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HOW HOMERIC IS THE ARISTOTELIAN CONCEPTION OF COURAGE?

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ABTRACT: When Aristotle limits the manifestation of true courage to the military context only, his primary target is an overly inclusive conception of courage presented by Plato in the *Laches*. At the same time, Aristotle explicitly tries to demarcate his ideal of genuine courage from the paradigmatic examples of courageous actions derived from the Homeric epics. It remains questionable, though, whether Aristotle is truly earnest in his efforts to distance himself from Homer. It will be argued that Aristotle's attempt to associate with Homer the two forms of specious courage—courage of the citizen troops and spirit-caused courage—fails to provide sufficient criteria for the demarcation in question. All the essential elements of the Aristotelian account of courage, such as a voluntary choice, a noble goal, and a *thumos*-driven reaction guided by reason are exemplified by a number of Homeric characters as well. It is thus likely that the philosopher's account of courage largely incorporates the poetic tradition at a new level, rather than supersedes it.

1. INTRODUCTION

Even a cursory comparison of Plato's discussion of courage in the *Laches* with Aristotle's take on the same virtue in the *Nicomachean Ethics* makes it obvious that the two philosophers have fundamentally different conceptions of what genuine courage amounts to. The most conspicuous difference between Plato's Socrates and Aristotle concerns the scope of actions that should properly fall under the category "courageous." There is a tendency in the *Laches*

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toward widening the scope of courageous actions, with Socrates suggesting, contrary to the initial opinion of his interlocutors, Laches and Nicias, that not only do soldiers in battle manifest courage, but also those suffering the perils of the sea, resisting the fear of pain, fighting a disease, coping with poverty, or confronting a politically precarious situation—all these people are potentially exhibiting essentially the same virtue (191d1–e1).[1] Moreover, Socrates is apparently willing to include in the same category even those who "are mighty to contend against desires and pleasures" (191e1), that is, individuals showing an unusual level of self-control when confronted by strong temptations, and, perhaps, even certain wild animals (196e).

Plato's overly inclusive and internalized conception of courage was unacceptable to Aristotle, who sought to narrow down significantly the range of truly courageous actions. It is natural to see Aristotle's approach as a kind of "restoration project"—a return to the martial roots of this virtue, while resisting the popular attempts of extending the manifestations of courageous behavior beyond the military context. But any conceptual restoration implies an existence of a previous tradition, where the concept in question enjoyed its proper position in the semantic space of language. Such a tradition, of course, is readily identifiable—the heroic world of the Homeric epics.[2]

As always, the initial impression might well be delusive, and more evidence would be needed before we could characterize Aristotle's view on courage as "Homeric" in some nontrivial sense of this word. The following discussion will revolve around two distinct but related questions: (1) How does Aristotle himself position his view with respect to the Homeric heritage? (2) To what extent have the elements of the Homer-rooted cult of the military heroes been preserved in the Aristotelian theory of genuine courage? Answering these questions will require a comparison of Homer with Aristotle on this topic at some level—to the extent that a direct comparison between a philosopher and a poet is at all possible. It is apparent that we cannot compare Aristotelian courage with its Homeric equivalent in the same way in which we could compare Aristotle's ἀνδρεία with, say, Aquinas' fortitude, and, yet, we should still be able to elucidate the most conspicuous psychological and behavioral features of a courageous warrior in the epics, testing those against the theoretical requirements of the Aristotelian account. As a preliminary step, a summary of Aristotle's own requirements for genuine courage will be necessary.

[1] In-text references will cite the Bekker numbers from Aristotle 1934.

[2] Archaic Greece is by no means unique in its emphasis on martial essence of courage. Miller points out that "the martial view [of courage] is easily the dominant view, informing heroic literature and songs of triumph from Ur to Ugarit, to Judea and Nineveh, to the Germanic North. Indeed, it is pretty nearly a universal view of courage" (2009, 18).

2. ARISTOTLE'S CRITERIA FOR A COURAGEOUS WARRIOR

The direct and indirect polemic with Socrates of the *Dialogues* is a constant feature in many of Aristotle's philosophical discussions, but it is particularly apparent in their respective treatments of the Homeric legacy. The Homeric epics have assumed a unique status among the Greeks that can only be compared to that of the sacred scriptures of a religion long before Aristotle's time, and Plato merely records a common opinion when he calls Homer "the educator of Hellas."[3] But while recognizing Homer's actual influence on the Greeks, Plato largely bemoans this fact, and seeks to show (especially in *The Republic*) the corrupting effects of poetry in general and the Homeric system of values in particular. In that context, we can see Socrates's radical disagreement with Laches, who identifies courage with military achievement (190c–d) and is clearly a bearer of the familiar Homeric ideals in the dialogue, as another attempt to liberate the ethical inquiry from the pressures of the flawed tradition.[4]

It is significant that in his treatment of courage in the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle is apparently willing to reconsider the definition of courage proposed by Laches in the beginning of Plato's dialogue, yet at a new level. According to Laches' first attempt, which failed miserably after questioning by Socrates, a man of courage is the one "who does not run away, but remains at his post and fights against the enemy" (190e4–6). Although Aristotle's own position will be much more nuanced and more sophisticated than that of Laches, both share an important assumption about the proper scope of courageous actions: true courage is exhibited during a life-threatening situation in war. As a first step, Aristotle switches the focus from the characteristically Socratic type of question, "What is courage?" to the more practical one: "What are the main characteristics of a courageous person?" The later philosopher has little patience with the more abstract investigations into the *idea* of courage itself, and the whole inquiry strikes the reader as having a rather pragmatic disposition. He thus proceeds by listing the particular behavioral, emotive, and situational conditions necessary for courageous behavior, which would allow us to make the basic distinctions between the types of character and, one hopes, to identify a truly courageous agent when we encounter one in real life. It will be helpful at this point to list three

[3] Plato 1969, *Republic*, 606e2.

[4] By contrast, Aristotle's attitude toward Homer (and poetry in general) is much more reverential than that of his great predecessor. In *Poetics*, Homer is constantly praised as an exceptional dramatic artist, the father of both the tragedy and the comedy, and there are more references to Homeric epics than to any of the other poets or tragedians. We may also recall Aristotle's famous remark on the philosophical significance of poetry in *Poetics*, 1451b5–11.

important Aristotelean definitions from the *Ethics*, which complement each other in several crucial aspects.

1. "The man, then who faces and who fears [φοβούμενος] the right things from the right motive, in the right way and at the right time, and who feels confidence under the corresponding conditions, is brave" (1115b16–18).
2. "He who stands his ground against things that are terrible and delights [χαίρων] in this or at least is not pained is brave, while the man who is pained is a coward" (1104b6–9).
3. "Properly, then, he will be called brave who is fearless [ἀδεής] in face of a noble death [καλόν θάνατον], and of all emergencies that involve death; and the emergencies of war are in the highest degree of this kind." (1115a32–35)[5]

The three definitions raise at least the following four issues: (1) the scope of a courageous action and the context in which true courage can be exhibited; (2) fear and confidence as the two main emotions with respect to which courage should be defined; (3) emotional satisfaction or pleasure experienced by a courageous agent; (4) the proper (noble) goal of a courageous effort. Without entering too deeply into the countless controversies surrounding each of these issues, I will present below what appears to me the most likely interpretation of Aristotle's position.

As one of the virtues of character, courage is presented as a "middle" state between the two extremes, which in this case results in two possible definitions—as a mean between excessive confidence and the shortage thereof and as a middle state between total fearlessness and the experiencing of fear that exceeds some appropriate level of intensity. The latter description creates a well-known tension with the distinction between a self-controlled and a truly virtuous person, which is central to Aristotelian ethics (e.g., 1102b26–28; 1152a1–3). Does a person, then, who possesses the virtue of courage in its entirety, feel any fear *at all* when confronted with the life-threatening situation in a battle? Aristotle's general requirement for the "purity" of virtues seems to suggest that a courageous agent, unlike a self-controlled one, would simply have no deviant passions to control. Indeed, on a number of occasions a brave man is openly described by Aristotle as *fearless* [ἄφοβος, ἀδεής, ἀνέκπληκτος, ἀτάραχον],[6] but, of course, the complication arises when we

[5] Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from the *Nicomachean Ethics* (N.E.) are adapted from H. Rackham's translation.

