PITY AND PATHOS IN HOMER

by Mary Scott
(University of the Witwatersrand)

Pity is the feeling roused by the sufferings and misfortunes of others and pathos is a quality of a person or event which raises pity. I intend in this article to examine some episodes perceived as pathetic by modern readers in order to analyse the quality which involves pathos. I shall attempt to distinguish what is felt by us as pathetic and what would have been felt as such by Homer's immediate audience. Thereafter I shall examine the pity felt by actual characters in Homer in order to discover, by analysing situations, what roused the pity and how it was felt.

Since perceptions of what constitutes misfortune differ from culture to culture and from era to era, the pathos or quality which rouses pity for misfortunes will also be differently perceived. What a person perceives as pathetic will be influenced by the whole framework of his values and opinions. The Homeric value system differs fundamentally from ours; thus what is felt as pathetic by us would have been perceived differently by the poet and his immediate audience since the pathos would lie in different aspects of the situation.

Adkins' work, *Merit and Responsibility*, sets out the Homeric value system, as far as it is possible to reconstruct it. His main emphasis is upon *aretē*-standards and he carefully distinguishes the *aretē* of Homeric times from that pertaining to later periods. In Homeric times, the demand of the *aretē*-standards was that a man be constantly successful, agathos, in war or peace and value was placed almost exclusively on the skills and qualities which promoted success. A man who did not succeed in this way was labelled kakos.

Social values were never, in the time of Homer or for a long time after, regarded as cardinal virtues or *aretai*—in fact, not until the rise of the polis increasingly required the exercise of social skills for the success of the individual. Pity for another individual in misfortune does not notably advance one's success and thus it is important to determine when and how the emotion was felt by characters in Homer.

In looking first at pathos in Homer, I am going to limit myself to instances from the Iliad, since the differences from our perceptions of pathos are more marked here.

In Homer, war is characterised by epithets such as 'bloody', 'grievous', 'involving tears', 'destructive' and 'destroying men'. For us, these epithets may involve pathos but there is no reason why, for Homer, they should not have been purely descriptive in the same way as terms such as 'violent', 'fierce',

---

'hostile' and 'inevitable'.

2 War does conspicuously involve blood, tears and death as well as hostility and violence.

War is also labelled 'kakos', that which does not promote success, and 'the leveller' inasmuch as it reduces agathoi, successful men, through death to a state where all men are on a level. The agathos, worsted in battle, becomes in some sense a failure. He can now be mocked or triumphed over by his victorious opponent. Thus the epithets 'kakos' and 'the leveller' may have caused the Homeric audience to feel pity for those who died, not in any modern humanitarian sense but in that, through dying, they had in effect failed. Pity is related directly to a fear of suffering the same fate oneself and the humiliation of death in battle would have been a very real fear for the immediate Homeric audience.

Homer exploits the pathos of the sudden dreaded collapse of success to the full especially by contrasting the warrior's former state with his present condition. The poet's usual method is to emphasize the warrior's former position as an agathos by quoting his ancestry, perhaps with some details of wealth and standing, or by stating his former pre-eminence in war-like arete, some special feature of a warrior's arete or some other skill.

Details of wounds inflicted should be treated with caution. They are usually intended to impart information, giving particulars of the success of the victor. We find descriptions of wounds immediately followed by the victor's making a triumphant speech, stripping off the victim's armour, failing to strip him of his armour or simply rushing off to further battle. If the description of the wounds had been intended to be pathetic, the focus would have stayed longer on the victim. We find also mention of the failure of the victim's armour to protect him, sometimes contrasted with its earlier success. Since the focus is returned quickly to the victorious warrior, the purpose is clearly to emphasize the strength of the blow which pierces the armour and thus to mark the might of the

---

2. Iliad 19. 313; 13. 97; 5. 737; 3. 133; 9. 604; 17. 737; 7. 119; 2. 797.
5. It would not be related to John Donne's sentiments 'Any man's death diminishes me because I am involved in mankind'. Devotions XVII.
6. E.g. Iliad 4. 520
10. Iliad 5. 59-60.
victor. Descriptions of wounds, then, highlight the success of the winner and the failure of the victim. 16

Family relationships in Homer are also used for pathos, yet because of a difference in circumstances, the pathos would have had a different focus for the immediate Homeric audience.

