Aspects of the Epic Vocabulary of Vulnerability

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Recommended Citation
Colby Quarterly, Volume 29, no.3, September 1993, p.197-221

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The opening scene of the Iliad strikes a particularly harsh and penetrating note, accentuated by the negation of a verb which, in this and many other respects, may be taken as a telling introduction to the world of the Iliad. In the clash of Agamemnon’s rejection of the outsider Chryses, the verb χραισμεῖν couples a sense of the remote and the poetic with the immediacy of fundamental human concerns. The meanings of the verb—“to ward off, to defend, protect, to succour, aid”—identify those concerns. It is, moreover, notable that they are articulated by a verb that seems already to have, in this, its first appearance at the opening of the epic, an association with a distant past that will characterize it throughout the history of Greek literature. The verb is a striking instance of the epic Kunstsprache, a recognizably poetic articulation highlighting a significant theme.¹

Even before the reverberations of the opening scene have been stilled, the verb χραισμεῖν will be caught up again, highlighted in the oath of Achilles which heralds much of the plot of the Iliad, and repeated three further times across the first book of the epic (1.28; 241-42, 566, 588-89). In this way the word functions significantly and insistently within the narrative’s own introduction to the epic world. Another aspect of χραισμεῖν which marks it as distinctively Iliadic is its disappearance from the literary language immediately after the Iliad:

¹ For the meanings of χραισμεῖν given here see Cunliffe (1963); cf. LSJ s.v.: “ward off something destructive from one; more freq. c. dat. pers. only defend, succour (though the notion of warding off injury is always implied); c. neut. Adj. χραισμεῖν προς αντίστασιν, avai in all”; and Frisk (1960-72): “nützen, helfen, fördern.” For χραισμεῖν as a “verbe ancien,” see Chantraine et al. (2968-80) s.v.; for opposed views on the question of the origin and status of vocabulary attributed to the Arcado-Cyprian dialect (by the scholiast on Apollonius Rhodius, 2.218, τὸ γὰρ χραισμεῖν Κλειτόρης λέγει τοις ἔτοιμοι), see Leumann (1950) and Ruijgh (1957), esp. p. 164 (cf. also pp. 57-64 on the particle νῦ in the formulation μη νῦ τοις χραισματι-) Ruijgh observes on the example of χραισμεῖν in the Iliad, “le caractère formulaire de leur emploi n’est pas très net” (164).

Unless otherwise stated, all citations of classical texts in this paper are from the most recent OCT editions.

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it does not appear in the *Odyssey*, Hesiod, lyric, or tragedy, and is only revived as a conscious archaism by the late imitators of Homeric epic. A verb from a distant past, which disappears from use for the greater part of Greek literature, *chraismein* serves to spotlight, at the very outset of Western literature, an aspect of mortal existence which was to abide and which was to constitute one of the most pervasive concerns of Greek society, literature and thought: the basic, primordial need for help and protection as a fundamental condition for survival.

The beginning of a narrative marks that critical realm in which the said is parted from the non-said. Very often a voice emerges from silence to articulate and make known some need, lack or “insufficiency” by request or supplication. The *Iliad* is particularly sensitive in its approach to these large narrative possibilities. Indeed, much of Book 1 is a powerful dramatization of processes generative of the *epos* itself, with a tension maintained throughout as voices struggle to overcome resistance, opposition and silence. For example, shortly after the epic has announced *mēnis* as its great subject—a discordant, destructive theme forcefully juxtaposed in the first verse with the imperative “sing” (μήνιν ἄτις), the pitch of emotion to be matched by the power of song—the narrative dramatizes the difficult and delicate process by which a speaker might articulate that very subject within the narrative: μηθησασθαι / μήνιν (1.74-75). Throughout the book there is a repeated restaging of the precarious passage from silence to language and the risk inherent in speaking out in an arena of power where even within language there exists the voice that silences, the force that excludes from language and society. These tensions are introduced in the opening Chryses scene where the request of the suppliant is completely crushed by the negation uttered by Agamemnon (from the first word of the reply, μὴ, 1.26). In the reiteration of that negation, the phrase *ou ti chraismein* rings piercingly with all the harshness of the impact of abrupt dismissal, immediate helplessness and powerless silence.