[6] E.g., 1115a32; 1117a17. All four Greek synonyms are used by Aristotle in his description of a courageous man.

observe that one of the corresponding vices is defined as "excess in fearlessness" (1115b25). Instead of insisting on the complete fearlessness of the courageous warriors in the face of death, then, we may rather agree with those authors who prefer a purely *behavioral* interpretation of fearlessness—a courageous agent only acts *as if* he feels no fear, even if a medial level of fear is still present as a real subjective experience. On this reading, the qualification "fearless" should properly apply to external behavior rather than to the internal state of one who boldly faces the dangers of war.[7]

With the behavioral interpretation of fearlessness as a constitutive element of courage, we make a full circle and return to the behavioral definition of courage advanced by Laches: a courageous man is the one "who does not run away, but remains at his post and fights against the enemy" (190e4–6). We have observed earlier that Aristotle favors Laches' suggestion to limit the occasions for a courageous action to a military context, but it is less likely that he would also be content with limiting the definition of the virtue itself to a description of an agent's external behavior, without considering the relevant "passions" as well as the motivating reasons for one's action. A soldier who "does not run away" because he underestimated the force of the enemy, or because his desire for spoils is more intense than his fear of death, would exhibit a merely spurious form of courage, according to Aristotle. But reference to a behavior alone would not allow him to make these distinctions.

A courageous person is praiseworthy, admirable, and commendable. The inherent normative element of courage would preclude the attempts to reduce courage to mere fearlessness, since the latter term lacks any obvious evaluative features when divorced from the contextual clues. As Curzer rightly observes, "the mere mastery over fear in the face of the fearsome is not a valuable accomplishment, in itself" (2012, 31). But, similarly, as Aristotle saw clearly, omitting from the definition of a courageous action the specification of the proper goal of that action threatens to eliminate the normative aspect of courage. Unless courage leads to some substantive good, it is not clear what makes it a virtue and why it is desirable to acquire this character trait. The substantive good a courageous agent seeks to achieve is what Aristotle means by the "noble end" [τέλος καλός] of courage.

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[7] E.g., Pears 1980, Urmson 1988. Pears suggests that Aristotle probably had in mind the "behavioral use" of the word fearless in this context, "which comments only on the manner of the agent's conduct," rather than on his subjective experience (178–79). We may also observe that in the *Iliad* in a famous passage where Idomeneus describes the features of a courageous warrior, he wisely stops short from demanding complete fearlessness: "But the brave man's skin will not change color, *nor is he too much frightened* [οὔτε τι λίην ταρβεῖ], once he has taken his place in the hidden position" (*Il.* 13.284–85; emphasis added). All quotes from the *Iliad* (*Il.*) are from Lattimore's translation (Homer 1967).

The nobility aspect of Aristotle's discussion of courage remains one of the most difficult to understand. The qualification "noble" [καλόν] is applied by Aristotle in the context of his analysis of this virtue to circumstances of war (1115a27–30), to death (1115 a32–35; 1115b5–7), to danger (1115a30), to courage itself (1115b20–22), to the deeds of war (1117b14), and, most importantly, to the intended end of one's courageous action (1115b22–24). Some of these attributions are more obvious than others. We can interpret Aristotle's contention that courage is καλόν (noble, fine, good, beautiful) as analytic truth, which simply follows from his conception of a virtue—a character trait which positively contributes to fulfilling the specifically human purpose or function [ἔργον] (1099a20–21). The nobility of death, on the other hand, must be seen as derivative from nobility of the circumstances in which death occurs (we may say that nobility is a "transitive" property in this case). But the paradigmatic example of the circumstances in which a noble death could occur or in which one could face a noble danger are, for Aristotle, the circumstances of war. But what is it that makes a war or a battle noble? Surely, it cannot be the case that the war is noble and desirable for its own sake. As Aristotle observes elsewhere, "no one chooses to be at war for the sake of being at war" (1177b9–10). Hence, it must be some further goal of the war, which alone bears the attribute "noble" nonderivatively.

There are a number of benefits one can achieve by waging a successful war, but one such benefit is more obvious than others—"we make war that we may live in peace" (1177b6). Still, peace, we may agree, is not the ultimate goal of the war either, but merely the instrumental one. We value peace primarily because it creates suitable conditions for pursuing our final end—εὐδαιμονία (happiness, well-being, flourishing). Indeed, Aristotle, when speaking of happiness, uses a number of superlatives, emphasizing its unique status as a final goal of all intentional actions, calling it "the best, noblest [κάλλιστον], and the most pleasant thing in the world" (1099a24–25). He also acknowledges that "the more [the brave man] is possessed of virtue in its entirety, the happier he is" (1117b7), thus reiterating an earlier remark (1104b6–9) about a peculiar kind of delight [το χαίρον] that a courageous agent is experiencing even at the moment of the greatest danger—a point that would not be lost on careful readers of Homer either.[8]

[8] In Homer, a desire to prove oneself worthy of one's martial *aretê* goes beyond the mere readiness to fight when forced to by the attacking enemy; it is also *eagerness* and even strong *yearning* for fighting that distinguishes the courageous leader. A real blood-lust is felt, for instance, in the words of Achilles, who encourages Agamemnon: "Now let us remember our joy [χάρμης] in warcraft" (*Il.*19.148 and esp. 213–14). Cf. also a possible translation of *Il.* 3.8: "The Achaeans marched, breathing eagerness (μένεα πνείοντες) for battle" (e.g., in G. M. Grube's translation of this line as it is quoted by Plato in *Republic* 389e6).

This reading should partly alleviate the common worry that the term "noble" connotes for Aristotle some esoteric, mysterious property, which cannot be easily transported to a different cultural milieu. Courage is noble in the same sense in which friendship is noble (cf. 1155a29), and the deeds of courage, which might often involve fighting in a battle, are also noble, since they aim at achieving the noblest goal of happiness. Noble, in this context, simply qualifies a highly desirable state of affairs, something one is willing to risk his life for. Yet, as always, there is a complication hiding behind the obvious. Courage stands out from all the other virtues in one crucial respect. Unlike the case with, say, temperance, friendship, or generosity, a consistent and repeated exercise of courage greatly diminishes one's chances of achieving happiness, since it now becomes less likely that the courageous fighter lives long enough to enjoy the benefits of a lasting peace. Paradoxically, then, a coward, who "throws away one's shield and takes to flight," and thus survives the battle, has an advantage over the courageous warrior, who perishes while fighting, when it comes to his chances of achieving happiness. Being alive, after all, is a basic precondition for being happy.

If a courageous person is willing to die in a battle, and if such a death is nonetheless noble and praiseworthy, we should say that the nobility of such a death derives not from the opportunity to achieve a person's own happiness, but from some other worthy goal, which is somehow furthered by one's perishing on the battlefield. But what could that other goal be? Surprisingly, Aristotle does not give us so much as a hint of the possible options here. Michelle Brady believes that Aristotle's silence on this subject can be explained by its obviousness to his likely audience. It was a universally shared assumption in Aristotle's Athens and elsewhere in Greece, according to Brady, that the soldier's sacrifice was done for the preservation of the *polis*, and Aristotle simply did not feel the need to reiterate that point (2005, 199). Curzer, on the other hand, offers a more probable reading, arguing that Brady limits the possible legitimate goals of a courageous action too severely and would himself include such examples of the praiseworthy goals of fighting as saving one's comrades (even if doing so is detrimental to one's *polis*), rescuing someone in need, maintaining one's honor, and freeing one's city from tyranny (2012, 28–29).

There are good reasons, including the textual ones (as we will see below), to side with the broader interpretation of the scope of the possible noble goals of courageous behavior. It must be admitted that the question what constitutes the noble goal of action for Aristotle will be crucial for my final thesis—that many Homeric characters, despite Aristotle's telling ambivalence on this issue, do exemplify true courage in the strict Aristotelian sense of this term, and thus can properly be used as examples of agents possessing the

virtue in question in its entirety. The thesis is *prima facie* problematic as it seems to go against Aristotle's own explicit attempts to distinguish his presented ideal of a courageous warrior from the Homeric paradigms. In the remaining sections, we will look at the specifics of Aristotle's interaction with the text of the epics and make an attempt to elucidate the reasons for his apparent reluctance to cite a Homeric hero as an instance of a truly courageous agent. It will be argued, however, that the reasons fall short of being convincing enough.

