

Achilles and Odysseus

A prose composition exercise for IB Greek HL: write an original passage of Ancient Greek in the style of a source text of your choosing. I set mine at the emotional core of *Iliad* 9, where Odysseus tries to persuade Achilles back into the war, but told it as a Platonic dialogue instead of epic narrative, Achilles working through, question by question, why he won't accept Agamemnon's compensation.

Intentions

I aim to create this prose composition in the style of a Platonic dialogue between Odysseus and Achilles. One of my primary sources of influence is *Iliad* 9, which features the important and intimate discussion between Odysseus and Achilles. This discussion is particularly prominent as its conclusions could significantly affect the outcome of the entire war. I have decided to orient my composition around the middle of a fictionalised conversation between Odysseus and Achilles, in which Achilles justifies why he won't rejoin the battle against the Trojans.

Considering that around 45% of the *Iliad* is direct speech, drawing on another primary source oriented around direct speech makes sense. Therefore, my other primary source of inspiration is Plato's philosophical dialogues. Plato's dialogues draw heavily on their use of particles and elenchus (the process of two or more interlocutors working together to answer some question): two features I aim to emulate. In my composition, Achilles will attempt to justify his actions against Odysseus' questions by discussing different forms of compensation (and their implications) and what is 'good'. Achilles' methodical thinking and justifications, alongside the discursive element of my composition, means that a Platonic dialogue is a suitable medium for this conversation.

Language

This is an original composition, not a translation, so it's worth being explicit about what it imitates and where it departs from strict usage. The vocabulary and setting are Homeric: τίπτε and ὦ πέπον are drawn directly from *Iliad* 6 and 9, and κούρη keeps Homer's epic spelling rather than the Attic κόρη. The syntax and philosophical vocabulary are Platonic: the deliberative subjunctive, particles drawn from *Lysis* and the *Republic*, and terms like τὸ ἀγαθόν and μετέχειν that only mean what they mean inside Plato's own arguments about the Forms. Putting Homeric diction inside a Platonic argument structure is the whole exercise, and it isn't how anyone actually wrote Greek; a fifth-century Athenian wouldn't reach for epic vocabulary mid-dialectic, any more than Homer's heroes reasoned in deliberative subjunctives. The rationale below marks each borrowing and why I made it.

Composition

GREEK

Ὀδυσσεύς: τίπτε οὐκ ἐγείρη, θεοῖς ἐπιείκελ' Ἀχιλλεῦ; ἄρα βούλη ἰδέειν Τρῶας ὑπερθύμους ἐν νηυσὶ μελαίνησιν πίπτοντας;

Ἀχιλλεύς: ὁ Ἀγαμέμνων τὴν τοῦ Βρισηῖος κούρην ἔκλεψε, ὦ πέπον.

Ὀδυσσεύς: ἀλλὰ δώσει ἑπτὰ γυναῖκας Λεσβίδας, Τρωιάδας γυναῖκας ἐείκοσιν, καὶ σεαυτοῦ τὴν κούρην. ἐθέλει δόμεναι ἅποινα. τίπτε οὐκ ἐγείρη;

Ἀχιλλεύς: ταῦτ' ἔσται. πειράσομαι διελθεῖν διὰ τί τὴν αὐτοῦ ποινὴν οὐκ ἐθέλω. τί δὲ τοὺς κλέπτοντας καλοῦμεν;

Ὀδυσσεύς: κλέπται, πῶς δ' οὔ.

Ἀχιλλεύς: οὐκοῦν καὶ οἱ θεοὶ τούτους ἀνδρὸς τῆς τιμῆς ἀξιοῦσιν;

Ὀδυσσεύς: οὐδαμῶς. τούτους ἀμελοῦσι ἵνα τίνωνται.

Ἀχιλλεύς: ἄρα οὐ διδασκόμεθα τοὺς θεοὺς πράσσοντας τὸ ἀγαθόν;

Ὀδυσσεύς: ναὶ γε.

Ἀχιλλεύς: πράσσωμεν οὖν τὸ ἀγαθόν;

Ὀδυσσεύς: παντάπασιν μὲν οὔν.

Ἀχιλλεύς: εἶεν, πειράσομαι μάλιστα μετέχειν τῶν τῶν θεῶν ἔργων διὰ τὸ ἀμελεῖν τὰ τοῦ Ἀγαμέμνονος αἵτημα.

TRANSLATION

Odysseus: Why are you not roused, noble Achilles? Do you wish to see the hearty Trojans descend upon the black boats?

Achilles: Agamemnon stole my trophy-girl, my dear friend.

Odysseus: But he shall give seven Lesbian women, twenty Trojan women and one of his daughters. He wants to give recompense. Why are you not roused?

Achilles: Very well. I will try to explain why I don't want his compensation. What do we call those who steal?

Odysseus: Why, thieves, of course.

Achilles: And do the Gods deem thieves worthy of honour?

Odysseus: Certainly not. They neglect them in order that they are punished.

Achilles: And are we not taught that the Gods do what is good?

Odysseus: Yes.

Achilles: And we should do what is good?

Odysseus: Certainly.

Achilles: Well then, I shall do my best to follow in the ways of the Gods and ignore Agamemnon's pleas.

