

Heroism, hubris, and moderation in homer's the iliad

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Heroism, Hubris, and Moderation in Homer's the Iliad Why are morality, justice, honor, and virtues important for the world of "mortals?" Describe the relationship between humankind and gods? What is hubris and what is the opposite of hubris? Why is longing for immortality so important for humans? In the Iliad, morality, justice and virtues are all simply devices to obtain and uphold honor. There are different kinds of honor: honor from heroic deeds, honor from being charitable, and honor to one's family being some examples. Greek society was mainly community-based, and status within that community was not fixed. One needed to maintain honor to keep one's place in society. Honor and glory were also a way of being remembered or immortalized. Along with status, possessions—spoils of war, booty, women-- were symbols of honor. The Trojan War began to uphold the honor of Menelaus, whose woman had been taken by Paris, son to the King of Troy. Agamemnon's troops are plague-stricken because he dare kidnap the daughter of a priest of Apollo and not return her, dishonoring the priest and the god he serves. Agamemnon further dishonors Achilles by taking from him his spoils. Achilles then refuses to fight, indirectly causing the deaths of thousands of soldiers. As already stated, the Greek society is one of community and of the republic, but so often men are too intently focused on their individual honor rather than to attain honor for the greater good. Menelaus would rather go to war than to see his honor diminished. Agamemnon would rather incur the wrath of an immortal than sacrifice the symbol of the honor attained by being victorious in battle, and Achilles would rather sulk than fight because his booty was taken away. These men are guilty of hubris, or of excessive pride. With such pride men arrogantly put

themselves in a place of the gods and forget themselves and their limitations. The immortals have a society much like the Greeks, but live on Mount Olympus where none of the ills and tragedies of the mortals can touch them. They watch mortal people live their lives and interfere by doling out justice when they feel it necessary. Usually, the immortals are spectators but just like humans, they uphold their own honor, like Apollo did when his priest was disgraced. Hubris is punished by the gods because it is a slight to their own honor. Moderation would be important to the Greeks because in ancient Greek society, one must remember not to be too prideful, or to act rashly to defend one's own personal honor. The individual must still have a sense of personal and civic pride, however, to maintain honor. Lack of such pride would not be humility; it would result in either cowardice or shame-- neither of which deserving of honor and both being punishable offences. Also, the Greeks held the belief that they must live to the best of their potential, not to be a god or a coward. Actions as a result of hubris or resulting in shame offer no honor or glory and bring the individual farther away from being immortalized. Living as honorably as possible and using all of the individual's available resources will inevitably lead to immortality. Living forever is not of interest to the Greeks, but a man's story—his legend—will be what lives forever.