

## Justice?

Δίκη (*dikē*)- Homeric term translated “justice,” often a basis for discussions. What did δίκη mean to the Greeks? To be δίκη is to conduct one’s actions and affairs within the universal order of the world. Δίκη is a goddess as well, personification of the moral order of the universe. The universe created by the gods is a place of order, and even the gods are subject to it. The person who is δίκαιος is one who lives within this order and fulfills their natural *role*.

So what?

In the classical world (Homeric and classical Greek, pagan European, Jewish, Muslim, and Christian cultures, others) the primary mode of moral education was **telling stories**. Morality and social structures are one and the same in classical cultures. Modern distinctions between the I and the We are not just absent, they would have been incoherent to a person.

Thus we are presented with virtues and vices, not individual actions but coherent accounts of being a person of a certain sort, and educated in what it means to be a virtuous person, a person of virtue, of ἀρετή. The ethics of the classical world was primarily an ethics of modeling, not of rule following. Rules came from exemplars, not vice versa.

- Homeric: Achilles, Odysseus. Men of courage and cunning (understood in a very specific way, more later...)
- Icelandic: the warrior-poet-farmer such as Njal or Gisli, who exemplifies the homely/heroic virtues.
- Confucian: the *junzi*, the gentleman, the person who is perfectly *li* and perfectly *ren*.
- Christian: *imitatione Christi* ; also Phil 2:5 (“have this mind in you”) and 1 Cor 11:1 (“imitate me as I Christ”)
- etc.

What this gives us is a very different idea of the self than we have in modernity:

Ideal  
Classical self: { morally encumbered, the product  
of a tradition, particular, situated.  
An ethics of belonging.

Ideal  
Modern self: { morally unencumbered, self-created,  
universal, freed from particularity and  
contingency. An ethics of choice.

These two ideas of selfhood give rise to a competing theme in ethics and justice that we’ll make much of in this course:

- in modernity, we have tended to search for all-encompassing, universally applicable norms, standards, *rules*.
- in antiquity, what were valued were particular, socially and traditionally situated *virtues*.

Why? Because virtues cannot be cultivated in isolation from communities that develop them, inculcate them, educate them and exemplify them. Modernity, in lionizing the individual self, rejects notions of tradition and community and thus must find ways of getting along in a world where we are not members of a group, but individuals on our own. Rules are much better for this, since they are *abstract* and *universal* and do not depend upon *shared practices*.

What are these shared practices? What are the virtues? That depends, and they’ve differed:

Homer: The grandest set of ancient norms we know about in the West (biblical religion is Middle Eastern...) were Greek. The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* codified for the Greeks all they knew and needed to know about everything: the gods, how to please them, what sorts of people we ought to be, how to be a good man, a good woman, a good son, a good daughter, a good king, a good soldier, a good farmer, etc. It is impossible to overemphasize the importance of Homer. He was the school textbook, Bible, hymnal, Wikipedia, and Netflix of Greek antiquity.

The traditional lists show up in Homer (courage, temperance, etc., we’ll look at these in Aristotle later). But one thing central:

Homer valued ἀγών (*agōn*), struggle, conflict (hence “agony” and “protagonist” etc.) The ἀγωνιστής is the hero who strives.

- military striving. *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (victory) but also Thermopylae (excellence).
- athletic striving. Pythian and Olympic games.
- artistic striving. Drama was festivals, awards were given (Sophokles won a lot of them)
- moral striving? What would that look like? Here’s a rub....

What they would have struggled about was not *what to do* (that is always a given, since morality exists within social roles), but *how do I do what I know I should do*. “Be like Achilles” – how? “Be like Christ” – how?

In modernity, we ask *what should I do*, and ideally, *knowing* is enough. When you know, you do it. Rules work that way. In antiquity, they *knew what to do*, the thing was knowing *how* to do it in the particular situation.

<i>X</i> is wrong = <i>I shouldn't do X.</i> Performing the right action	(vs.)	"What would <i>X</i> do?" = <i>I should do what X would do</i> Becoming a certain sort of person	} These are two <u>very different</u> ways to approach the world...

This was the world taken for granted from the dawn of civilization until the eve of the Enlightenment, more or less all over.

In Athens, the idea of modeling virtue went to the Greek's head, under Pericles (495 – 429 BC). Maybe for good reason:

- had just kicked the Persian's butts (Pericles was a child)
- Delian League becomes an Athenian empire
- Builds/rebuilds the Acropolis and Parthenon
- flowering of Athenian democracy
- Aeschylus, Sophokles, Euripides, Herodotus, Thucydides, Socrates...]
- In other words, besides Homer and the Bible, Western culture is born under Pericles. A big deal. And they knew it....

ὕβρις : (*hubris*) Excessive pride, arrogance, impiety. This was the cardinal and greatest sin possible to the Greeks. To be guilty of ὕβρις was to step out of the primary role of a mortal, i.e. being *mortal* and not *divine*. The gods don't like this.

Sophokles thinks Athens and Pericles are guilty of this, thus the Oedipus plays (among others). Oedipus = Pericles.  
Plato thinks Homeric heroes are guilty of this (among other things), thus his wholesale new educational model in *Republic*.

But no Plato now. Plato is next. Now, Sophokles and *Antigone* (c.422 BC).

The *Antigone* slips beyond the expected roles of ethical modeling: "what happens if you have an ἀγών of legitimate virtues?"

Antigone's virtues vs. Creon's virtues. This is a new sort of ἀγών for the Greeks, and they hated it... and loved it.  
Sophokles poses the problem of justice within the context of Homeric ἀγών without a clear answer (yes yes, Teiresias the seer comes in with the *deus ex machina* solution – Antigone good, Creon bad – but that's always seems too clean, avoiding the knot that Sophokles ties so masterfully).

What are the demands of δίκη here?

Whom should we model: Antigone? What about order? Creon? What about blasphemy? And aren't both full of ὕβρις ??

Modeling *neither* isn't an option: you either obey the law, or you break it; either way, there are consequences. Modernity sees Antigone as a classic heroine, but that's because it reads *Antigone* as a simple story of civil disobedience. Is it?

Are the demands of justice in the *Antigone* that simple?