An outwardly fearless warrior, who fights in a war for a noble cause, and finds certain pleasure in risking his life for the sake of the noble, is surely central to the Aristotelian image of a courageous agent. But other requirements for genuine courage become apparent once he takes up the task of demarcating true virtue from various imitators. A truly courageous warrior controls his rage by the power of reason [*logos*] (1117a8ff); he fights voluntarily and not out of fear for penalties (1116a15ff); he is fully aware of the dangers ahead of him (1117a24ff); he is not acting fearlessly simply because he possesses superior martial skills (1116b19ff); and, finally, he is not by nature a sanguine person, who acts out of an overly optimistic disposition (1117a10ff). As we will observe below, presence or absence of some of these elements in a warrior will be the point of contention between Aristotle, on the one hand, and what Aristotle takes to be the paradigmatic Homeric hero on the other.[9]

3. COURAGE OF THE CITIZEN-SOLDIER

If my argument is sound, Aristotle is trying to revive the Homeric ideal of courage at a new level. And, yet, it must be admitted that he appears to be distancing himself in the text from the all-too-familiar Homeric image of a heroic warrior. Out of the five forms of risky behavior in war, which, according to Aristotle, merely mimic the genuine virtue, two are explicitly associated with the author of the epics.[10] These two forms of specious courage, then, will be particularly relevant for our understanding of the relation between the philosopher and the poet on the subject of courage. Special attention will be paid to the function of Homeric images and direct quotations in Aristotle's argument.

Aristotle begins demarcating his view on true courage from the various rivaling conceptions by mentioning the one that is "most closely resembling courage," and this happens to be the kind of courage "that Homer

[9] For a discussion how the Aristotelian conception of courage differs in key features from the mainstream modern understanding of this virtue, see Zavaliy and Aristidou 2014.

[10] N.E. Book III, Ch. 8.

portrayed" (1116a15ff). He labels it "the courage of the citizen-troops"[11] and goes on to present it as follows:

> Citizen troops appear to endure dangers because of the legal penalties and the reproach attaching to cowardice, and the honors (τιμάς) awarded to bravery; hence those races appear to be the bravest among which cowards are degraded (ἄτιμοι) and brave men held in honor (ἔντιμοι). It is this citizen courage which inspires the heroes portrayed by Homer. (1116a16–22)

This form of courage, which Aristotle associates here with Homer, is defined by reference to the three motivating causes of the risk-defying behavior of a soldier: (1) fear of penalties, (2) fear of shame (reproach), and (3) desire for honor. The first cause is left for a further discussion in the same chapter, while the third one is never explicitly analyzed; still, Aristotle immediately quotes the *Iliad* twice to illustrate the significance of shame for Homeric heroes. In both of Aristotle's quotations, Hector is mentioned, although he functions in the opposite roles in these two episodes, and, in fact, appears only indirectly in the second scene. The initial short quote—"*First will Polydamas be to heap reproach on me then*"—refers the readers to an episode when Hector, standing outside the Trojan walls, deliberates about the proper course of action in light of the approaching Achilles. After some hesitation, he comes to a decision not to hide behind the safety of the walls but to face his archenemy, and, in a short monologue, cites fear of shame, both from his trusted companion Polydamas and other Trojans, as the main reason for his choice (*Il.* 22.99–107). Hector, in other words, acts courageously on that occasion as he is conscious of the worst punishment that might befall a nobleman who fails to live up to high expectations—disgrace and dishonor in front of his peers. In the speech quoted by Aristotle, though, Hector says nothing about his desire for honor and glory as an additional motivating reason for fighting with Achilles, but relevant references could easily be supplied from elsewhere.[12]

In Aristotle's second quotation, Hector's role is reversed. While earlier he was concerned that *others* might find him unworthy of his heroic reputation, and would thus shame him for cowardliness, in the second case he appears as a would-be judge and a "distributer of shame" himself. Again, speaking to a

[11] Literally: "political [πολιτικήν] courage." Cf. Plato, *Rep.* 430c. Paul Shorey, in his commentary on Plato's use of this term, observes that "the word is often used of citizen soldiery as opposed to professional mercenaries" (Plato 1969, 218). Aristotle likewise contrasts "professional soldiers" with "citizen-forces" at 1116b15–21.

[12] E.g., *Il.* 22.110; 304–6. We may assume that the original audience of Aristotle's lectures was well-versed in the classics and he simply did not feel the need to labor the obvious point.

Greek audience, Aristotle is understandably brief in his two-line reference, but we can surely benefit from a longer quotation, as well as from some explanation of the context (the lines mentioned by Aristotle are italicized):

> Then in turn Diomedes of the great war cry answered:
> `Yes, old sir, all this you have said is fair and orderly.
> But this thought comes as a bitter sorrow to my heart and my spirit;
> *For some day Hector will say openly before the Trojans*:
> *`The son of Tydeus, running before me, fled to his vessels.'*
> So he will vaunt; and then let the wide earth open beneath me.' (*Il.* 8.145–50)[13]

In the passage quoted, Diomedes responds to the appeal of aged Nestor. Seeing that Zeus favors the Trojans during the battle, Nestor "was afraid in heart" and called on Diomedes to "steer now to flight [his] single-foot horses." Diomedes haughtily refused, mentioning Hector's potential scorn and his future bragging in front of the Trojans about the victory over great Diomedes as the main reason. Moreover, he claimed that his feeling of shame in such a case would be so intense that he would be ready to fall through the ground just to hide his face. Hector, despite being an enemy, functions here in the role of a potential judge whose opinion about Diomedes' military prowess *does matter*. Just a thought of Hector's future scathing remarks is able to embolden Diomedes even if Zeus himself fights against the Achaeans.

So far there is nothing objectionable in Aristotle's treatment of Homer. His two references show instances of courage (or something that is "most closely resembling courage") exemplified by a representative from each of the two camps—the Trojans and the Achaeans, and, by citing shame and honor (glory) as the two significant motives for the heroes' behavior on the battlefield, he does seem to capture part of the essence of the Homeric understanding of courage. When the leaders of both armies in the *Iliad* try to inspire their warriors to remain strong in battle, they often appeal to what Charles Fuqua suitably calls the "Homeric shame culture" (1981, 220)—a deeply-rooted and intentionally cultivated anxiety of falling short from the appropriate social expectations, whether those of a semi-divine hero, a king, a member of the aristocracy, or simply a man. Likewise, the continual obsession of Homeric heroes with honor and glory is obvious.[14] It is the goal that

[13] *Il.* 8.145–50. Aristotle's quotation of the two italicized lines slightly deviates from our text.

[14] Both honor [τιμή] and glory [κλέος] refer in Homer to praise and admiration accustomed to the rulers and warriors. But whereas honor is typically enjoyed during the life-time of a person, "glory" mostly refers to the post-mortem extolment of a hero by later generations. Aristotle focuses on honor in his discussion, but there is no reason to suppose that he takes it to be qualitatively different from glory.

is used both to motivate and to justify one's actions; it is the ultimate reward for courage in battle; it is something that the warriors constantly dream about and what gives true meaning to their short lives. Indeed, the fact that Aristotle did not feel the need to mention specific episodes when desire for glory, rather than fear of disgrace, prompts a warrior into action, can be explained by the obviousness of these examples to his listeners.[15] We may thus provisionally correlate the courage of the citizen soldier with the Homeric ideal of a courageous agent, without insisting, though, that Aristotle's brief description exhausts the content of this complex virtue for the author of the *Iliad*.