Rationale

τίπτε

This adverb is an epic form of the words τί ποτε and means 'why?'. I opened my composition with a question word to mimic Platonic dialogues, which revolve around questions. For example, *Euthyphro* is a dialogue on the nature of piety, and in *Euthyphro* 5d, Socrates formulates the crucial question around which the

dialogue revolves. I chose to use τίπτε since it is used in *Iliad* 6.254, when Hecuba asks Hector why he has left the battlefield. This is similar to Book 9, since both sections are emotionally vivid and have direct confrontations between characters, with one abandoning their duty on the battlefield. As such, I used this word to echo Homer's use of speech and to achieve my intention of creating a Platonic dialogue in an epic style.

ὦ πέπον

When addressed to a person, this term of endearment means 'dear friend'. Homer uses this word in *Iliad* 9.252, when Odysseus enters Achilles' camp, asking him to rejoin the fighting. I felt that using this word could highlight the emotions and affection these two characters still have with one another, since *Iliad* 9 is a passionate part of the poem, in which we see the intricate relationships between Achilles and his comrades. Also, in his dialogues, Plato's characters often directly address each other as 'friend' or 'dear friend' (e.g. *Phaedrus* 241e). By addressing Achilles as πέπον, a sense of intimacy is brought out, which highlights the direct dialogue between the two characters and better characterises Achilles as a 'master speaker', and shows his skill in responding sensitively to a piece of diplomacy.

τὴν τοῦ Βρισηΐδος κόρυνην

The trophy girl (γέρας) Briseis is called 'the daughter of Briseus' in *Iliad* 9.132. I chose to indirectly refer to her as Briseus' daughter, as this would best emphasise her as some sort of property or compensation that would be given to Achilles if he agreed to fight for the Greeks. Homer also uses the epic spelling κόρυνη instead of the Attic κόρη when describing girls or daughters. As such, I also decided to keep this piece of Homeric language to achieve my desired intention of writing in the style of a Homeric epic.

ἄποινα ... ποιήν

These typological terms refer to forms of compensation that feature throughout *Iliad* 9. ποινή is a type of compensation in which the compensator pays for damage which they have inflicted, whereas ἀποινά is a form of compensation with the assumption that there is enmity between the two parties: the compensator doesn't lose any honour (τιμή). As such, when Odysseus says that Agamemnon is offering ἀποινά, Agamemnon refuses to admit that he has committed any actual wrongdoing against Achilles. In response, Achilles changes the term into ποινή to express his opinion that Agamemnon did wrong him. The difference between these two words may seem small but is significant, especially as the definition of key terms is central to the process of dialectic found more broadly throughout Plato's dialogues and philosophical works.

οὐκοῦν καὶ... γε... μὲν οὖν

Particles are short words that can be added to other words to help emphasise or give meaning to the broader sentence. I read through Plato's *Ion* and saw his widespread use of particles. This prompted me to read *A Little Greek Reader*, and I soon understood that particles allow words, such as 'yes' or 'no', to be emphasised. As such, I have decided to use some of the particles Plato uses in *Lysis* 219c, *Republic* 548c and 559e.

τὸ ἀγαθόν

This term is used in *Protagoras* 355a and refers to 'the Good' or Form of the Good. This is different from the word τάγαθά, which is used to refer to 'things that are good'. τὸ ἀγαθόν involves knowledge of the Forms, and the Form of the Good is the focal point from which all other objects derive their value. By contrast, τάγαθά encompasses 'goods' (anything that can be described as 'good') in a broader, more general sense. I felt that τὸ ἀγαθόν was more suitable in this setting, since Achilles grounds his judgement in the Gods, from whom he derives the value of 'neglecting' thieves.

πράσσωμεν

There are many ways of asking what to do in Greek. I used the deliberative subjunctive here, as its nature is such that the answers 'yes' or 'no' are equally valid when responding to the question, since it is used when the speaker is deliberating with themselves about what to do. Thus, the Socratic elenchus is maintained, as Odysseus must choose a response with which the dialogue can progress. This is important, as Achilles' justification for withdrawing from the fighting hinges on Odysseus' response to his question.

παντάπασιν

Platonic dialogues feature a to-and-fro exchange of thoughts between the interlocutors. In this dialogue, Achilles clarifies key concepts (such as whether the Gods do good, and that we should always strive for the good) and requires Odysseus' input and responses. This is a common trope of Platonic dialogues, where a character will put forward propositions and expect the other interlocutors to agree or disagree; the responses are often simple one- or two-word replies. An example would be *vaí* throughout *Ion* 537c–538b. *Republic* 548c features the one-word response παντάπασιν (used by Glaucon), and its simplicity helped me choose it, to make Odysseus' responses to Achilles' questions short and to the point, allowing the text to better revolve around Achilles' justifications for his actions.

μετέχειν

The concept of methexis is one that Plato examines in his dialogues (such as throughout *Republic* Books 6 and 7). It involves 'participating in' or 'taking part in' some sort of quality in the realm of the Forms: here, the deeds of the Gods. Methexis differs from mimesis, as the latter is concerned with imitating acts or objects in the realm of appearances. This philosophical term not only allows me to achieve my intention of writing a Platonic dialogue, but also better characterises Achilles as someone conscious of the implications of his language and his need to justify his actions.

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