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Robert Spillane
and
Jean-Etienne Joullié

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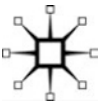


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*To the memory of John Martin*

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# Contents

# Preface

This book develops a philosophy of leadership by tracing in general outline the evolution of Western ideas from philosophical perspectives, ancient and modern. Various philosophies – including ancient heroism, rationalism, cynicism, stoicism, Machiavellianism, romanticism, heroic individualism and existentialism – are pursued through a critical analysis of those ideas which have had an enduring and pervasive influence on the way we think about leadership and the authority and power relationships that underpin it.

It is perhaps surprising that in the century that saw around 100 million people die because of the lunatic beliefs of political 'leaders', people in our time should have become obsessed with leadership and its application to individuals in diverse fields – religious, military, political, entertainment, sport, arts and more. For example, it is almost universally accepted in business, government and educational circles that managers and administrators should be, or aspire to the status of, leaders.

'Leader' derives from *laedere* – to take people on a journey, like Moses leading people out of the wilderness to the 'promised land'. The concept assumes that followers freely choose to accompany leaders on their journey and this implies that there is no fundamental conflict of interest between the parties. History tells us that famous leaders, like Moses or Jesus, offer highly circumstantial solutions of what appear to be real dilemmas for people and that they are usually supported by claims of some kind of mystical experience. Almost invariably the proposed solution is imaginative and this suggests that an important relationship exists between such special individuals, who lack the coercive power of armed forces, and groups of people who are prepared to follow them. However, as Machiavelli noted, unarmed prophets always come to grief.

Rulers throughout history have wanted to believe that people obey them, not because they have the power to ensure obedience, but because they are 'born leaders'. This myth was invented by Plato and has been so successful that it is still widely debated in business schools. It forms an important part of a ruler's rhetoric. Wittgenstein argued that the meaning of a word depends on its role in the language game of which it is a member. As 'ruler' and 'leader' operate in quite different language

games, the claim that (some) rulers are leaders requires a language game which embraces the ideas of gifted and superior individuals leading others on a journey to paradise. But history tells us that leaders are just as (if not more) likely to lead us to hell.

Arguably, most people in positions of power prefer to be respected as persons than powers and the obsession with leadership probably derives, in part, from their desire to believe that their power over people is the result of the recognition by others of their exemplary personalities. Accordingly, such people believe that they are obeyed because they are leaders and not because they have power to enforce obedience. But where do we draw a line in the sand in order to distinguish leaders from non-leaders? If bureaucratic managers are leaders because they take their colleagues on a journey, should not bus drivers be called leaders? That this question is usually greeted with amused surprise, since it is obvious to most managers and their consultants that they are, or can become, leaders, suggests that the concept 'leadership' has been rendered so elastic that it includes managers (but not bus drivers). By defining leadership in terms of an individual's capacity to take them on a journey, or by the even more inclusive notion of 'influence', the term loses its significance.

In everyday life, we don't need leaders. We follow individuals because of the role they occupy or the technical skills they possess. In short, we follow competent individuals because it is rational to do so. We follow the directions of police officers because the law demands that we do; we follow the advice of motor mechanics if they are technically qualified and competent in their work. We do not refer to police officers or motor mechanics as leaders, although there may be opportunities here for enterprising consultants to elevate them to a more exalted status. Since managers get their following from the law and their technical expertise, there are good reasons to follow their advice or directions if they act competently. But when they claim to possess pseudo-mystical powers or more modestly, exemplary personalities, there are good reasons *not* to follow them anywhere.

Why, then, are we so obsessed with leadership, given its consistent history of mystical propaganda, widespread corruption, arrant stupidity and mass homicide? It probably has something to do with the unstated and thus unanalysed meaning attributed to 'leadership' which is, as Christopher Hodgkinson suggested, 'an incantation for the bewitchment of the led'.[1] When applied to mediocre politicians, empty-headed celebrities or bureaucratic managers, the concept of leadership gives them and

others a sense that what grounds the relationship is far more impressive than the mere practice of politicking, entertaining or managing.