But the first kind of specious courage, the courage of the citizen-soldier, or "Homeric courage," turns out to have a further subdivision:

> The courage of troops forced into battle by their officers may be classed as of the same type, though they are inferior inasmuch as their motive is not a sense of shame [αἰδώς] but fear, and the desire to avoid not disgrace but pain. Their masters compel them to be brave. (1116a30–33)

Several general observations are in order. Earlier we have seen Aristotle mentioning fear of penalties as one of the three motivating reasons of a citizen-soldier—a reason that was neither explicitly discussed, nor illustrated up to this point. It appears that he now returns to the original definition again and picks up the threads.[16] Secondly, Aristotle introduces a moral hierarchy, where he ranks the types of risk-defying actions by reference to their motivating causes: an action done "from shame" is morally *superior* to the one done "from fear." We may observe that the distinction is not obvious at this point, since both actions can be described as stemming "from fear"—whether it is fear of disgrace or fear of physical punishment. But, we may suppose, it is the *object* of fear that matters for Aristotle's evaluation—an ostensibly courageous action motivated by fear of painful punishment from one's superiors is ranked lower on the moral scale than the one motivated by fear of shame from one's

[15] Examples of the glory-obsession from the epics are too numerous, but the following few are representative: *Il.* 6.440–45; 12.328; 18.119–22; *Od.* 1.301.

[16] The phrase "καὶ τοὺς ὑπὸ" ("and under that," "and of the same class") suggests that what follows comes under the category mentioned earlier, namely, of the citizen troops introduced in the beginning (1116a16–22). The mere discrepancy in terminology between the original definition and this later paragraph—"compelled by legal penalties" vs. "compelled by their officers"—is not sufficient to warrant the claim that Aristotle is now introducing something qualitatively different from his earlier summary. In either case, it is the fear of physical punishment that is at issue, whether imposed by abstract laws or by specific rulers.

equals or inferiors.[17] Notably, the third reason, one's desire for honor, is not mentioned in this estimation at all.

Let us call this latter type of behavior, where a threat of physical punishment for disobedience of the military orders is present, "forced courage" and distinguish it from "voluntary courage," which is exclusively due to considerations of shame and honor. As one might expect, the *Iliad* is quoted again to illustrate the cases of compulsion. It is by now apparent that Hector is Aristotle's favorite character from the epics, as he attributes to him the words that seem to be extracted from Agamemnon's speech. In Aristotle's rendering, the alleged Hector's threat to his soldiers appears thus:

> But I shall spy any dastard that cowers far from fight,
> Vainly will such an one hope to escape from the dogs.

There is no exact correspondence of these two quoted lines to our standard text of the *Iliad*; still, the expressions used are close enough in meaning to the ones uttered by Agamemnon to his troops:

> But any man whom I find trying, apart from the battle,
> to hang back by the curved ships, for him no longer
> will there be any means to escape the dogs and the vultures. (*Il.* 2.391–93)[18]

But the use of this quotation for Aristotelian purposes is unclear. If Aristotle's main goal is to show that Homer does indeed depict cases of compulsion in war, then, to be sure, the quote is appropriate, and it is not that important who the author of those words was. But the fact that Agamemnon or Hector used brute force and explicit threats to motivate their soldiers for the battle does not allow us to conclude that "forced courage" was part of the Homeric ideal, or that it had anything to do with the kind of courage that Homer admired.[19] What makes one to act bravely in war is just as important for Aristotle as it was for Homer, and Aristotle's concluding judgment, "one

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[17] The distinction between (culpable) fear of future pain and (honorable) fear of disgrace is first introduced in *The Laws* (647a–d) by Plato, who observed a peculiar psychological condition of a courageous citizen: he must be "fearless" with regard to expected sufferings and, at the same, time remain "fearful" with regard to a possible evil reputation (647c1).

[18] Hector is indeed using threats of death penalty for the would-be cowards to force his soldiers to attack the ships in one episode (15.348–51), but his wording is very different from Aristotle's quotation.

[19] Courage, in Homer, is an essential attribute of a nobleman [ἀγαθός], who is conscious of the duties that come with the status, e.g., as in the famous *noblesse oblige* speech by Sarpedon in *Il.* 12.310–28. A warrior who remains indifferent to considerations of honor and who must be *forced* to fight is by definition a man of a lowly origin, an ignoble one—κακός—a term that also connotes cowardliness. See also Jaeger 1946, 2–15.

ought to be brave not under compulsion but because it is noble [καλόν] to be so" (1116b2), could be endorsed by the author of the *Iliad* as well.

We may now summarize the above reasoning. Aristotle starts the chapter by mentioning the courage of the citizen-soldier, linking it with "the kind of courage that Homer portrayed" and claiming close resemblance, although not identity, with his own conception of true courage. His analysis of political courage further bifurcates into two subcategories: the one that is due to fear of punishment ("forced courage"), and the one that is due to considerations of shame and honor ("voluntary courage"). The latter form of courage is ranked above the former one, "for it is due to shame and desire for a noble object [καλοῦ ὄρεξιν] (i.e., honor)," and it is precisely "voluntary courage" of a citizen soldier that turns out to be "most like to that which [Aristotle] described earlier" (1116a27).[20] We have also made a preliminary observation that the ideal of courage that can be derived from the Homeric epics closely resembles "voluntary courage," as described by Aristotle, but not "forced courage," even if instances of soldiers being compelled by their leaders are indeed *depicted* by Homer. For simplicity's sake, the term "political courage" will be used below to refer to the voluntary type only.

4. WHAT IS WRONG WITH POLITICAL COURAGE?

Once the nature of political courage has been outlined, we may recall Aristotle's admission that it is the kind of courage that resembles his own understanding of this virtue the most. In the previous section, we have restricted this initial claim of similarity to a certain *variety* of political courage only, namely, to voluntary courage of a warrior who freely chooses to face dangers due to his desire of a noble object (honor or glory) and his fear of disgrace. There is hardly any similarity, on the other hand, between the Aristotelian analysis of courage, which involves free choice, and the kind of behavior that was labeled "forced courage." Yet, Aristotle's statement of close resemblance between the two views implies the existence of a difference, however slight, between them as well. How exactly, then, is the Aristotelian conception of true courage different from the traditional courage of the heroic age?

A Homeric nobleman, such as Hector, freely chooses to participate in a battle, forced into the fray only by the considerations of duty and fear of reproach. Even though public shaming can be seen as a kind of social

[20] Ann Charney, who, on the other hand, takes the forced type of risky behavior as an essential part of political courage in general, draws a radical conclusion, arguing that Aristotle's aim here is to show that the "bravest acts of political courage are a form of cowardice" (1988, 69–70). This would make it very difficult to accommodate Aristotle's insistence on close similarity between "political" and "true" courage.

punishment for cowards, Aristotle suggests that there is a qualitative difference between a risky action motivated by fear of punishment *by shame* (which is proper and noble), and the one motivated by fear of *physical* punishment (which is base and ignoble). Avoiding reproach at all costs *per se*, though, cannot be taken as that final goal of a courageous action, which would satisfy the requirement of *nobility* [τὸ καλόν]—cited by Aristotle as a prerequisite for genuine virtue on multiple occasions.[21] But it is less clear why *honor*—the ultimate prize of a Homeric hero—cannot function as such a noble goal for Aristotle as well. If, on the other hand, a desire for honor and glory may be perceived as a legitimate goal of courageous behavior, then, rather than being its close semblance, political courage will be seen as an instance of true courage—as the one fulfilling the most stringent requirements of the Aristotelian account.

Admittedly, Aristotle's view on the value of honor is somewhat ambivalent. One place where honor is discussed at some length occurs in the context of his search for the true meaning of happiness [εὐδαιμονία] in the beginning of the *Ethics*. After a vulgar life devoted to pleasures was quickly dismissed, honor was presented as a common goal of "the cultivated people active in politics," and the question was raised whether it would then be proper to identify honor with the final good. Aristotle's answer is rather curious: "[Honor] appears to be too superficial to be what we are seeking [i.e., final good], for it seems to depend more on those who honor than on the one honored, whereas we intuitively believe that the good is something of our own" (1095b24–27). Thus, he continues, we may likewise safely dismiss political life and its main goal, honor, from consideration and start looking elsewhere for the kind of life that would lead to happiness.

