

# [The historical context of the code of honor in homers the iliad essays example](https://assignbuster.com/the-historical-context-of-the-code-of-honor-in-homers-the-iliad-essays-example/)

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In Ancient Greece, human existence was strongly tied of the legends of heroes and gods. With legendary figures guiding their lives, Ancient Greeks worshiped heroism, which was always linked with the code of honor. Honor represented a human value and in the same time a condition for living up to the ideal of living among the gods. The code of honor in Ancient Greek tradition represented a supreme ideal and a challenge that determined humans who exerted it to overpass their condition. Reflecting the Ancient Greek society of Homer’s time, “ The Iliad” depicts the meaning of the code of honor by surprising the protagonists of the events in various situations wherein they exhibit their honor in fighting, entering risky perils, defending others’ honor or protecting their possessions.
The Trojan War, in which the Iliad unfolds, occurred due to a situation that required the application of the code of honor. Offended that the Trojan Paris stole his wife Helen, Menelaus, the King of Mycenaean Sparta, asks for the help of his brother Agamemnon to reinstate his honor by fighting the Trojans and bringing back his woman. “ In sixty ships with Menelaus draws:/ Eager and loud from man to man he flies,/Revenge and fury flaming in his eyes” (Homer 70). The code of honor for Ancient Greeks was a condition to be a ruler, an index of one’s status quo. Menelaus’ offense and his quest to regain his honor by revenging became a common goal for all the Achaeans. With the cost of losing many soldiers and some of the most valuable Trojans and Achaeans warriors, the Trojan war of recapturing King Menelaus’ woman is validated by the code of honor. However, the code of honor was not a specific attributes of the leaders, but regular individuals could enhance their popularity and their social status by fighting or by exhibiting courageous acts in the name of the code of honor. Osborne (150) notes that individuals become esteemed by the population by endeavoring in dangerous, risky, but mainly actions, such as killing of the enemies with “ overwhelming violence”, but also by exerting charisma and fine rhetoric, as Odysseus did.
In “ Iliad”, the code of honor implied venturing in dangerous actions, knowing that they might end fatally for the pursuer of such situations. Hector has the abilities of a wise leader, as he acknowledges the possibility that he might die in a face to face combat with Achilles, taking into consideration to give back Helen and to end the war. However, in the name of the code of honor he ventures in the battle with Achilles, guided by his heroic ideal to leave his life at the hands of the gods, while winning the respect of his enemies and of his subjects and achieving glory. “ Through the wide world should make our glory known”. Yilmaz (6) notes that Hector compares himself with the Gods, perceiving them as holding supreme virtues such as beauty, power and fearless attitude. Although Hector is aware of the fact that the gods do not risk losing their lives in the battles because, unlike men they are immortal, he decides to fight Achilles for not being considered a coward, thinking that his action will glorify him (Yilmaz 6). Valuing his honor more than his life, hector pursues a battle that was not his own, as the entire Trojan War was not the concern of the Trojan population. For defending his brother Paris, he endangers his soldiers and himself. He realizes that he fights for defending his brother’s act of stealing Menelaus’ woman and he condemns his action. However, he adventures in the War when he could give the Greeks what they demanded, in order to live up to the expectations of his people, who required heroic deeds.
In this sense, the Ancient world praised the code of honor as a cultural identity, as a value that transcribed humans’ thirst for overpassing their nature. Believing in the permanent help and protection of the Gods, Iliad’s heroes and ordinary men ventured in life threatening and dangerous situations, without taking into consideration the wise advices of not fighting or avoiding such situations. As such, when Agamemnon suggests his military leaders to retract from the Trojan War, seeing that many Greeks died and many were to die. “ Let us run away with our ships” (Homer 139-140). The counsel of leaders were surprised by Agamemnon’s proposal, expecting not this attitude that they considered a sign of cowardice. Osborne (154) states that Agamemnon realized that his safe judgment of protecting his people was interpreted as a weakness, which threatened his authority. He had no other choice but to continue fighting, taking, just as Hector, all the risks of losing more men, including his own life. Just like Hector, he justified these actions by the desire to maintain his honor, to be respected by his people and admired for his heroic deeds.
The code of honor in the Ancient times referred also to protecting one’s possessions. If Menelaus started the war with the Trojans because the Trojan Paris stole Helen, similarly Achilles aggravated the war because he refused to fight against the Trojans when Agamemnon dispossessed him of his woman Briseis. The code of honor for both Greeks and Trojans implied pride and when their pride was threatened they had to fight to regain it. However, Achilles did not fight to regain his possession, but because, just as Menelaus, he felt dishonored when Agamemnon took his woman, his attitude was to retract from the battlefield, which generated significant trouble for the Achaean army. In a way, his non-combat attitude was highly destructive for his people. But his code of honor prevails his patriotic duties for his country and in the name of standing out for his offended pride he justifies his action of refusing to fight.
The code of honor in the Ancient times and in the specific historic context outlined by Homer, receives the Gods’ protection. However, the God’s intervention is selective. Aphrodite saves Paris from a certain death at the hands of Menelaus and Athena brings Hector in a direct fight with Achilles, who, driven by a personal code of honor, wishes to revenge Patroclus’ death by killing his murderer. However, Hector, who also expects God’s intervention as he goes on to fight with Achilles, driven by a code of honor of showing his bravery, receives no help from the Gods.
In Ancient times, the code of honor was a reason for being, an ideal for reaching Gods, becoming one of them through accomplishing great, courageous and brave deeds. As everybody aspired the same ideal, a culture that praised the code of honor was instituted. Homer’s “ The Iliad” reflects the values of the Greek and Trojan societies, willing to commit to dangerous actions, to sacrifice, and to fight other men’s wars, justifying their actions through their code of honor.

## Works Cited

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