It therefore comes as no surprise to find that leadership is one of the earliest phenomena to be studied by industrial psychologists in the first half of the twentieth century. They took the position that leadership is not a relationship between two parties but a subjective quality of certain individuals who have special powers by which they persuade others to follow them. The power leaders derive from the concession of authority is shunted aside in favour of their personal powers. Understandably, the concept of leadership was eagerly embraced by managers, who agreed with psychologists that the power to bewitch others derives from their 'leadership qualities', and set about hiring psychologists to develop and administer personality tests in order to identify 'leadership' traits. Generations of psychologists have jumped at the opportunity to become 'servants of power', to use Loren Baritz's instructive term, and have produced lists of leadership traits, including emotional stability, conscientiousness, integrity, compassion and empathy. Yet studies have shown and general observation confirms that senior managers (including those referred to as leaders in their field) have bad tempers, do not like their colleagues and do not care about their anxieties or aspirations.[2]

Thankfully, most researchers in the field of leadership no longer support the idea of a 'leader personality', even if management consultants continue to profit from the naivety and gullibility of managers who believe that there is such a thing. It is simply not possible to understand leadership by attending only to one of the parties to the relationship. We may, of course, make inferences about the personalities or motivational states of leaders and followers from the way the relationship manifests itself, and these inferences can be used as explanations for particular cases of leadership. But we cannot understand leadership as such unless we attend to the reasons that motivate followership.

'Leadership' is an abstract noun and lacks the kind of physical referent we associate with concrete nouns. In this strict sense, there is no such 'thing' as leadership. 'Leadership' is a relational word and refers to an irreducible element in the study of the interactions between leaders and their followers: the anchor points between which the concept has its meaning. There appears to be no way in which the relationship between leaders and their followers can be analysed in terms of component relationships; leadership is not the sum of leaders' actions, let alone their putative personalities. It is true that leadership overlaps with other relationships between parties, such as influence, persuasion, conformity and

obedience, but these may be present and leadership absent. While these relational concepts command attention, we have chosen the protean concepts 'authority' and 'power' as the focal points around which to structure arguments for a philosophy of leadership.

Admittedly, the authority of leaders seems co-extensive with power. Yet there is a distinction to be made between these concepts since authority is connected with rights and duties and power is connected with the ability to make things happen. The authority of leaders involves the right to direct power for productive purposes and this involves them in the search for reliable knowledge and the people who possess it. When leaders use knowledge for the benefit of others we are justified in calling their behaviour rational. And when followers grant them the right to use such knowledge, their assent is likewise rational. The assent which underlies the power of leaders is given in the belief that both leaders and their followers will benefit from the search for and utilisation of knowledge. The assent is rational because it replaces the ineffective applications of knowledge with more effective ones. Leaders cannot grant authority to themselves and so their power is dependent on their abilities to mobilise the activities of others and this is dependent on the extent to which authority is conceded to them. The power attributed to leaders is conditional on the concession of authority and is defined and circumscribed by these concessions.

Leadership, then, is a human encounter grounded in authority and it is through a process of authorisation that leaders get their power. Indeed, the psychological factors which make the working of authority possible are logically prior to the creation of leaders' power. Leaders, therefore, have to deal with the tension between individuality and followership – between personal and social power – because for everyone who concedes authority to a leader there is a choice between authority and autonomy: leaders are generally attuned to these tensions and that choice.

The question of what encourages people to accept the authority of leaders by obeying their commands, endorsing their actions or believing their communications is a matter of considerable importance. Unfortunately, the conceptual confusion surrounding authority has tended to obscure earlier philosophical formulations and has rendered empirical translation difficult. Authority has been notably defined as: a property of a person or office; a relationship between two persons or offices; or the quality of a communication by virtue of which it is accepted, obeyed or acted upon. Elusive as a denotative definition of authority may be, it is a pervasive and fundamental factor in human affairs unless

many distinguished philosophers have been totally mistaken. Bertram de Jouvenel, for example, asserts with engaging confidence:

> The phenomenon called 'authority' is at once more ancient and more fundamental than the phenomenon called 'state'; the natural ascendancy of some men over others is the principle of all human organisations and all human advance.[3]

By this statement Jouvenal equates authority with any form of ascendancy and joins a large number of philosophers and sociologists in viewing authority as a form, rather than source, of power.