The following observation is in order. While rejecting honor as the final end of human life, Aristotle is not denying its *nobility* in the relevant sense of the word. It may well be the case that true happiness of a fulfilled life is not identical with the life devoted to honor, and, yet, a courageous agent, as it was earlier observed, was not expected to pursue his *own* happiness by engaging in a life-threatening behavior during war. By recognizing honor as noble [καλόν], we are not implying that it is the ultimate self-sufficient final good, that is, we are not challenging Aristotle's evaluation of εὐδαιμονία as being "the noblest [κάλλιστον]" (1099a24–25). But it seems that a goal of action can still be noble, even without fitting the category of the "most final end" or "the noblest end" in the Aristotelian sense. As we have already seen, the qualification καλόν is freely applied by Aristotle to a variety of virtues,

[21] "Therefore it is for a noble end [τὸ καλόν] that the brave man endures and acts as courage directs" (1115b23). Cf. also 1115a32–35; 1115b13; 1116b30.

objects, and circumstances, and, when the pursuit of personal εὐδαιμονία comes in conflict with the harsh realities of war, there is no reason why a desire for honor and postmortem glory should be denied the characteristic of nobility.

And, indeed, there is some direct textual evidence supporting the tentative identification of honor with a noble goal of courage. Speaking approvingly of political courage, Aristotle observes its similarity to the kind of courage "which we described earlier," and stresses that "it is prompted by a virtue, namely the sense of shame, and by the desire for something noble [αλοῦ ὄρεξιν], namely honor, and the wish to avoid the disgrace of being reproached" (1116a28–29). It is crucial that Aristotle is citing honor as an example of "something noble" in this passage, thus legitimizing a desire for honor (and glory, we may assume) as the proper final goal of a courageous action. It does not follow, of course, that honor, for Aristotle, should be the only member in the class of all noble goals of brave actions.[22]

Once we recognize honor as one of the legitimate goals for a courageous warrior, the announced difference between political and Aristotelian forms of courage seems to evaporate. Moreover, since voluntary life-threatening actions on the battlefield with the goal of obtaining honor and glory for oneself are clearly endorsed by Homer, we can infer that the traditional Homeric ideal of a courageous warrior, as far as his final motivation is concerned, justly exemplifies the kind of courage admired by Aristotle. But, perhaps, the main difference between Homer and Aristotle lies elsewhere; the following section will explore a suggestion that the key deficiency of a Homeric hero lies in the "efficient" rather than the "final" cause of his risk-defying behavior in battle.

5. *THUMOS* AND "SPIRITED COURAGE"

We should now turn to the second form of specious courage from Aristotle's list—the kind of courage that is caused by one's "spirit" or θυμός. Aristotle's discussion of "spirited courage" is the only other form of alleged bravery (besides that of the citizen-troops) that is richly illustrated by Homeric references. Aristotle's choice of Homer as the main authority on this kind of courageous behavior is by no means accidental—θυμός of the epic heroes plays as significant a role in their feats on the battlefield, as their constant

[22] There is little doubt that the preservation of the Greek *polis* was one of the primary intended references of Aristotle's "noble goal of courageous action," but it does not have to be the only one. At any rate, it is highly unlikely that Aristotle would deny courage to a warrior simply on the basis of his living under an archaic political and social system, where no *polis* was yet present.

preoccupation with shame and glory. Once again, then, Aristotle tries to demarcate his view of courage from the one that has become an inalienable part of the Homeric heritage. In addition, the Homeric θυμός -caused bravery similarly earns a restrained praise from the philosopher as showing "some affinity to true courage" (1117a9). The key to understanding the relation between Homer and Aristotle on this issue lies precisely in understanding their respective views on the role of θυμός in a risk-defying behavior.

The Liddell-Scott-Jones *Greek-English Lexicon* cites multiple meanings for θυμός, ranging from breath, spirit, and desire, to soul, mind, anger, and even courage itself.[23] The commonly accepted etymology (supported by Plato[24]) derives θυμός from the old Greek word θύω, meaning "rage" or "seethe." While θυμός becomes the topic of a special theoretical investigation as one part of the tripartite human soul in Plato's *Republic*, and thus acquires a much more technical sense as the predominant character-trait of the courageous guardians,[25] in Homer, the usage of the term is considerably less consistent and, indeed, may be rendered by a variety of English equivalents depending on a situational context. All the same, it remains one of the most frequent terms in the epics, and it occurs no less than 475 times in the *Iliad* and at least 327 times in the *Odyssey*.

It is significant that Aristotle's understanding of θυμός is informed both by the poetical tradition, stemming from Homer, and the philosophical one, rooted in Plato's psychology.[26] Besides, the nature of θυμός is briefly discussed in Aristotle's own psychological investigations.[27] Nonetheless, in the section on spirited courage, Homer is cited as the only source of relevant illustrations, which suggests an important inference: Aristotle is ostensibly using the term θυμός *in the same sense* in which Homer used it several centuries earlier.[28] Aristotle begins by offering a description of this kind of pseudo-courage as well as an important simile:

> Spirit or anger (θυμός) is also classed with Courage. Men emboldened (ἀνδρεῖοι) by anger (διὰ θυμὸν), like wild beasts which rush upon the hunter that has wounded them, are supposed to be courageous, because the courageous also are

[23] See Liddle-Scott-Jones *Greek-English Lexicon* (LSJ) (1953).

[24] Plato 1969, *Cratylus*, 419e.

[25] See Plato 1969, *The Republic*, Book 4

[26] Paskewich (2014) observes that the term θυμός, although quite common in the Homeric epics, fell into a relative oblivion during the post-Homeric period, only to be brought back to life in Plato's writings.

[27] *De Anima*, 432b5.

[28] It is difficult to imagine Aristotle committing a fallacy of equivocation here, or that he was unaware of the broader usage of the term during the Homeric age. Burnet, on the other hand, blames Aristotle for misunderstanding the Homeric sense of θυμὸς, claiming that "he seems to limit its meaning in the *Nicomachean Ethics* to anger" (1969, 140n).

> high-spirited (θυμοειδεῖς); for spirit (θυμός) is very impetuous in encountering danger. (1116b23–6)

We may note that the term θυμὸς, including its cognate adjectival form θυμοειδεῖς, is mentioned four times in this short description, and a warrior emboldened (literally: *en-couraged*) by his θυμός is compared to a wild animal defending its life. The analogy will be further pursued in the next paragraph, but at this point Aristotle immediately leans back on Homeric examples once again. The quotations, though, are disappointingly brief and not always relevant. Rather than pointing to an example of a Homeric character, who rushes into battle prompted by his rage, Aristotle cites the following four short phrases: (1) "he put strength in his spirit [θυμός]"; (2) "[he] roused their might and their spirit [θυμός]"; (3) "bitter wrath up through his nostrils welled"; (4) "his blood boiled." "All such symptoms," Aristotle reasonably concludes, "seem to indicate an excitement and impulse of the spirit" (1116b30).

His four short references require an explanation. The first phrase refers to an episode when god Apollo grants Glaucus' desperate appeal for help by "drying away from the hard wound the dark running of blood and putting strength into his spirit" (*Il.* 16.528–29). The second quote is an established expression in the *Iliad*, typically describing the positive effect of someone's inspiring speech on the soldiers' morale.[29] The third quote appears to be taken from the *Odyssey* and occurs in the context when Odysseus finally reveals his identity to his father, Laertes. The moving scene is described in the following words: "Odysseus's heart [θυμός] was moved at last and a sharp sting rose through his nostrils, watching the father he so loved. He ran up, kissed and embraced the man" (*Od.* 24.318–20).[30] We should observe that the stirring of Odysseus's θυμός, as well as a peculiar feeling in his nose, have nothing to do in this case with the courage-provoking anger that Aristotle seeks to describe in this section—it is rather intense joy and filial love that Odysseus is experiencing at that moment.[31] The fourth quote, despite being ostensibly attributed to Homer, is not found in our texts of the epic poems.[32]

The impression that the reader gets at this stage of presentation is that spirited courage is *somehow* related to the heroic ideal of the epics, or,

[29] E.g., *Il.* 5.470; 5.792; 11.291; 13.155.