In the description of the death of Protesilaus (Iliad 2. 698–702), pathos would be involved in the contrast between his leadership while alive and the fact that he now lies dead and between his leaping ashore first of all and the fact that now 'the black earth held him'. However, the details about his half-built home and his wife with her cheeks torn in mourning which would, in a modern reader, cause a feeling of pity for the woman left without her husband, would have had a different focus for the Homeric audience. A wife, together with her child or children, passes, once her husband dies, into the protection of another male kinsman. 17 But if no male kinsman or protector is available, she has no value in herself. There was no valuing of a human being qua human being. A man had the value or regard which he could earn for himself and women and children were part of his possessions which he must protect in order to be perceived as successful. No sanctions existed which could compel a man to protect those who are helpless. This situation is clearly illustrated in the discussion between Hektor and Andromache in Iliad 6. 456ff. where her fate, if Hektor dies, is anticipated, and in book 22. 490ff. where Andromache, mourning Hektor's death, paints a picture of the beggarly fate that awaits their son. The attention of the Homeric audience would be focused not on the sufferings of the survivors in sympathy with them, but upon the enormity of the failure of the agathos who is no longer succeeding in protecting his dependents. For this reason, although a modern reader might expect that the picture of the widows and orphans left behind would be a rich source of pathos for Homer, he very rarely mentions them. Women and children appear in the Iliad as people for whose protection the agathos must fight. 18 In a society where the greatest fully organised unit was the family-household and emphasis was constantly laid on material success, to take over the household of an agathos who could not, for some reason, successfully protect it would be an action against which no effective sanctions existed. This can be seen in the behaviour of the suiters in the Odyssey, who, in Odysseus' absence, take over his household and eat away his possessions. With regard to his family, the need to protect it


Compare Vergil Aen. 10. 829–30:

hoc tamen infelix miseram solabere mortem:
Aeneae magni dextra cadit.

17. Cf. Andromache's mother who after her husband's death is ransomed from Achilles by her father (Iliad 6.425–8).

Cf. also W. K. Lacey: The Family in Classical Greece p. 44. (London, 1968.)

would be foremost in the mind of the agathos because of the demands of the aretē-standards and the social insecurity of the Heroic Age. I am not implying that family affection did not exist in Homeric times\(^{19}\) but merely that the agathos would place the emphasis on what was for him more immediate and pressing—the need to succeed in the task of protection. One might compare here the modern demand that a 'successful' man adequately protect his family through life insurance. Advertisements for this commodity exploit the pathos of the family left without its protection and carry the connotation that the deceased man has shown himself lacking in this respect. In the same way, in the Homeric context an unprotected family is a failure on the part of the agathos, and the distress of a bereaved family is merely one of the many possible areas of failure of the dead agathos.

Iliad 11. 241-4 affords us another instance of the mention of a wife for pathetic effect. However, the dead Iphidamas is oiktros, pitiable, because he did not see any return for the wealth he had expended to win his bride, and to spend more than one gets in return is a failure in terms of the Homeric aretē.\(^{20}\) The Homeric audience would see his situation as involving pathos for this reason.

At Iliad 11. 328-32, the timē, glory,\(^{21}\) of Diomedes and Odysseus is enhanced and the pathos increased by the mention of their victims’ former standing, that Hippodamos and Hypeirochos were ‘both most noble’. However, not only did their aretē fail but so also did that of their father Merops. His skill lay in his knowledge of divination, but his foreknowledge failed to save his sons from death. If these were his only sons, his old age and failing strength would now lay him open to disaster. Homer’s audience would, like the modern reader, be affected by the dramatic irony of the father’s useless foreknowledge, but their main attention would be upon its failure.

A similar situation is described in Diomedes’ aristeia, the narrative of his triumphal progress in battle (Iliad 5. 148-51). However, here the pathos lies not in Merops’ futile foreknowledge but in that Eurydamas’ aratē, skill, fails altogether to provide him with a warning of the disaster. Yet, in a results-culture\(^{22}\) such as the Homeric, the distinction is irrelevant. In both cases, their skill failed to bring them success and therefore the partial success of the father at Iliad 11. 328-32 is unimportant. In the second example, effect is also gained by the mention of Eurydamas’ age, given twice. As an old man, he is all the more in need of his sons’ protection.

In Iliad 5. 152-8, there is undoubted pathos in the picture of the old man,

---

\(^{19}\) Cf. Iliad 6, 232 ff. where Glaukos is judged to have lost his wits in that he gives to his xenos, Diomēs, a superior set of armour in exchange for a much cheaper set.

