

Historically, if you should dare leave beggars

[Life](#), [Friendship](#)



Historically, xenia was a very important custom for everyone, most especially travelers. It kept many adventurers safe during their longer journeys on land. Xenia is the Greek term for hospitality, it was a custom for everyone to extend xenia to any man who needs it, friend or foe.

Xenia has long since been forgotten about, since we now have shelters and restaurants everywhere for those in need of a bed or a meal. Xenia was also important for its social aspect, living away from town on a farm usually meant little to no new faces. People could sometimes go months without meeting new people, farmers welcomed guests with open arms. Ultimately, xenia was an important thing for travelers in ancient Greece, and could never work today in first world countries, people are no longer trusting of each other. The concept of xenia leads to the well being of others as seen through the encounter between Telemachus and King Nestor and when Odysseus washed up on Phaeacians island. In Homer's *The Odyssey* Xenia is used as a central plot device throughout the whole story. Xenia first appears during Telemachus's stay with King Nestor in Pylos. Telemachus arrives in the middle of a grand feast hosted by Pylos and is welcomed in and offered food, all without Nestor even asking who they were or what they sought.

“ Now's the time, now they've enjoyed their meal, to probe our guests and find out who they are. Strangers – friends, who are you?” (Homer 228). The host, King Nestor proceeds to give a sacrifice in Telemachus's honor, clothes and bathes him and provides him with a chariot. In ancient Greece these were standard hospitality measures, offered to any and all wandering travelers. Ancient Greece was incredibly harsh, from deadly weather to ruthless thieves, xenia was extended to everyone because there was

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potentially no other help for miles – if you could not help yourself you were left for dead.

If you should dare leave beggars outside your walls they could return with an army and pillage your land. Xenia, like respect, is a two way road, those who offer xenia, expect it in return from others. When Odysseus washed up on the Phaeacians island Nausicaa discovers him and instantly giving him all the hospitality she can giving him “ a cloak and a shirt... a golden flask and olive oil and pressed him to bathe.

” (Homer 276). She also “ set before him Odysseus food and drink, and he ate and drank.” (Homer 277). Odysseus was then brought to the king and asked to tell about himself and what brought him there. This further solidifies the concept of xenia by showing that you provide hospitality first, and ask questions later. This is the correct way to show hospitality, others are not nearly as hospitable.

Odysseus and the Cyclops is a prime example of how not to provide xenia. When Odysseus and his men arrive the Cyclops does not share, but instead greedily eats all the food himself. Upon discovering the men he questioned who they were and what they wanted – before offering them food and drink, “ Strangers! Now who are you? Where did you sail from, over the running sea-lanes?” (Homer 307). Odysseus, hopeful for hospitality tries to remind the Cyclops of xenia, “ we’re at your knees in hopes of a warm welcome, even a guest-gift, the sort that hosts give strangers. That’s the custom.

Respect the gods, my friend. We're suppliants – at your mercy!" (Homer 308). The Cyclops proceeded to completely ignore Odysseus, even after having the foreign concept of xenia explained to him, and he even went as far as to begin to eat Odysseus's men.