In initiating a reading of these and related scenes, we might begin again from outside language, tracing the movements of an outsider who crosses a boundary to bring a request. We might note that the narrative of the *Iliad* commences with the approach of a figure whose emergence into visibility is marked by the particular attention given to the important objects which signal his position as priest, suppliant and claimant to protection. Chryses appears bearing fillets and sceptre, tokens which are given sudden, renewed prominence in the unexpectedly added phrase which recomposes the visual image, possibly lending height to the wreath at the same time as it introduces the sceptre: οὕτω δὲ ἐκχωμάτων ἔν χριστήρῳ ἑκατοβάλον Ἀττάλλωνος / χρυσέως ἄνα κτίπττρῳ (1.14-15). This initial stage of narrative, this liminal world of silently signifying symbols, is violently disrupted by a speech which brutally denies the possibility of any form of protection to be secured through symbols: μή νῦ τοι οὖ χραίσιμη σκύπττρον

2. Kirk (1985) ad loc. regards the construction as an instance of “typical, if rare, oral imprecision.” The attention to the hands (ἐκχωματ' ἐν χριστήρῳ ἑκατοβάλον Ἀττάλλωνος / χρυσέως ἄνα κτίπττρῳ (1.14-15)). This initial stage of narrative, this liminal world of silently signifying symbols, is violently disrupted by a speech which brutally denies the possibility of any form of protection to be secured through symbols: μή νῦ τοι οὖ χραίσιμη σκύπττρον

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καὶ στέμμα θεοί (1.28). The voice of power proclaiming powerlessness denies all efficacy to the emblems it sights, names, recognizes, and rejects. In its first occurrence in the epic, the verb *chraisein* tells of a state of exposure, of defencelessness, enforced silence and isolation.

From the extremity of his solitary and exposed position, along the openness of the shore and against the natural force of the “loud resounding” sea, the priest appeals to his god for protection, help and vengeance. In this open landscape of sea, shore and sky, he recalls his past service in constructing a roof, a primary form of shelter, a protection against the elements, as a temple for the god: *ἐγὼ ποτέ τοι χαρίσεις ἐπὶ νῆον ἐρευσα* (1.39). In its opening the *Iliad* thus registers the basic feature of a major cultural change, the shift from open-air cult to the construction of the roofed temple. (“The first impulse towards the building of temples came at the very beginning of the eighth century.... It was felt that the presiding deity needed a house, in which the cult image was to be given the place of honour.”)

It may well be important that the verb *ἐπέθεσε* (p. 199), “to furnish with a roof, to roof,” occurs within the *Iliad* only here and in Book 24, where the narrative dwells upon the construction of the “tent” of Achilles, an abode which is to function significantly in providing shelter for the very mortal and vulnerable Priam, aged father and suppliant (καθαύπτερεον ἐρευσαν ... ὑπόκαιρον, 24.450-51). In this, as in a number of its details, the Chryses scene sketches elements that will be expanded and elaborated to assume critical significance in the achievement of the conclusion to the *Iliad*. Through this particular architectural detail and relation—in the roof that covers and shelters—an arch of protection spans the epic.

The language in which Chryses invokes Apollo is striking in its accumulation of terms for protection. Where ἀμφιβέβηκας (1.37) is vivid in its evocation of physical protection, of the warrior’s bestriding, and standing over, a fallen friend on the battlefield, the verb ἀνάσσεις (1.38) encompasses the more conceptual, constitutive relation between the power to protect and the ability to rule. To rule is to protect—the very relation that Agamemnon, designated within the epic as ἄναξ ἀνδρών, disregards in dismissing Chryses. By denying protection to the outsider, the king has placed the safety of his own community in jeopardy.

The god strikes, inflicting plague, and it is Achilles who responds, Achilles

3. Coldstream (1977) 321 (emphasis added). For the temple as a protection against the elements, see p. 327. One might add that the important structure of reciprocity articulated in 1.39 may be suggested again in the word ἀμφιβεβήκας (ἀμφί- + ἐπέθεσ) at 1.45 when Apollo moves in answer to Chryses’ prayer.

