): thus, as the poems present it, μοῖρα is the utmost—i.e., first—principle of the cosmos, not limited by anything else. To properly understand the significance of this, it is necessary to examine exactly what role μοῖρα, as the first principle, serves with a view to the structure of the rest of the cosmos.

The role of μοῖρα is setting the outer limits of activity within the cosmos, saying what this activity (negatively) *cannot* be—i.e., men *cannot* outstrip death, and the gods are limited in that they *cannot* change men's deaths or prevent them. Importantly, as a first principle, μοῖρα does not positively determine what the being of particulars is. That is, although μοῖρα determines in some way that a man will die, it does not determine how he actually fills his life before this death. All of this has been said earlier in this essay, of course, but what is significant is that as a first principle, μοῖρα *does not* exhaustively contain the being of particulars or universals within the cosmos, such that the reality of everything is *not* reduced to what the first principle is.[19] Rather, with μοῖρα as a non-exhaustive first principle, particulars and universals have their own positive being. To more completely see how the poem expresses this relationship between μοῖρα, the Olympians, and particular things, I will return to a further examination of the interaction between Odysseus and Poseidon in the *Odyssey*.

[19] As do the first principles of the view commonly attributed to Parmenides and Herakleitos.

Within the outer limit set by μοῖρα, the Olympians are more specific principles (i.e., less universal in their realm) than μοῖρα, and can more positively influence what occurs regarding particulars. This is given poetically in the poem with reference to what transpires in men's lives. For instance, Poseidon sees Odysseus approaching the land of the Phaiakians on his raft, and Poseidon

> was the more angered
> with [Odysseus], and shook his head, and spoke to his own spirit:
> "For shame, surely the gods have rashly changed their intentions
> about Odysseus while I was away in the Aithiopians'
> land, and he nears the Phaiakian country where it is αἶσα
> that he shall escape this great trial of misery that is now his.
> But I think I can still give him a good full portion of trouble." (*Odyssey* V.284-290)

Poseidon here refers to Odysseus' αἶσα (i.e., μοῖρα): though we learn this later, the poem always has in mind that it is not Odysseus' μοῖρα to die until sleek old age, since Odysseus did not harm the sun god's cattle, as the prophet Teiresias has already informed Odysseus (XI.100-137). Thus, since Odysseus is not yet fated[20] to die, Poseidon is unable to strike him dead upon the sea, though he wants to: μοῖρα negatively determines that this is impossible (*Odyssey* V.285-290). Within the constraints of μοῖρα, however, Poseidon *is* able to make Odysseus' life rather miserable for a while by smashing his ship and delaying his homecoming (V.290-330 ff.).

In turn, the particular too is structured both by μοῖρα and by such universals as the Olympians: for instance, Odysseus is both determined by μοῖρα not to die here, and determined by Poseidon to be thrown into the open sea without a raft. In other words, these principles (μοῖρα and Poseidon) *do* genuinely account for some being of the particular, yet they do not exhaust it, as follows.

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[20] This is one instance, like with Sarpedon, where μοῖρα is more determinate than its general expression—namely, that men must die at some point. Only here, μοῖρα dictates that Odysseus' death lies still distant in the future.

Given these limits set by μοῖρα and Poseidon, Odysseus is nonetheless free to determine his own action within the poem. Indeed, we get an insight into his doing so: he had resolved to remain with his raft, when the goddess Leukothea appears to him and advises him to take her veil, ditch the raft, and swim for shore despite its being so far away (V.330-350). Odysseus considers this option, yet chooses to not follow this goddess' advice at first: instead, despite her advice, he decides to remain on the raft (V.356-364). Then, however, Poseidon sends another heaving wave down onto the raft, breaking it into pieces. Odysseus manages to grab hold of a piece of the raft's wreckage, and at this point he has the option of trying to ride this piece to safety, as had previously worked for him when Zeus destroyed his ship following the incident with the cattle of the sun (V.365-371, XII.424-450). Instead, however, he chooses to now heed Leukothea's advice, and, tying the veil around himself, he begins swimming (V.371-375). That is, in this very instance wherein the poem shows us how a universal principle can limit a particular, the poem also shows how the particular's being is not exhausted by the universal, but the particular itself has positive being, illustrated here in the free choice of Odysseus. Thus, having seen how particulars, Olympians, and μοῖρα are related with the cosmos, and how μοῖρα as the first principle of the cosmos leaves space for particulars and universals to have their own positive being, rather than being exhausted by the first principle, we can turn to recapitulate what this thesis has accomplished.

VIII: Conclusion

The primary aim of this thesis was to draw out Homer's metaphysical view as it exists in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, and to show how Homer's metaphysical view—in contrast with the views attributed to Parmenides and Herakleitos—preserves the reality of both particularity and universality. After drawing out the discourse in classical metaphysics surrounding the

relationship between particularity and universality, I accomplished this primary aim by showing first how Homer's poetry *as poetry* (and as distinct from the other mediums discussed) presents this view—more specifically, by indicating how Homer's poetry discloses particularity and universality, together, throughout the whole of the work. Following this, I then turned to interpret three key ways in which Homer's poems implicitly contain this metaphysical view. Firstly, I interpreted the image of the cosmos on the shield of Achilles, wherein Homer's description of the two cities suggests—via the poetic expressions of peace and strife—that unity and variety are both natural. This view was further deepened as I showed how the Olympian gods have principles of both unity and variety, and thus provide a metaphysical explanation for unity and variety wherein the reality of both is preserved without one's being reduced to the other. To show more deeply how the Olympians are able to provide such a metaphysical explanation of opposites, I showed how the poems suggest that they are persons, and the metaphysical significance of their personhood. At last, tying together my previous discussions of μοῖρα and the Olympians, I drew out the cosmology of Homer; more specifically, I showed how μοῖρα is presented as a non-reductive first principle, such that universals and particulars both have positive being while still being related with each other.

Thus, in comparison to the views of such classical thinkers as Parmenides and Herakleitos, Homer's poetry presents an interesting and detailed view of how particularly and universality can be preserved.

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