Authority is a highly abstract category and it would be rather to assume what needs to be shown if it were claimed at the outset that such a category can be adequately represented by any specified set of behaviours.

One object of a philosophical analysis of authority as a foundation of leadership is to seek criteria for making distinctions between authority, power and influence with reliability. It turns out that the beginnings of such attempts are very old. As we pass from the examination of a selection of ancient philosophers to more recent ones there are significant changes in what people accept as being included in the categories of 'authority'. These changes take the form of historical progression but they also ebb and flow with fashion and with the rise and fall of especially influential thinkers. It is therefore likely that differences in what is held to represent authority will appear across cultures, across historical periods and even from person to person at the same time in the same culture. This circumstance carries some implications for the empirical study of leadership in the here and now, for it suggests that agreement about the nature of *all* the behaviour which is to be described in terms of the operation of authority and leadership is unlikely to be reachable. If this is so, the territory cannot be mapped. It does not preclude the possibility, however, of seeking out *some* behaviour (in appropriate settings) which epitomises the way the concept is applied, or of studying these isolated cases by empirical methods. Here philosophers have prepared the ground for theorists of leadership.

It has to be acknowledged that many definitions of leadership appear to serve equally well as definitions of authority. Nonetheless, despite the apparent similarity of the two concepts, authority should be distinguished conceptually from leadership for the obvious reason that while

there are many cases of authority that do not entail leadership, there can be no leadership without authority. Those tempted to argue otherwise confuse leadership with coercive power; individuals who possess the power of the sword alone are not leaders.

Philosophers have not merely analysed political, military and religious leadership, they have educated and counselled leaders. For more than 2,500 years, their writings have influenced those individuals who turned to them for advice about how to attain and retain power. Philosophers' ideas have influenced rebels and revolutionaries, politician and popes, and by questioning the assumptions on which all other educational subjects depend, they have challenged cherished beliefs and values. Consequently, philosophers have been executed or exiled for their ability to look tyrants in the eye and argue with them. They are liberators because, for better or for worse, their ideas have the power to change lives. As John Maynard Keynes noted:

> Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back. I am sure that the power of vested interests is vastly exaggerated compared with the gradual encroachment of ideas.[4]

While we, the authors of this book, engage and argue with various philosophers, we do not presume to tell readers how *they* should engage and argue with them. To tell readers what in the writings of philosophers is of 'take-home value' (to use a dubious phrase with which management academics are berated) is to ignore or deny the liberating potential of philosophy. Accordingly, we make few references to the secondary literature since we do not want to burden readers with discussions of what one author thought of another author's thoughts of the thoughts of a particular philosopher.

Existential philosopher Karl Jaspers introduced his history of the great philosophers with words which apply to our more modest book:

> We hope to enter into the world of the great philosophers, to make ourselves at home in it, because it is in their company, the best there is, that we can attain to what we ourselves are capable of being. Admittance is open to all. The dwellers in that land are glad to answer provided that we know how to inquire. They show us what they were.

> They encourage us and make us humble. A great philosopher wants no disciples, but men who are themselves. With all our veneration, we can come closer to them only if we ourselves philosophize.[5]

An account of philosophers' ideas is not merely a technical exercise which yields a number of general points in the manner of a PowerPoint slide. Rather, the task is to attempt to disclose the central assumptions which ground the philosophers' ideas. The challenge is, therefore, to communicate important ideas in such a way that we acknowledge their inexhaustibility and remind ourselves that they can be revisited with profit in a way in which superficial ideas render such an exercise otiose.