4. Similarly, the single occurrence of the verb ἐπέθεσε in the *Odyssey* marks the powerful and conclusive moment where Odysseus provides Penelope with the proof of his identity, recovers wife and home in a symbolic reconstruction of the *oikos*, in which he recalls his own original construction of the *tholos*, chamber, and the marriage bed itself, ἀντὶ δὲ ἐγὼ ἀμφιβεβήκας θαλάσσαν δικοῦ, ὑπὸ ἐπέθεσα, ἵππον ἅλαδεσσαν, καὶ εὗ καθαύπτερεον ἐρευσα (23.192-93). If the account recalls his earlier construction of a raft for his return (5.241-61), the simple which now recapitulates the long experience at sea (23.233-40) contrasts with the fixity, stability and security of home at last regained.

5. Leaf comments on ἀνάσσεις, “protectest by thy might, rather than rules,” but the two meanings need not be quite so mutually exclusive: cf. Il. 6.402-03, τὸν ἀ' ἔκτοι κατέκατε λαμπρόν κατερράποι δί αἰλλα / ἄστυναντα κίτος γὰρ ἐρυτον ἔλαφον ἔκτοι, and Leaf’s note at loc., “It follows that ἄναξ, which is explained by ἐρυτοτομοσκούντος τῶν ἀκρωτίων ὀπίσθεν τοῖσι τούτοις ἐπικύρων. It is not the protection given to his country by a king,” see also Leumann (1950) 42-44. For the synonymy of ἄναξ and the name Hektor, see Plato, Cratylus 393a.
who not only summons an assembly to seek a remedy, but undertakes to provide the help and protection necessary for the possibility of speech within that public arena. The seer Kalchas will not speak—and disclose the knowledge which the Achaian need in order to preserve themselves from destruction—until Achilles has sworn an oath to protect him (καὶ μοι ὄμοσσον / ἥ μὲν μοι πρόφρων ἔπεσεν καὶ χερσίν ἀρήξειν, 1.76-77; cf. 1.83, σὺ δὲ φράσαι, εἰ μὲ σαώσεις).

When Sophocles later recalls the opening of the Iliad in his Oedipus Tyrannus, the text emphatically articulates the essential element sought by this threatened human society: ἀλκήν τιν’ εὑρεῖν ἥμιν (42; cf. OT 188, εὐστα πέμψων ἀλκάν, and OT 218). The term ἀλκή, “defence, protection, help,” is also the “valour, prowess” which is valued as ἀρετή in its ability to meet society’s needs and to provide protection.6 It is a central term about which so much of this early Greek world—vulnerable and in pressing need of defence and protection—revolves. This need for “defence, protection, help” is reiterated in the rhyming relays that make up the narrative structure of Book 1 of the Iliad, as one loigos, and the need to avert it, is overtaken by another.7

In reply to Agamemnon’s threat to take Achilles’ prize Briseis to replace Chryseis, Achilles proclaims his great oath. In contrast to his first oath of protection at the opening of the assembly, this announces the departure of the warrior who is the effective protector of this assembled society at war.8 If Agamemnon fleetingly acknowledges something of this capacity in the phrase ἀγαθός περ ἐὼν (1.131), it is to dismiss it again in the confidence of his own claims to being ἄριστος Ἀχαιῶν, a status Achilles had conferred upon the king only to reappropriate it for himself, most emphatically at the conclusion to an oath which challenges the king by turning his language against him at critical points.9 This verbal reversal is particularly powerful in the instance where the king’s first words in the epic are recalled (1.241-42, cf. 28); the negated chraismein is forcefully articulated within the larger form of the great oath, directed against the king in one of the major utterances of this first book of the epic. In this clash, and the deeper division within the heroic world that it unlocks, power and the position of protector are to be tested as the warrior confronts the king. In Book 9 Diomedes makes the significant remark that as king Agamemnon possesses the sceptre but lacks ἀλκή. And where need presses, it is in ἀλκή, the