\(^{20}\) For timē, see Adkins: “‘Honour’ and ‘punishment’ in the Homeric Poems” B.I.C.S. vii (1960) 23 ff.

\(^{21}\) For the definition of what is meant by a results-culture cf. Adkins: Merit and Responsibility pp. 46 ff.

Phainops, worn out by miserable old age, to whom now come ‘grief and sorrowful cares’ in addition because of the deaths of his two sons. But line 154 makes it clear that the sons are precious to him as guardians of his property, to preserve it intact after his death, and that a great part of the Homeric pathos lies in the fact that now his property goes out of his immediate family to heirs not of the direct line.

When Simoeisios is killed in Iliad 4. 477–9, the pathos is once again essentially Homeric. Whereas a modern reader would probably concentrate on ‘his brief life’, for the Homeric audience, the shortness of his life is to be lamented because it prevented him from repaying to his parents what they have expended on bringing him to adulthood. He has failed in this, and his parents have had a bad bargain and would be pitied.

We can see clearly that the emphasis in the Homeric family relationships is different from that prevailing today and influences the focus of the pathos. As already mentioned, pathos is related to one’s own fears for oneself, and one’s fears will in turn be influenced by one’s whole framework of values and attitudes.

Homer’s similes drawn from nature are also occasionally used with pathetic effect. The death of Simoeisios is described by the image of a poplar tree, cut down by a wagon-maker (Iliad 4. 482–9).\(^{23}\) It is difficult or even impossible to know to what extent details in a Homeric simile can be regarded as immediately significant and relevant to what is being described. Though the pathos of the fall of a beautiful tree may lead the modern reader to a feeling of regret concerning the fall of Simoeisios, this is not the whole story. The idea that war is totally purposeless is foreign to Homer. War is too central to the whole framework of values of an heroic era. Just as the tree is cut down by the wagon-maker for a purpose, so Simoeisios dies so that the aretē of Aias can be proved. Yet, though the poet understands this aim, he gives a picture of a fine tree, growing in lush surroundings, branching luxuriantly at the top. We think of the young agathos, brought up in comfortable surroundings, who is just reaching the prime of his strength. Now he lies in the dust, his life seeping out of him, as the poplar lies, drying out. There is a purpose, and yet there is a fall.

When Agamemnon kills first Isos, then Antiphos, Homer adds the image of the doe, unable to protect her young from the lion (Iliad 11. 113–21). Clearly the main point of this simile is the exaltation of Agamemnon’s aretē. Attention is focussed on the lion’s strength and the weakness and fear of his opponent. The ease of the lion’s attack through the hōs (thus) in line 112, points to the ease of Agamemnon’s slaying of his two victims and the fearful flight of the Trojans is compared to that of the doe. Despite this Homeric emphasis, it is at least possible that the pathos the modern reader perceives in the fate of the fawns and the helplessness of their mother was felt also by the Homeric audience, as well as a contempt for what was so clearly inferior.

\(^{23}\) Compare also Iliad 13. 389–91.
When Achilles is explaining to Odysseus and Aias the reason for the depth of his anger against Agamemnon, he uses the image of a mother-bird, exhausting herself to feed her young fledglings (Iliad 9. 323–6). Just so, he says, by continual fighting, he would win much booty which was then handed over to Agamemnon. Agamemnon would distribute it among the Greek leaders, keeping a large portion for himself. In this way, and since Agamemnon has taken away Achilles’ prize, Briseis, Achilles who had borne the brunt of the fighting is left without any of its rewards.

A difference of attitude is immediately and startlingly apparent. To the modern reader, the simile presents a picture of the selfless devotion of a mother-bird to her children but for Achilles, it is merely an illustration of fruitless labour. The phrase, ‘things go kakos, badly, for her herself’ (line 324), is especially revealing. Because to fare badly is a disgrace by arete-standards, it is the respective humiliations suffered by himself and the mother-bird that motivate Achilles’ use of this simile.

We can see, then, that the response of Homer’s immediate audience to the pathos in the Iliad would be related, in some cases, to different aspects of the situations or relationships from those upon which we may tend to concentrate. This happens because cultures have, within the framework of their own norms and values, differing perceptions of what constitutes misfortune and involves pathos.

I shall now turn to examination of the words used for ‘pity’ in Homer.