Quotations are indispensable as a means of communicating important philosophical ideas without distortion. Consequently, we have used ample quotations so that the philosophers can speak for themselves. We have followed Karl Jaspers' advice and selected key sentences, from among the innumerable range of philosophers' pronouncements, which illuminate the main thrust of their meanings. Such quotations are generally brief and are employed to emphasise climaxes of reasoning or unexpected ideas. Through quotations we have the opportunity to go beyond an observer's description of philosophical ideas and to engage with them.

In an attempt to tell a story of the history of Western thinking, we have outlined for each philosopher a limited number of ideas, preferring, in Nietzsche's words, to select:

> those doctrines which sound most clearly the personality of the individual philosopher, whereas the complete enumeration of all the transmitted doctrines, as it is the custom of the ordinary handbooks to give, has but one sure result: the complete silencing of personality. That is why those reports are so dull. The only thing of interest in a refuted system is the personal element. It alone is what is forever irrefutable.[6]

We have written this book to arouse philosophical curiosity, not to satisfy it. What we have tried to do in this book is to point out that ideas about leadership necessarily draw upon both ancient and modern wisdom.

*Note*: Dates of birth and death for the individuals cited appear in the Index of Names.

## Notes

1. Jouvenal (1957: 13).
2. Baritz (1960: 178).
3. Hodgkinson (1983: 228).
4. Keynes (1949: 383).
5. Jaspers (1962: ix–x).
6. Nietzsche (1962: 25).

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# 1
# Heroic Leadership: Authority as Power

The name of Homer is associated with two great epic poems – the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* – which were required reading for well-educated people for more than 2,500 years. While scholarly debate about the true authorship of these poems continues to this day, our interest is confined to the *Iliad*, which dates from around 750 BCE, and describes the war between the Trojans and the Greeks (or 'Danaans' or 'Achaeans') that had occurred about 400 years earlier. This places the action in the heroic age which is associated historically with the Mycenaean civilisation of around 1600–1100 BCE.

Although the *Iliad* is epic fiction rather than history, it conveys a comprehensive worldview which comes down to us as ancient heroism. We are presented with an aristocratic society where heroic warriors lord it over camp-followers who count for nothing in war. Aristocratic warriors respect those people, like themselves, who are the 'best' because they are men of power and courage. In heroic societies, power and courage on the battlefield are valued for obvious reasons, but so are noble oratory, beauty and excellence in living. To be the 'best' is to pursue personal glory through warlike achievement and a deep feeling for the tragedy of human life. But personal glory has to be earned and recognised by others and so the fierce behaviour of aristocratic warriors is regulated by the uncompromising judgements of their peers. The striving to be the best ceases only in a noble death. If shame is berating oneself for an incompetent act, and guilt is berating oneself for an immoral act, the warriors of the *Iliad* know little of guilt. Theirs is a 'shame culture' governed by unceasing striving for power and glory.

The values, actions and foibles of the mortal warriors are at one with those of their immortal gods who live on Mount Olympus. As aristocrats themselves, the gods support the warrior heroes with whom they

have a special affinity. These anthropomorphic gods enter and leave the action in a manner which infuriates modern readers because, in acting as a *deus ex machina*, a god brings an air of improbability to the plot. Gods are important for Homer because their interventions are used to explain the eccentric behaviour of warriors in a language that does not permit 'psychological' explanations. Homer's gods are not spiritual and his language is innocent of spiritual and psychological terms, such as 'soul', 'mind', 'psyche' or 'ego'. Reading Homer, therefore, represents a challenge for modern readers who are used to stories about individuals with psychological powers. It is as if the gods on Mount Olympus have left the mountain and taken up residence inside human individuals: they appear in psychology books as personality traits which allegedly cause individuals to behave in certain ways, thus by-passing the fact of human choice. We shall leave the gods to their own devices in the knowledge that after about 600 BCE they were, with one exception, retrenched.