[30] Quotations from the *Odyssey* (*Od.*) are from McCrorie's (2004) English version.

[31] The description is in line with the Homeric "broader" understanding of θυμός as the source of various emotions, and not only of the aggressive anger. The more peaceful emotions, such as sorrow, love and grief, are usually associated in the epics with the female θυμός, though (Odysseus experience cited is one exception).

[32] The image of "boiling blood" [ἔζεσεν αἷμα] occurs in Theocritus's *Idylls* (20.15), who flourished, however, about year 270 BCE, some 50 years after Aristotle's death. In Theocritus, though, the poor shepherd's blood "boils" as a result of a rejection by a girl and is a sign of deep insult.

otherwise, it is not clear why Homer's name would be invoked four times. But having paid his dues to Homer, Aristotle continues to develop the analogy between a high-spirited (*thumoeidic*) warrior and a wild animal with the goal of highlighting how true virtue differs from yet another imitator. We can also sense that by reducing the motive of a *thumoeidic* warrior to the mere animalistic instinctive drives, Aristotle eliminates the last chance of taking "spirited courage" seriously:

> Thus the real motive of courageous men is the noble (τὸ καλόν), although spirit (θυμός) operates in them as well; but wild animals are emboldened by pain, for they turn to bay because they are wounded, or frightened—since if they are in a forest or a swamp they do not attack. Therefore they are not to be considered courageous for rushing upon danger when spurred by pain and anger, and blind to the dangers that await them. (1116b30–34).

It is instructive that what has started as a simile ("like wild beasts") continues as a straightforward *identification* of a high-spirited warrior with an injured wild animal. A truly courageous warrior, we learn, is primarily "pulled" by his attachment to a noble goal, but a wild animal, on the other hand, is "spurred" by its inner affective urges—pain and anger. At the same time, Aristotle's telling admission that "θυμός operates in [a courageous man] as well" suggests that he does not wish to paint a picture of a cold-blooded fighting machine as an ideal soldier.[33] The key Greek term, translated by Rackham as "operates," is συνεργέω, which is more accurately rendered as "cooperating" or "working together."[34] But this seems to be a case when the much later semantic layers of the derivative term *synergy* can help us to better appreciate the ideas of the ancient philosopher: the combination of *thumoeidic* drive with the noble goal do produce a qualitatively different form of disposition, which cannot be reduced to the simple sum of its elements. A courageous warrior, on Aristotle's account, is just as passionate as a wild beast might be, but there is something essential that both the attacking animals and the *thumoeidic* human fighters lack: "[they do not act] for the sake of the noble [τὸ καλόν], nor as the rule [λόγος] directs" (1117a8).[35] Indeed,

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[33] Brady (2005), trying to prove the merely defensive character Aristotelian θυμός, argues that in this particular phrase Aristotle "seems to be using *thumos* as a synonym for confidence" (209). The interpretation appears to be far-fetched, especially given the Homeric references cited by Aristotle earlier, as well as his own later admission that θυμὸς might prompt one to action not only in response to physical harm, but in response to an insult as well—as an urge for aggressive revenge (1149a31–35).

[34] See LSJ (1953). Cf. Ross: "passion *aids* them;" Irwin: "their spirit *cooperates* with them."

[35] W. D. Ross (1934) quite unexpectedly translates here τὸ καλόν ("noble") as "honor" (". . . they do not act for honor's sake"), and the same substitution occurs earlier at 1115b13. Although technically incorrect, Ross's rendering points back to Aristotle's mentioning of honor as a legitimate *noble* goal of a courageous action (1116a28–29).

Aristotle explicitly states that spirited courage could be turned into true virtue "when reinforced by deliberate choice and purpose" (1117a2). But such choice, as we have seen, although "spiritually" motivated, should be done in accordance with the rational rule [λόγος], so that a courageous action is directed by reason at pursuing the noble goal of honor.[36]

What is stressed in this entire discussion of the spirited form of courageous action is that genuine virtue cannot be reduced to self-preservation instincts or any other "animalistic" reaction that is not properly informed and guided by reason. The intellectualistic tendency in the understanding of courage, though, is mitigated by Aristotle's recognition of the important role of θυμός in a risk-defying behavior—"the most natural" and "impetuous" affective reaction[37] in response, for instance, to a physical injury or an affront to one's honor.[38] It is a common thought in the Aristotelian approach to various virtues in general that natural elements are not to be suppressed, but should rather be properly cultivated and channeled into the right direction by reason. In the case of courage, the primary function of reason is to observe the "due measure" in the emotional reactions, provoked by external stimuli, making sure that a warrior "fears the right things from the right motive, in the right way and at the right time" (1115b16–18).[39]

We have already mentioned that spirited courage, according to Aristotle, has "some affinity to true courage" (1117a9) insofar as it takes θυμός as providing a necessary emotional motivation for a risky action, but it falls short of genuine virtue insofar as it takes a raw *thumoeidic* reaction as being sufficient for virtuous behavior. But it is not until the end of the discussion that Aristotle supplies an *argument* for his view, which, incidentally, also appears to be an indirect (and final) polemical remark aimed at Homer. The argument takes the form of a classical *reductio,* where Aristotle seeks to show the foolishness of any position which would identify courage with "spirited" excitement,

[36] That θυμός "seems to listen to argument [λόγος] to some extent" is stressed by Aristotle during his discussion of incontinence at a later stage in N.E. (1149a25). Cf. also Aristotle's claim in *De Anima* that human θυμός partakes of reason (432b5).

[37] Aristotle admits that "courage that is due to spirit [θυμός] seems to be the most natural" (1117a6).

[38] Aristotle does not give us a list of legitimate cases or circumstances, when an aggressive, *thumoeidic* reaction would be appropriate. The notion of injury is taken from Aristotle's analogy of a warrior with a wounded wild animal, while a response to an insult, with an aggressive desire for revenge, is mentioned later at 1149a31–5. None of this suggests that these two cases exhaust all alternatives for Aristotle.

[39] Indeed, suppressing θυμός altogether might not only be undesirable, but also impossible. At an earlier point Aristotle approvingly mentions Heraclitus's phrase (11105a8), who, in one of the surviving fragments, stresses the unique power of this emotive drive, which pursues its goal even if it leads to self-destruction. The full fragment in question reads as follows: "It is hard to fight with one's heart's desire [θυμός]; whatever it wishes to get, it purchases at the cost of soul (life)" (Burnet 1969, 140; Diels 2010, fr. 85).

for, he ironically observes, "on that reckoning even asses would be brave, when they are hungry, for no blows will make them stop grazing!" (1116b35–36).[40] It is expected that the reader would immediately see the absurdity of attributing virtues to an animal, let alone to such a base animal as an ass.[41] The discussion that began with an impressive image of a wild beast defending its life from the attackers ends with a more prosaic picture of a stubborn ass, enduring the pain while satisfying its gluttony. But in either case, Aristotle implies, it would be foolish to reckon any animal, or any human, that is driven into a dangerous encounter exclusively by his aggressive θυμός, among the truly courageous agents.[42]

6. *THUMOS* AND *LOGOS* IN HOMER

Among the five forms of specious courage analyzed by Aristotle, only two forms discussed above—political and spirited—are intentionally linked with the Homeric tradition. In addition, both forms were said to approximate the true virtue at least to a certain degree. It was argued earlier, however, that political courage, shown by certain Homeric characters, can be seen as fully satisfying Aristotle's criteria for courage, and thus a stronger claim is warranted: it does not just resemble true courage but exemplifies it. It remains now to consider the function of the θυμὸς-related emotions in the behavior of the epic heroes, paying particular attention to the relation between θυμός and practical reasoning in Homer. Our goal will be to find a reasonable answer to the following question: how closely does the θυμός-driven behavior of the Homeric warriors correspond to Aristotle's description of spirited pseudo-courage?

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[40] Although Aristotle does not openly acknowledge it, the episode with the stubborn ass does seem to have originated in the Homeric text. In the *Iliad*, it is Ajax, one of the greatest heroes of the Achaeans, who is likened to a hungry donkey that is being harassed by small children with their sticks (11.556–62). The comparison, though, is not meant to be degrading to Ajax; on the contrary, it is the Trojans' power that is being belittled by the analogy. Just a few lines earlier Ajax is compared to a raging lion attacked by the dogs (Trojans) (11.548–52).