The first such word is the verb oiktirein, to pity, with the related terms oiktos, (noun) pity, and oiktros, (adjective) pitiable, (superlative, oikistos). The word oiktros is used five times, and four of these are in combination with forms of the participle ‘wailing’, in contexts of grieving or weeping. All these four are from the Odyssey. The fifth example is from the Iliad, in a passage already cited, where the dead Iphidamas is described as oiktros in that he had not yet had any joy of his new bride for whom he had paid a good price. In all five cases, there is a connection with misfortune. In fact, in each case there is a connection with death, except in Odyssey 4. 716–9, where Penelope is described as ‘wailing pitiable’ when she hears of Telemachos’ departure in search of news of his father, Odysseus. Yet even here Homer speaks of a ‘life-destroying grief’ pouring over her (Odyssey 4. 716). We find, too, that the superlative form, oikistos, is always associated with death.

It is noticeable that oiktros is never used in connection with a warrior’s death, except in the case of Iphidamas. It is

---

26. Odyssey 11. 412; 24. 34; 12. 258; 23. 79; 22. 472; 12. 341–2. In the only example of oikistion in the Iliad, Priam, appealing to Hektor not to go out to fight Achilles but to stay in Troy and protect him, says, “It is in every way becoming for a young man, slain in war, to lie pierced by a sharp bronze spear; whatever is visible is in every way beautiful about the man though dead; but when the dogs defile the grey head, the grey beard and genitals of an old man who has been killed, this is indeed oikistion, the most pitiable thing for wretched mortals.” (Iliad 22. 71–6.)
as if the feeling involved in oiktros is aroused only by people placed in a position of peculiar humiliation, of especially shameful failure under Homeric arete-standards. The dead warrior, though defeated, has died nobly and thus does not deserve the term. Iphidamas merits the term through his having given a lot in return for nothing which is failure by these standards. This is, perhaps, why contexts occur where the rendering 'most shameful' seems closest to oiktiston. An important example in this context is the death described by Priam, which is specifically contrasted to the death in which 'everything is becoming' (22.71) and 'everything is beautiful about the man, though dead' (22.73). Oiktros is clearly associated with shame (22.75).

But it does not need the final humiliation of a shameful death to rouse oiktos. In Iliad 23, Achilles proposes that, although Eumelos actually came last in the race, he should be given the second prize, since his coming in last did not truly reflect the fact that he was a man of very great arete (line 536). Antilochos, who has won the second prize, objects and suggests that Achilles produce another prize from his tent, 'if you pity him and he is philos to you in your heart' (Iliad 23.548). Eumelos is shamed by not matching up to his own ability and this could rouse pity.

When Priam, in Iliad 24, goes to Achilles to beg for the return of Hektor's body, he appeals to Achilles' aidos, reverence, for the gods, eleos, pity, and the memory of his own father. In lines 507–516, we can see that Priam's position is one of great humiliation. He has had to come and beg a favour from his son's killer, in a society where there are no sanctions which might induce Achilles to grant it. He is an old man, unable to defend himself. Despite the relieving word 'gently' (508), the fact remains that he is thrust away by Achilles and left to weep, grovelling at his feet (510). It is only when Achilles has recovered from his own emotion that he has room to experience oiktos (516) and this leads him to raise the old man to his feet. Whatever emotion, then, is involved in oiktirein, it has the sense of 'see in a shameful situation' as a prerequisite.

Two instances of the word oiktos itself occur in the Odyssey. The first comes in book 2. Telemachos has just angrily complained of the behaviour of the suitors in his home. He then throws the speaker's baton to the ground and bursts into tears. We are told that 'pity gripped the whole crowd' and they remained silent, refraining from putting the youthful Telemachos in his place with angry words (Odyssey 2.81–3). Telemachos is in the humiliating position of having to watch his family possessions being consumed and his house taken over by a mob of unwelcome guests. Because of his youth, he cannot effectively deal with them.