The *Iliad* begins with the wrath of Achilles. Agamemnon, the commander-in-chief of the Greeks, has violated the heroic code by depriving the great warrior Achilles of his just rewards after his success in battle. Having been dishonoured, Achilles withdraws his labour and refuses to fight. Without Achilles and his forces, the Greeks are nearly defeated by the Trojans. Concerned at the Trojan success, Agamemnon sends Ajax and Odysseus to persuade Achilles to return to the battlefield. Even though Achilles is offered one of Agamemnon's daughters as a bride, Achilles rejects Agamemnon's overtures. The fighting resumes without Achilles and under Hector's inspiring leadership the Trojans cause the Greeks to retreat. Achilles' closest friend, Patroclus, returns to battle at the behest of Nestor who asks him to disguise himself in Achilles' armour to frighten the Trojans. The two armies fight a bloody battle on the beach in sight of the Greek ships which, if destroyed, would bring an end to the war. Patroclus receives permission from Achilles to wear his armour as the first ship is set on fire. Believing that Achilles has returned to the battlefield, the Trojans retreat to their city wall where Patroclus, who has ignored Achilles' warning about advancing too far too quickly, is killed by Hector. Hearing of Patroclus's death, Achilles is stricken with grief and burns with revenge. He establishes a truce with Agamemnon, puts on his new armour, and attacks the Trojans with a ferocity that sentences to death every warrior who confronts him without the assistance of the gods. The Trojan retreat is hindered by a river which runs red with the blood of Achilles' victims. Inevitably, as befits their status as great warriors, Achilles and Hector meet in single combat. Achilles

kills Hector and desecrates his body by dragging it behind his chariot while Hector's father, King Priam, watches from the walls of Troy. While Patroclus is buried with heroic ceremony, Hector's corpse lies unburied for many days. Finally, Priam visits Achilles and begs for a dignified end to the slaughter and the return of his son's body. Achilles is moved by Priam's lamentation and Hector is returned to Troy where his widow, Andromache, presides over the funeral. Thus ends the *Iliad*.

Traditionalists will be horrified at a summary of the plot of the *Iliad* which ignores the intrusions of the gods. Without the gods, many of the twists and turns in the plot are incomprehensible. However, we beg the indulgence of our readers since our interest is in the men and women of the natural world that is depicted in the poem. But, it may be objected, does it make sense to try to extract a philosophy from an epic poem, let alone draw psychological implications from a language that lacks psychological concepts?

Perhaps the best we can hope for when reading such a strange poem with marauding gods and men who are larger than life is to attend to the values exemplified through their actions, even if their actions are interfered with by immortal beings. Fortunately, the Homeric warriors valued oratory and through their dialogues and inspiring speeches they tell us about their values. As modern readers, we feel more confident in understanding their values than their actions as affected by gods. It is, therefore, to the ethical underpinnings of the *Iliad's* characters that we address ourselves in the hope of avoiding the charge of undue distortion.

Insofar as the *Iliad* offers a coherent view of aristocratic warriors living and dying, it enables readers to compare and contrast ancient heroic values and today's unheroic values. In ancient times, heroism was a way of life embedded in a results-orientated culture; today it is sporadic and embedded in a hedonistic culture. Ancient heroes expected to live short and glorious lives; today's heroes hope for long lives as celebrities. Heroism is grounded on power, nobility, courage, honour; the present era prefers happiness, pleasure, compassion, humility, equality.

For Homer's noble warriors, to live heroically is to live honourably. The great warrior Sarpedon, who was to be killed by Patroclus, emboldens his men:

> Ah, my friend, if you and I could escape this fray and live forever, never a trace of age, immortal, I would never fight on the front lines again or command you to the field where men win fame. But now, as it is, the fates of death await us, thousands poised to strike, and not

> a man alive can flee them or escape – so in we go for attack! Give our enemy glory or win it for ourselves.[1]

Judged by today's Western standards there is a frightening lack of compassion in the exchange between Achilles and his defeated enemy Lycaon, son of King Priam, who, when begging for his life, received the following reply:

> 'Fool, don't talk to me of ransom. No more speeches. Before Patroclus met his day of destiny, true it warmed my heart a bit to spare some Trojans: droves I took alive and auctioned off as slaves. But now not a single Trojan flees his death, not one the gods hand over to me before your gates, none of all the Trojans, sons of Priam least of all! Come, friend, you too must die. Why moan about it so? Even Patroclus died, a far, far better man than you ... But even for me, I tell you, death and the strong force of fate are waiting. There will come a dawn or sunset or high noon when a man will take my life in battle too – flinging a spear perhaps or whipping a deadly arrow off his bow.' Drawing his sharp sword Achilles struck his collarbone just beside the neck and the two-edged blade drove home, plunging to the hilt – and down on the ground he sprawled, stretched face first and dark blood pouring out of him drenched the earth. Achilles grabbed a foot, slung him into the river, washed away downstream as he cried above him savage words to wing him on his way.[2]

The central theme in heroic societies is power expressed through noble action. In the beginning was the deed: heroes are what they do. And what they do is regulated by their role and the rules that bind the various roles: elder, warrior and camp-follower. Heroes know who and what they are by reference to the roles, rules and rewards which govern their lives. Knowing their role, they know all that they have to know. They know what they owe others and what others owe them. They know their place in the hierarchy of power and the authority that accrues to them. They know what they deserve and what others deserve. If, after a battle, enemies surrender, they also surrender their rights as noble warriors and human beings. They effectively consign themselves to the status of dogs and are treated accordingly. There is nothing as unseemly as running from a fight or begging for one's life.

Scholars have noted that in Homer *arché* – authority – signifies initiative which 'gets things done' and is manifested especially as 'a cause of activity in others'. Such initiative resides in a person qualified by

birth or abilities. Authority could not be conferred on an ordinary man in Homeric society where princes are born of semi-divine families. Authority was thus regarded by the Homeric Greeks as referring to those who were in some way *qualified* to initiate social or political action, in the sense that Achilles had, together with his considerable personal powers, authority over his warriors. Authority figures in the *Iliad* are characterised by their possession of special qualifications, including symbolic objects which designate a particular social status, like Achilles' magnificent shield, and special abilities which result in demonstrable achievement.

Used in this sense, authority is indistinguishable from the personal power which is revealed in a hierarchical relationship where rulers or commanders motivate subordinates to act. It was to be several centuries before the Greeks adopted a more sophisticated approach to the understanding of authority which would separate conceptually authority and power. By referring to people in positions of power by the term *arché* and by concentrating on the implementation of action, and ignoring its achievement, Homeric thought conflated power and authority. 'Authority' was, accordingly, used to designate 'rule' or 'government' but, as we shall see, authority came to be regarded as a *concession*, not a possession.

Similarly, in matters of psychology, Homer's world is considerably less complicated than ours. For example, many people today claim that they judge others by objective performance and thus identify with Homer's warriors. But a moment's reflection tells us that Homer's world is much more foreign to our psychology than it at first appears. We do not as a rule judge our friends and colleagues according to Homer's criteria. That is to say, we do not normally believe that individuals are merely the sum of their actions. Like the person who mistakenly attributes the flash in the sky to lightning, and so does not appreciate that the flash is the lightning, people today are inclined to the view that individuals are more than their actions: behind the actions there is an actor pulling the strings of action, so to speak. We have inherited a number of words to describe this actor: soul, mind, self, ego, psyche, personality, character, and more. These words are given the status of an internal power which determines what individuals do. In proportion as people accept these powers, they devalue the importance of roles, rules and rewards as determinants of human behaviour. A language, such as Homer's, which makes no reference to these psychological powers, is indeed far removed from the psychological language of motivation and personality that dominates thinking today.

Homer made no distinction between actor and action: there is no soul, no mind and therefore no Freudian unconscious mind, no psyche and so no psychology, no hierarchy of psychological needs, no personality traits. Heroes are described according to their *powers,* which are related to their bodily organs. Combining physiology with feelings, Homer attributed particular behaviours to bodily organs, notably the lungs and the heart. When we say that a person's heart is not in his job, and he lacks the brains to do better or the guts to resign, we are echoing Homer's idea of a relationship between body and behaviour. The problem with attributing behaviour to bodily organs is that there are more behaviours than organs and so Homer needed elastic concepts that could be applied to different behaviours. Inevitably, these concepts became more abstract and moved Greek thinking away from Homer's naturalism to spiritualism.