[41] Aristotle's *reductio* has a second example as well, which reinforces the previous point: "And adulterers also are led to do many daring things by lust [ἐπιθυμία]" (1117a1). On the relation between ἐπιθυμία (desire) and θυμὸς see *De Anima* 432b1–6.

[42] The foolishness of attributing courage to animals was less than obvious, though, both for Homer and for the Aristotelian audience. A comparison of a brave warrior with an animal is common in the epics (e.g., *Il.* 3.23; 5.136; 7.256). Laches claims that the fact of courage of certain animals (lions, leopards, boars) is part of the "universal opinion" (*Laches*, 196e1–197a9). Aristotle's ranking of animals with respect to their relative ἀνδρεία in *Hist. An.* (608a30–40) cannot be taken as evidence that he was willing to attribute virtue to sheepdogs. It is clear that the comparative form ἀνδρείοτερα (braver) in the passage mentioned is used as a rough synonym of "more aggressive" or "more thumotic."

As was mentioned, θυμός is a polysemantic term of ancient pedigree with a variety of connotations, which cannot be rendered by a single English equivalent. This is not the place to enter controversies about the true meaning, proper scope, or chief function of θυμός in Homer—a subject matter that has prompted heated debates during the last century. There are good reasons, though, to agree with the authors who accept a broader interpretation of θυμός, identifying it with the quasi-physical seat of both reasoning and certain strong emotions, such as anger, righteous indignation, and vengeful feeling (but, notably, not of fear), which, in turn, serve as effective internal motivators of risk-defying behavior.[43] Angela Hobbs in her recent study of the subject proposed a reasonable description of the main functions of θυμός during that period:

> In *The Iliad* and *Odyssey*, *thumos* is a general term for both the seat of feeling and thought and for the passions themselves, particularly anger [. . .] It is a physical thing with spiritual dimensions, the stuff of consciousness, passions and thought. It is perhaps best viewed as the life force, and from it stems fierceness and energy (*menos*), boldness and courage (*tharsos*) and anger (*holos*). (2000, 8)

It would, of course, be utterly misleading to apply categories like "physical," "mental," "psychological," or "spiritual" with our contemporary connotations to the Homeric understanding of the world and human nature. Yet Hobbs's description of θυμός as being both "physical" and yet also having "spiritual dimensions" is probably the best we can do in the circumstances, and it will work as a rough approximation to the rich meaning of the term. Indeed, θυμός in Homer appears to have almost tangible physical properties, including size and texture, but it also refers to the warrior's mental resolve, that is, to what we would identify today with a certain psychological state of a person. Given this ambivalence, some scholars emphasize the unique psycho-somatic nature of θυμὸς and warn against reading Homeric texts as textbooks in systematic psychology where every term has a well-defined reference.[44] But whatever its ultimate ontological status is, it is uncontentious that Homeric θυμός, being the source of various affects that supply the necessary impetus for risky behavior, is also at the root of courageous actions of the heroes.

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[43] Redfield 1975; Bremmer 1983; Koziak 1999; Hobbs 2000. The more docile emotions—sorrow, love and grief—are also associated with θυμός (mostly female). Fear, on the other hand is connected in Homer with one's "heart" [καρδία, ἦτορ, φρένες] with its characteristic "loud beating" and "trembling" (Cf. *Il.* 10.10; 13.282; 22.452).

[44] E.g., Padel 1992; Koziak 1999. Padel rightly advises extreme caution when trying to draw far-reaching theoretical conclusions from Homer's mentioning of the many somatic-psychic "inner" parts, including θυμὸς, καρδία, ἦτορ, φρένες, νοός, ψυχή, arguing that none of them have solidified reference in Homeric texts, but they rather exhibit "multiple shades of meaning" depending on the context (38).

Human θυμός, in Homer, while providing the raw materials for courage in the form of emotive states, is nonetheless not an entirely irrational aspect of a human soul, in the same sense in which an animal's θυμός clearly is. It is important to observe that θυμός, and, thus, the behavior that springs from it, can be influenced by rational appeals and deliberations, either coming from the agent himself or from an external source. More specifically, one's θυμός may be either aroused or suppressed by an appropriate line of reasoning. In his ardent address to a retreating army, Ajax, among other things, points to purely pragmatic considerations, inviting the Achaeans to consider the advantages of an intense, yet short, military effort by comparison with the prolonged, exhausting warfare: "Better to take in a single time our chances of dying or living, than go on being squeezed in the stark encounter right up against our ships." The pragmatic appeal, we are told, had a positive effect of "stirring the strength and spirit [μένος καὶ θυμὸν] of every man" and thus emboldening the warriors defending the ships against the attacks of the Trojans (*Il.* 15.511–14). Hector, Agamemnon, and Nestor are all recorded as encouraging their warriors by reference to potential benefits of courageous behavior and the unpleasant consequences of the cowardly actions. In all cases, we learn, the speakers succeeded in enhancing the resolve to fight on the part of the combatants—their θυμός was brought into the proper condition for the battle.

Yet, admonitions and warnings coming from an authoritative external source may also function as an inhibitor of an overly aggressive θυμός. In the very beginning of the *Iliad*, Achilles, the greatest hero of the Achaeans, feels dishonored and is fuming with rage at king Agamemnon, who threatens to take a prisoner girl, Briseis, away from him. The two leaders are at the brink of starting a civil strife within the Greek camp, and, yet, Achilles exercises enough restraint to consider the options first. As he pondered about the best course of action, his "heart was divided," and he asked himself whether it should be better to "draw the sharp sword" and fight with the king (i.e., to act as a courageous warrior who defends his honor would typically act), or "to check the spleen [χόλος] within and keep down his anger [θυμός]." Moreover, Homer immediately tells us that Achilles deliberated these alternatives both "in mind and spirit [θυμός]," implying that one's θυμός is more than simply the seat of irrational passions (*Il.* 1.188–95).[45] After goddess

[45] Cf. also *Il.* 11.420. Even though much has been made by the commentators out of these puzzling Homeric remarks, Koziak reasonably suggests that the best way to interpret them is by remembering that a philosophical split between reason and emotion is simply nonexistent in Homer's time (2000, 1077–78). Hunter notes that "Platonic psychology is such a short step away here," and laments that later commentators of Homer often found it difficult to resist the temptation to invoke at this point Plato's distinction between reason, spirit and appetite (2012, 64).

Athena, one of Achilles' divine patrons, descends from Mount Olympus trying to restrain his rage, Achilles was able to tame his emotions, that is, to suppress the affective power of his θυμὸς, by entertaining the truth of a general ethical principle, "One must obey the gods," and, also, by considering the future benefits of such obedience:

> Goddess, it is necessary that I obey the word of you . . .,
> Angry though I am in my heart [θυμῷ]. So it will be better
> If any man obeys the gods, they listen to him also. (*Il.* 1.216–18)

As we can see, one's *thumotic* urge for an aggressive attack on the offender of one's honor, which Homer connects with a kind of true courage, can be successfully checked by relevant pragmatic considerations if these reasons come from a source that the agent trusts and respects.[46] While the power of reason may restrain one's θυμός, it may also be able to sustain its motivating force. In one of the most interesting passages regarding our topic, we find Odysseus, another great hero of the Achaean army, facing an existential dilemma on the battlefield. As the Trojans intensify their attack, the Greeks hastily retreat for "fear had laid hold of them all," leaving Odysseus standing alone against the multitudes of the oncoming warriors. The odds are greatly against Odysseus and, as he clearly realizes, if he fails to follow the example of his timorous compatriots and run from Trojans, his prospects of surviving will be rather bleak. At this decisive moment, Homer records the following inner monologue:

> And troubled, he spoke then to his own great-hearted spirit [μεγαλήτορα θυμόν]:
> `Ah me, what will become of me? It will be a great evil
> if I run, fearing their multitude, yet deadlier if I am caught
> alone; and Kronos' son drove to flight the rest of the Danaans.
> Yet still, why does the heart [θυμός] within me debate on these things?
> Since I know that it is the cowards who walk out of the fighting,
> but if one is pre-eminent in battle, he must by all means
> stand his ground strongly, whether he be struck or strike down another.' (*Il.* 11.403–10)[47]

Apparently, Odysseus is facing an inner conflict between two strong urges—an urge to flee, supported by fear, and an urge to remain on the battlefield,

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[46] Dodds, with good reason, interprets the voice of Athena as the voice of reason [*phronesis*] within Achilles (1951, 14–15), which fits well with the Aristotelian requirement of channeling the power of θυμός by λόγος (1117a8). This "psychological" view is challenged by Pulleyn (2000, 176–77), Kirk (1985, 45–49) and Hunter (2012, 64–67), who argue for the more traditional "external agency" interpretation.