The second example comes at Odyssey 24.432–5 and 438 when Antinoos' father appeals to the other Ithakans to help him kill Odysseus and his men, in revenge for the killing of his son and the other suitors. We do not hear the effect oiktos has on the actions of the Ithakans because two messengers appear at this moment. However, it seems that the shame is shared by those who experience oiktos—the shame of being unable to take adequate revenge.
**Oiktos**, then, is roused by the sight of another’s humiliation, accompanied by distress. Its effect is to cause the man who experiences it to refrain from triumphing over the one who is humiliated, though this would be his right under Homeric aretē-standards. It causes Achilles not to take advantage of Priam’s helplessness, and indeed, to restore to him some of his lost dignity. This, too, he does for the loser of the race, Eumelos. It is interesting that it should be the unyielding Achilles who is the only man in the Iliad to experience this emotion. It should be noted, however, that positive restorative action is not a necessary concomitant of oiktos. It causes the men of the Ithakan assembly to refrain from reproaching or mocking the youthful Telemachos. The exception is Antinoos (2. 84), who is consistently painted as an unfeeling rough man.

**Oiktos**, then, was, it seems, experienced as a feeling of inhibition, a shrinking back, that checked a man from following his normal course as dictated by Homeric aretē-standards. This shrinking feeling would explain the fact that the sense of the word covers both the feeling of pity, in modern terms, and a feeling of shrinking horror such as would be occasioned by the oiktistoi deaths, revulsion at the sight of such extreme shame. In its effect then, oiktos resembles our ‘pity’ in that it leads men to refrain from taking advantage of another’s troubles.

Of much more frequent occurrence are the verbs eleēin and eleairein and the adjective eleēinos. Eleairein is used in the present and imperfect tenses and eleēin occurs only in the aorist form.

**(E)leos**, pity, is felt both by gods and men. Eleos in the gods may be caused by the sight of an agathos in trouble in battle. In Iliad 15. 12–3, Zeus feels eleos at the sight of Hektor lying spitting up blood and he sends Hera to control the other gods and stop them from helping the Greeks. In Iliad 16. 431, he feels eleos at the sight of Patroklos and Sarpedon attacking one another, and he debates whether to allow fate to take its course or whether to rescue his son, Sarpedon. Poseidon on two occasions eleēse the Greeks who were in trouble in battle (Iliad 15. 44 and 13. 15–6). Hera herself experiences this feeling for the Greeks when Hektor is on the rampage, and she sets off with Athene to join the battle (Iliad 8. 350).

In each case, it is the people whom they normally support in battle who rouse this feeling in the gods. Zeus, of course, supports either side at different times and supports also notable agathoi on each side. Hera and Poseidon are consistently partisan, however, and it is for their protégés that they feel eleos.

The humiliation of an agathos outside the battle context may rouse eleos in a god, for example when Apollo protects the body of Hektor from disfigurement, out of eleos (Iliad 24. 19–20). Zeus, seeing Priam who must go and plead with his enemy, Achilles, for the release of his son’s body, eleēse the old man (Iliad 24. 332) and sends Hermes to guide Priam to Achilles’ tent.

The sight of tears may also evoke the response of eleos in the gods. In Iliad 19. 340, we find that Zeus eleēse the Achaian leaders who are mourning the death of Patroklos and, when the others go to supper, he sends Athene to feed the grieving Achilles with ambrosia and nectar. Achilles’ horses, too, portrayed
as mourning for Patroklos who had cared for them, have the same effect on Zeus; and his eleos (eleēse 17. 441) leads him to wish that he had not given them to a mortal man and thus exposed the immortal horses to grief at the death of their mortal handler (Iliad 17. 443-4).

In each case, it is possible to discern, from the words or actions that succeed eleos, an impulse to put right, as far as possible, the situation which has caused the god eleairein, to pity. In the last cited example, the desire to put things right cannot find its way out in positive action but is expressed in a futile wish that an act of the past might be annulled.27

It has been mentioned that eleos is inspired in gods who are favourably inclined towards someone. In the Odyssey, all the gods are sympathetic to Odysseus' plight except Poseidon whose hostility is unrelenting and we find that 'all the gods eleairon except Poseidon. He hotly meaneainen against the godlike Odysseus until he arrived at his own land.' (Odyssey 1. 19-21). The sensation involved in eleairein is contrasted to that of meaneainin. This contrast is used also in the Iliad where Homer says that Achilles meaneainon mishandled Hektor's body, while the gods felt eleos and urged Hermes to go and steal the body from Achilles.

Meneainein has been analysed as a ‘powerful positive forward drive’,28 directed against someone. By contrast, eleairein is an impulse or positive forward drive in someone's favour.

If the god or goddess is one who is consistently hostile or, in accordance with a special set of circumstances, may be presumed to be hostile, he or she is assumed not to feel eleos (Iliad 7. 27). Otherwise, elein may occur in prayers, presumably designed to change their attitude from one of opposition to one of support.