Although Homer's characters do not speak in terms of personal choice, they choose courses of action and it is Achilles' choice to withdraw his labour that sets in motion the plot and tension of the *Iliad*. Yet, there is a sense in which Achilles had no choice in this matter since Agamemnon had violated the heroic code by depriving him of his just reward and thus dishonoured him. The tension between a 'free' choice and an 'obligated' choice is characteristic of closed communities, such as those of heroic societies. We see this today in vendetta societies in which the murder of a relative obligates a family member to balance the books by an act of murderous revenge. It is in this sense that the characters of the *Iliad* are obliged to act in certain ways with fateful consequences. Modern readers imagine Achilles struggling with his conscience and with his commander-in-chief. But it is doubtful that he had any awareness of an individual conscience which stands apart from the heroic conscience. Achilles does what he must: the heroic code has been violated and he acts accordingly. Addressing Agamemnon in a blazing fury, Achilles calls him a burnt-out coward and refuses to trust or obey him. After Agamemnon sees the error of his ways and sends an embassy to Achilles, his spokesmen receive a reply which shows that Achilles recognises his power of choice and yet acknowledges the futility of exercising it since warriors are sentenced to a short heroic life or a long mediocre one. Thus readers are confronted with the heroic paradox: the greatest warriors must continue to fight since they cannot rely on past glories. But the more they fight, they quicker they die.

> The same honour waits for the coward and the brave. They both go down to Death, the fighter who shirks, the one who works to

> exhaustion. And what's laid up for me, what pittance? Nothing – and after suffering hardships, year in, year out, staking my life on the mortal risks of war … Shameless, inveterate – armored in shamelessness! Dog that he is, he'd never dare to look me straight in the eyes again … He cheated me, did me damage, wrong! But never again, he'll never rob me blind with his twisting words again! Once is enough for him. Die and be damned for all I care! … Mother tells me, the immortal goddess Thetis with her glistening feet, that two fates bear me on to the day of death. If I hold out here and I lay siege to Troy, my journey home is gone, but my glory never dies. If I voyage back to the fatherland I love, my pride, my glory dies … true, but the life that's left me will be long, the stroke of death will not come on me quickly.[3]

Does Achilles have a choice between a short heroic life and a long mediocre one? If the gods determine Achilles' fate, he obviously has no choice in the matter. But if the choice were left to him, is it conceivable that he would choose the life of mediocrity? If heroic life is dedicated to the pursuit of *arête* – virtue, excellence, power, courage, nobility – and if Achilles is dedicated to the heroic code, it would appear not. Achilles accepts the heroic code and thus his fate. Life is nasty, brutish and short but it can be lived nobly. Heroes rise above the status of animals by sublimating their primitive and barbaric impulses through a code which establishes standards for battle and oratory, for friendship and leadership. But the code is demanding, for warriors and their families and friends.

Because heroes strive to excel and cannot accept loss of face, they stubbornly risk their lives to increase their status. There is therefore a worrying tension between the necessities of battle and the welfare of family and friends since all parties know that heroic striving may do damage to the family. Heroic self-assertion often compromises the well-being of kinship and while heroes do their best to defend their loved ones, there is ultimately no way for them to avoid being placed in situations where the future of their family depends on their ongoing success in battle. This is a particular problem for the wives of warriors who know, only too well, that on the death of their husband they will be married off to the enemy, sold into slavery or killed.

Homer portrayed this dilemma with great poetic skill in the confrontation between noble Hector and his wife Andromache. With her son beside her, Andromache begs Hector, the most important defender of Troy, not to go once more into battle.