[47] Here, following Murray in translating ἀριστεύῃσι μάχῃ as "pre-eminent in battle."

supported by considerations of honor and social duty.[48] Characteristically, to resolve the conflict, he decides to speak to his own θυμὸς. Being the seat of both emotions and reasons, it is amenable to rational persuasion, even though we may assume that, at the crucial moment of decision, Odysseus' θυμός is just as fear-controlled as those of the retreating Greeks. But, unlike his fellow-warriors, Odysseus does not yield to the natural desire for safety, but takes time to consider rivaling obligations. Reciting to his heart what he already *knows* (rather than first discovers in the process of reasoning), namely, that fleeing from the enemy is "great evil" and that "he must stand his ground strongly" in all circumstances, he succeeds, we may say, in reversing the direction of the *thumotic* urge from fleeing to staying, which marks the difference between the cowardly and courageous behaviors. Fighting the Trojan army all by himself, which initially appeared to him as "the deadlier thing" by comparison with fleeing to safety, suddenly remains the only option. Against all odds, he resolves to face the enemy.

By picturing Odysseus as addressing his θυμὸς directly, Homer is implying that it can be influenced by practical reasoning or, at least, something very like it.[49] Odysseus talks himself into courage by keeping fresh before his mind the proper duties of a warrior "pre-eminent in fight." His normative obligation to stay on the battlefield naturally follows from a factual description of his social role—a heroic warrior and a member of the ruling class. Indeed, the paradigmatic examples of courage in Homer are the cases when a warrior is rationally persuaded to face the danger, rather than being forced by the threat of punishment, or spurred into the heat of a battle by his uncontrollable *thumotic* anger. The above case of Odysseus is by no means unique in the epics. Hector, likewise successfully, reasons with his "great-hearted θυμός" when he tries to inspire himself for the battle (*Il.* 22.98). Sarpedon, the king of Lycia, in a famous monologue, exhorts his cousin Glaucus to remain strong in battle lest their subjects think of them as being unworthy of their dominant position. Noble Glaucus is to "take his stand amid the foremost" and to "confront the blazing battle" without fear, since otherwise he will suffer the contempt of the ordinary Lycian warriors as being "unworthy"

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[48] MacIntyre rightly observes that it would be anachronistic to present Odysseus's inner conflict as a standard conflict between reason and emotion where reason ultimately wins over passions (1988, 16ff). The language of "urges" remains neutral with regard to the further categorizations of these inner drives.

[49] Odysseus's reasoning is manifested by applying a general principal (e.g., "One must face the enemy even if outnumbered") to the particular situation. Williams takes this passage as evidence that Homeric heroes ultimately act based on rational considerations, rather than irrational drives of θυμός (1993, 31ff). Koziak, who interprets θυμός as being the seat of both reasons and emotions, concludes that Odysseus "both reasons and feels himself into staying [on the battlefield]" (2000, 1079).

of his aristocratic position, and it is the prospect of this shame that would incite his θυμὸς and motivate him to fight bravely (*Il.* 12.310–28). Similarly, Odysseus, much later in his life, and not unlike the enraged Achilles of the *Iliad*, will have to suppress his θυμός by "much debating [μερμηρίζω] with it" while resisting a strong urge to kill his wife's suiters and their concubines (*Od.* 20.10–25).

It is then highly implausible that Aristotle's criticism of the animal-like spirited courage could be legitimately aimed at the best representatives of the Homeric epic heroes.[50] Neither Homer, nor Aristotle would admire an enraged and impulsive warrior, who rushes into the heat of the battle recklessly without having a reasonable justification for his risky behavior and without considering the consequences of his actions first. Both Aristotle and Homer recognize the role of reason in courageous actions, and, more importantly, acknowledge its capacity to influence "natural" *thumotic* urges. At the same time, being aware of the potentially destructive power of θυμός in certain circumstances, both authors admit its necessity for courage—the affective aspect of human nature must cooperate with the rational activity of setting the goal, by supplying the required impetus for a courageous action.[51]

7. CONCLUSION

It was argued above that Aristotle's explicit attempts to distance his view from the Homeric ideal of courage are at best half-hearted, and that his arguments seem to be attacking a straw figure. The poetic influences on Aristotle's philosophy are less explored than the various philosophical streams that contributed to his metaphysics, but there is a growing recognition of the deeper connection between the philosopher and the earliest layers of Greek literature. Howard Curzer, for one, thinks that Aristotle's dependence on the Homeric archaic ethics is obviously present, and that it goes beyond his conception of courage: "[In his terminology Aristotle] invokes an older, Homeric, aristocratic morality, a morality focused on fulfilling one's social

[50] The Spartans are much more likely to be Aristotle's primary target here. In *The Politics* he criticizes their demanding and lop-sided training system, which, according to Aristotle, creates beastlike creatures who lack the element of nobility: "The Spartans make their boys animal in nature [θηριώδης] by their laborious exercises, in the belief that this is most contributory to manly courage" (1338b9–19). The use of adjective θηριώδης ("beast-like") suggests a reference to an earlier comparison of the θυμός-driven warriors with the wild beasts (τὰ θηρία) in the N.E. (1116b25).

[51] Cowardliness in Homer is often described in terms of "feeble θυμός" (*Il.* 16. 656; 11.544): the one that is incapable of supplying the required drive for action. Notably, destroying one's θυμός altogether amounts to killing a person (*Il.* 8.90; 270; 10.482; 12.250).

role as a member of nobility. I speculate that Aristotle is sometimes trying, perhaps unconsciously, to harmonize this older morality with his own views" (2012, 28).[52] It is, of course, difficult to identify all the unconscious impulses that shape the beliefs of a particular thinker (let alone verify their presence), but there is little doubt that we can, at the very least, detect the familiar Homeric notes in Aristotle's repeated insistence on the martial essence of genuine courage and his open hostility toward widening the category of courageous agents beyond the battlefield. Moreover, as I attempted to show in the previous pages, all the essential elements of the Aristotelian account of courage, such as a voluntary choice, a noble goal, and a *thumotic* affective reaction guided by reason, can be properly illustrated citing the Homeric characters.

The question first raised in the title of the essay, then, can now be answered with a degree of certainty: the Aristotelian conception of courage in its central features is *more* Homeric than the philosopher is willing to admit. Whether the philosopher misread Homer or was trying to mislead the reader by pointing to a difference that did not exist, is not a question we can easily answer. But the following observation might add plausibility to the main thesis. It is generally agreed that the presentation of the pre-Aristotelian philosophers in Aristotle's metaphysical writings is less than fully objective, and using Aristotle as the decisive source for the history of early Greek philosophy is not advisable. Aristotle could well be (and, indeed, often *was*) wrong about the opinions of Heraclitus, Parmenides, Empedocles, and (*horribile dictu*) Plato himself, despite enjoying a greater temporal proximity to those philosophers and having the advantage of the well-preserved textual sources. Identifying the aberrations in Aristotle's presentation of his predecessors and attempting to restore the original thought is a philosophical project that enriches our understanding of both parties, and it is in this light that we should approach Aristotle's relation to Homer as well.

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[52] McKirahan makes a similar claim when he argues that in his ethics "Aristotle is only making explicit ideas that go back to Homer" (2010, 367). Jaeger likewise believes that Aristotle's ethical doctrines were ultimately "founded on the aristocratic morality of early Greece" (1946, 11).

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