After the disasters suffered by the Greeks and Achilles' continued obduracy have implied that Zeus was hostile, Nestor suggests that before they send an embassy to beg Achilles to change his mind, they pray to Zeus to elein (Iliad 9. 172). In fact, in the context of the 'over-determination'29 in Homer, the hostility of Zeus as well as the anger of Achilles may be equally regarded as the cause of the Greeks' failure and therefore both would have to be asked to elein.

Similarly, when Priam is intending to approach Achilles to plead for Hektor's body, Hekabe suggests that he pray to Zeus to elein (Iliad 24. 301) since the killing of their son and the maltreatment of his corpse are presumptive proofs of Zeus' hostility as well as of Achilles' power and anger. Again, both Zeus and Achilles have to be asked eleairein.30

---

27. Other examples of a god who eleēse and takes action which may rectify the situation: Odyssey 5.336 ff.; 4. 354 ff.; and 4. 828, where Athene sends a comforting message to Penelope.
30. Cf. also Helenos' suggestion that Hekabe be persuaded to sacrifice to Athene (Iliad 6. 94-5) and the Phaiakians's sacrifice to Poseidon when their ship was turned to stone (Odyssey 13. 182) and Anchises's prayer to Aphrodite to elein when she by her seductive presence poses a threat to his security (Homeric Hymns 5. 188-90). When Odysseus fears drowning, he prays to the river god to elein (Odyssey 5. 447-50).
In one passage, a hostile goddess actually shows eleos. Odysseus' men all weep for joy when Kirke changes them back from animals to men again. Kirke has been hostile to Odysseus and his men, as her actions have shown. But at the sight of the tears of joy which the men shed at their release from humiliation, even (kai) the hostile Kirke experiences pity ( Odyssey 10. 339) and an impulse in their favour which leads her to tell them to beach their ships and bring back the men left on guard to enjoy her hospitality.

This, then, is eleos as shown by the gods. It is already clear that eleos implies a 'positive forward drive', an impulse in favour of someone in misfortune, accompanied by a desire to correct their misfortune. This is to be contrasted with oiktos which, as has been seen, was probably experienced not as a forward drive but as an inhibition.

In the field of human relationships, when eleos is a factor in a situation involving someone defeated in battle, it is the emotion felt when another agathos on one's own side is killed, and it is immediately succeeded by the impulse to attack the enemy in revenge. This occurs four times. The sight of the humiliation of a fellow-agathos causes a desire to redress that wrong by inflicting a like humiliation on the enemy.

Outside the battle context, in non-competitive relationships between people, eleos is the sensation experienced by Odysseus in the underworld at the sight of the spirits of his companion Elpenor, his mother and later Agamemnon. His eleos is roused by the recollection that Elpenor's body has been left unburied and unwept, and in the ensuing conversation he agrees to remedy this. In the case of Agamemnon, it is the sight of the tears and weakness of his spirit that causes eleos but, of course, no corrective action follows. Yet Odysseus experienced a desire to help.

Just as in the case of the gods, pleas for eleos occur where a basic hostility forms the background. When Priam and Idaios meet Hermes on their way to see Achilles in order to recover Hektor's body, they do not immediately ask for eleos. They wonder whether to presume an implacably competitive instinct and to run away, or whether they might induce a non-competitive attitude of mind in him by supplication (praying him 'by his knees eleain' Iliad 24. 356-7).

As we would expect, in situations where competitiveness is clearly to the fore, such pleas would be fruitless. This applies to pleas for mercy on the battle-field. Trōs pleads with Achilles to eleain and spare his life (Iliad 20. 463-6). We have already seen that supplication is used to turn the heart of the hostile one in the case of the gods. We see here the element of persuasion (peisesthai, line 466). Trōs is relying on the shared feature of their youth (line 465) to establish a common ground which may incline Achilles to experience eleos, an impulse to spare his enemy. Presumably, he hopes that the common ground may cause a feeling of kinship and thus reduce the hostility.