> Reckless one, my Hector – your own fiery courage will destroy you! Have you no pity for *him*, our helpless son? Or me, and the destiny that weighs me down, your widow, now so soon. Yes, soon they will kill you off, all the Achaean forces massed for assault, and then, bereft of you, better for me to sink beneath the earth. What other warmth, what comfort's left for me, once you have met your doom? Nothing but torment![4]

As Andromache's status depends on her warrior husband, the possibility of his death in battle looms large in her thinking. Rather than offer him what behavioural psychologists call positive reinforcement, Andromache uses heavy rhetoric and emotional blackmail to try and square the heroic circle. Demanding the glorious status of a warrior woman, which depends on Hector's repeated success in battle, she nonetheless wants to keep him safe and secure in her comfortable woman's world. But she knows that he must resist her because, in the end, warrior women want their men to resist them and go out among the flying arrows and spears.

> All this weighs on my mind too, dear woman. But I would die of shame to face the men of Troy and the Trojan women trailing their long robes if I would shrink from battle now, a coward … To stand up bravely, always to fight in the front ranks of Trojan soldiers, winning my father great glory, glory for myself.[5]

Hector reached down to hug his son, possibly for the last time, but the little boy screams at the sight of the fighting machine that is his father. Realising this, Hector removes his flashing helmet from his head and mother and father laugh at the tragedy of human existence in which the future of a loving family hangs on the thread of brute power. Hector goes forth to battle reassuring his wife with a philosophical message: grieving is pointless since all human beings are at the mercy of their fate and so it is pointless to try to avoid it. Hector tries to reassure his wife:

> Andromache, dear one, why so desperate? Why so much grief for me? No man will hurl me down to Death, against my fate. And fate? No one alive has ever escaped it, neither brave man nor coward, I tell you – it's born with us the day that we are born.[6]

And with that parting speech, he goes out to do battle. On this occasion he lives to fight another day.

Warriors accept that they are fated to die young and although they hope for immortality they realise that the status of god is granted only to a few. Thus confronted with the prospect of an early and painful death, life is the standard of value and the way warriors act in life is the standard against which they are judged. We might say, with Nietzsche, that Homer glorifies life. It is part of heroic virtue to understand that victory is sweet but that defeat is the final outcome for all warriors. Human life is assuredly based on warlike achievement, but it also requires a deep appreciation of the fundamental tragedy of an existence which offers so much in such a short time. And then it is all gone. This would not be tragic if the Homeric warriors could look forward to a heaven or paradise which would grant them eternal bliss. This is not the case, however. Their fate is to die painfully and descend beneath the earth into Hades, which is not a place to look forward to.

To those who have argued that the *Iliad* is a glorification of war, the prospect of a painful death and an eternity in Hades should suggest pause for thought. Those who glorify war, or who find it glorious, frequently bolster their stance with easy deaths and comforting supernatural fictions which serve to reward warriors for their earthly adventures. Homer did not glorify war in either of these senses. His characters follow a remorseless logic in which the heroic code stands between them and an overwhelming impulse to save one's skin and trade on the heroic actions of others. The logic facing a Homeric warrior is simple: as a great warrior he must continue to lead men into the most dangerous part of the battlefield knowing that he is more likely to be killed than if he hid in relative safety. Furthermore, the more warriors fight, the quicker they die. When they fall in battle it will be agonisingly painful and their poor bodies will be violated while their *psyche* – breath of life – goes down to Hades. To remind readers of the savagery of the death of warriors and their courage in confronting it, Homer never tires of describing their end.

> Lycon, flailing, chopped the horn of Peneleos' horsehair-crested helmet but round the socket the sword-blade smashed to bits – just as Peneleos hacked his neck below the ear and the blade sank clean through, nothing held but a flap of skin, the head swung loose to the side as Lycon slumped down to the ground ... There – at a dead run Meriones ran down Acamas, Acamas mounting behind his team, and gouged his right shoulder – he pitched from the car and the mist whirled down his eyes. Idomeneus skewered Erymas straight through the mouth, the merciless brazen spearpoint raking through, up