31. See note 28.
32. Iliad 5. 561-3; 610-2; 17. 344-7; 352-3.
33. Odyssey 11. 55; 393.
Several times in the Homeric poems there are appeals to *aidōs* and *eleos* together. When Lykaon pleads with Achilles for his life, he makes a double appeal—to *aidōs*, respect, for himself as a suppliant and to *eleos* (Iliad 21. 74–5). He then goes on to plead that he has broken bread with Achilles (line 76), that he has brought him a good sum in ransom (line 79), thus increasing his *timē*, honour, and finally, that he was born of a different mother from Hektor who had roused this raging hostility in Achilles by killing Patroklos (95–6). An appeal to *eleos*, it seems, involved an attempt to establish some basis for a *philos*-or non-competitive relationship that may override the basic conflict between the men. Trōs hopes to do this by emphasizing their shared youth (line 465) which would establish a bond of sympathy and by appealing to respect for suppliants. He pleads that he is technically *philos* to Achilles in that he has broken bread with him while his prisoner and that he has in the past assisted Achilles by increasing his *timē*. These reasons for establishing a non-competitive relationship do work on Achilles to the extent that, as he kills Lykaon, he acknowledges the claim by calling him *philē* (Iliad 21. 106); yet the claims are not strong enough, despite Achilles' mental acceptance of the plea, to break the *menos* of his anger.

A combined plea to *aidōs* for a suppliant and to *eleos* occurs twice when Odysseus is wreaking vengeance on the suitors. Lēōđēs (Odyssey 22. 312) makes this double appeal and goes on to say that he has never done anything outrageous (line 314) and has, indeed, attempted to restrain the other suitors. Odysseus, however, refuses to believe that his behaviour displayed friendliness; he insists that Lēōđēs has longed to hear news of his, Odysseus', death so that he can take his wife (lines 321–5). Again the plea fails.

Nevertheless, the bard Phēmios, who makes the same plea at Odyssey 22. 344, succeeds because Telemachos steps forward and bears witness that Phēmios is guiltless (line 356). He has done nothing hostile to Odysseus.

There is only one example of *eleos* in which it leads a man to spare an enemy's life without this special pleading to establish a friendly ground. It occurs in Odysseus' lying story of his adventures, told to Eumaios. He tells how, after being defeated in a battle against the Egyptians, he was about to be killed; but he gripped the king's knees and the king took pity on him (Odyssey 14. 278–80). Odysseus appears to make no plea but his own helplessness. However, it is possible that the story is abbreviated in the telling and omits details of the special pleading. Anyway, the story is untrue!

There is another example outside the context of active hostilities where an appeal for *eleos* was successful—when Priam visits Achilles to ask for his son's body. The audience could not, on past showing, feel any confidence that the appeal would succeed. As a consequence of Agamemnon's high-handed behaviour and insult to Achilles' *timē* described in Iliad 1, Achilles no longer

---

34. Eleven times.
experiences a desire to help his own friends, let alone his enemies. Priam himself is by no means confident of success. He prays to Zeus that he may 'come into Achilles' home a *philos* and *eleinon,* an object of *eleos* (Iliad 24. 309). Once again, one notes the correlation between a non-competitive relationship and the possibility of *eleos.*

Yet Priam insists on going on his mission, and he tells his friends in Troy that he intends to appeal to *aidos* for Hektor's youth and pity for his own old age (Iliad 22. 418–20). When he does make his appeal, he actually pleads through *aidos,* reverence, for the gods and pity for himself (Iliad 24. 503–6). He is, he says, *eleinoteros,* more pitiable, in that he is brought to the humiliating position of having to beg favours from the man who killed his son, whereas the *arete*-standards demand that he exact vengeance. But he also appeals for *eleos* through Achilles' love for his father (504), and this is effective. Achilles' thoughts turn to his father and he weeps for him. Peleus, like Priam, is now an old man. Like Priam, he is now without his son, his protector. The picture conjured up of his father's vulnerability probably causes Achilles' tears. Now a bond of common ground is established and Achilles begins to treat Priam in a non-competitive manner and not as a defeated enemy.

*Eleos* is not only urged upon one's enemies in order to establish a *philos*-relationship, but it may also be urged on one already in such a relationship and who for some reason is felt to be acting in a manner inconsistent with the relationship. We see this in the case of the embassy to Achilles in Iliad 9. *Eleos* is urged repeatedly upon Hektor, too, in a series of unsuccessful attempts to persuade him not to go out and face Achilles in battle. Andromache, Priam and Hekabe all at different points urge it on him. They feel that he is not treating them as *philoi* as, by going out to battle, he is leaving them unprotected, exposed to a dreadful fate. However, the immediate demands of Homeric *arete*-standards override their claim. Hektor must, as an *agathos,* go out to war. It does not mean that he is insensitive to their counter-claims. In fact, as he hands their son back to Andromache, who stands smiling at them through her tears, he *elees* her, but in the circumstances he can do no more than caress her and comfort her with words, before going out to battle.

*Eleos* is involved in *xenia* or the offering of hospitality in cases where the prospective guest is in an obviously inferior position such as to render it unlikely or impossible that he will be able to return the hospitality offered. In
anticipating the fate in store for her son now that his father is dead, Andromachē says he will depend on eleos for his food. He will be reduced to beggary, dependent on borrowed clothes, and when he goes to his father's old friends as they are sitting at table, out of eleos they will offer him a scrap of food or wet his lips with wine (Iliad 22. 490ff.). The child has no rights once the agathos, the protector of the household, is gone. He is dependent on 'charity', a friendly impulse from his father's companions, as, in view of his youth, he is unable to assert his right to sustenance or to return that which is given him. Andromachē clearly does not feel that this impulse is to be relied upon, but this mood may be induced by her own unhappiness and the shock of their suddenly altered status.

In the Odyssey, which shows us much more of the xenia-relationship in action, it is eleairontes, pitying, that the suitors give the beggar Odysseus food (Odyssey 17. 367). One who seeks hospitality may be eleēinos in that he is an unfortunate and in need of help, and he may also be philos in that he has at home the capacity to repay his entertainment. Eleos, then, may lead to the offer of hospitality, without hope of return and without a pre-existing philos-relationship, in the context of peacetime when competitiveness is less immediately pressing. Although eleos does operate, for the most part, only within the framework of the established co-operative relationships such as xenia and philotēs, in general, as Odysseus' confident approach to and claims on his various hosts in the Odyssey show, the strength of the hospitable traditions of the Homeric world was such as to give every comer at least a reasonable chance of being treated as a philos or, if he seems poverty-stricken, as eleēinos. In war, as one would expect, one's reception is much more doubtful.

We have seen, then, that eleos is a positive impulse in favour of someone in trouble which, when followed up, leads to action on his behalf, while oiktos merely involves a holding back from further action which would increase the distress and shame of the object of one's oiktos. In a competitive society, if someone else is in trouble, one should logically exploit the situation to the full in order to increase one's own success. Any impulse which may lead one not to

41. Cf. also Odyssey 6. 175. As one would expect, the Kyklops who is unacquainted with co-operative sentiments (Odyssey 9. 106 ff.; 187 ff.; esp. 192), feels no eleos (23. 313) which might have led him to help Odysseus (9. 349-50). Repeatedly, he answers with a nēlēēs heart (9. 272; 368).

In fact, apart from phrases involving nēlēēs bronze (19 times—including Iliad 3. 292; 4. 348; Odyssey 18. 86; 21. 300), nēlēēs day (9 times: e.g. Iliad 11. 484; 13. 514) and a single example of nēlēēs bond (Iliad 10. 443), the phrases associated with Achilles and the Kyklops make up the full complement of occurrences of this word in the Iliad and Odyssey.

42. See the article by Adkins cited in note 40.

43. Diomēdēs feels eleos for the old man Nestor when he is going round waking the Greek leaders for an emergency meeting (Iliad 10. 175-6) and takes over the task. One can, then, feel eleos for relatively mild distress.

Telemachos, asking Nestor and Menelaīs for news of his father, begs them, not out of aīdōs for him or eleos, to soften the news. Eleos would lead them to try and spare his distress (Odyssey 3. 96-7; 4. 327-7).
pursue one's advantage is in essence non-competitive or social. *Eleos* and *oiktus* are such impulses. When one *agathos* sees another in misfortune, he may, through *oiktos*, refrain from making capital out of the situation or, through *eleos*, attempt actively to improve the other's position. We have seen that, with very few exceptions, *eleos* operates only within the well-established framework of such co-operative relationships as did exist in Homeric society, *philoi*ēs and *xenia*. It does not normally lead to the exercise of humanity outside this sphere. Nevertheless, pity in Homer offers interesting examples of co-operative and social operations, where it is exercised.
Acta Classica is published annually by the Classical Association of South Africa. The journal has been in production since 1958. It is listed on both the ISI and the SAPSE list of approved publications.

For further information go to: http://www.casa-kvs.org.za/acta_classica.htm