6. Cf. Lexikon des frühgriechischen Epos (hereafter LfgrE) s.v. ἀλκή, particularly ΣΧ(ε), “Abwehr, Hilfe,” and B (cols. 494-95); similarly Frisk, ἀλκή (1). The important distinctions provided by Cröner (1912-14) are summarized in Fraenkel (1950) vol. 2, p. 64, where Fraenkel draws attention to “the special meaning of the word” ἀλκή: “In early Greek in general... ἀλκή has, besides its principal meaning ‘defence, protection, defensive action,’ the closely related sense of ‘warlike strength,’ but not of ‘strength’ or ‘power’ in all senses.” Perhaps one might define this special sense as “prowess to protect.” Chantraine, s.v. ἀλέξω, recapitulates this point in his definition of ἀλκή as “force qui permet de se défendre.” On the persistence of the primary notion “Abwehrkraft,” see Snell (1969) 18 and n. 1.

7. Note in particular ἀπὸ λογίν ἀμύναι (1.67); ἀεικά λογιὸν ἄμυνε (97); ἀεικά ἴμιο γεννύται ἀεικά λογιὸν ἄμυνον / τοῖς ἄλλοις (341-42); ἀεικά λογιὸν ἄμυνον (456); cf. ἀεικά λογιὸν ἄμυναι (398).

8. Nestor states precisely this at 1.283-84: δὲ μύα ψάναν / ἵρκος Ἀχαιῶν πελεῖται πολέμου κακών. For ἄριστος Ἀχαιῶν see 1.91, 244; cf. 412. At 275 Nestor addresses Agamemnon as ἄγαθος περ ἐὼν; where Achilles echoes the language of the king to empty or to contest its claims, Nestor repeats in order to restore and conciliate, tendencies which become particularly marked in the subtle movements and processes of language so important in ll. 9. I have discussed these aspects of the text in detail in Chap. 2 of Lynn-George (1988). The subtleties in the use of the phrase ἀγαθός περ ἐὼν in Book 1 require detailed consideration, which is beyond the scope of the present study.
valour and prowess that provide protection and defence, that the greater power is deemed to lie:

\[ \text{οἱ δὲ διὰνδίξα δῶκε Κρόνου πᾶς ἀγκυλωμέτων·} \]
\[ \text{ακῇπτρῳ μὲν τοι δῶκε τετυμηθαί περὶ πάντων,} \]
\[ \text{ἀλκήν δ’ οὐ τοι δῶκειν, ὅ τε κράτος ἐστὶ μέγιστον.} \] (9.37-39)

The son of wily Kronos has endowed you but by halves:
with the sceptre he gave you honour beyond all,
but valour he did not give you, and of all power that is the greatest.11

It is upon a sceptre that Achilles swears his great oath (μέγας ὁρκός, 1.233, 239). But the sceptre is now charged with specific significance as a symbol of the preservation of themistes. In his protest against the injustice of the king who does not preserve the proper, customary forms of order, Achilles proceeds from that failure to the king's inability to protect the community exposed in war. The great oath upon the sceptre gathers the echoes of the opening of the epic into an elaborate and extended articulation which now pronounces the sceptre-bearing king's ultimate helplessness—a major reversal which turns on the verb chraismein:

\[ \text{οὔ δὲ τοι μέγας ἔσσεται ὁρκός·} \]
\[ \text{ἡ ποτ’ Ἀχιλλῆς ποθὶ ἔσται υἱὸς Ἀχαιῶν} \]
\[ \text{οὕτως ἐπεμενὸς· τότε δ’ οὐ τι δυνήσεται ἀρχευμένος περὶ} \]
\[ \text{χραιμεῦν, εὕτ’ ἀν πολλοὶ υἱὸς Ἐκτόρου ἀνδροφόνου} \]
\[ \text{ἄνθρωποι πίπτωσι· οὔ δ’ ἐνδοθυθυμὸν ἀμειβεῖς} \]
\[ \text{χωρίμενος δ’ οὗ ἄριστον Ἀχαιῶν οὐδέν ἔπεισα.} \] (1.239-44)

And this shall be a great oath before you:
some day longing for Achilles will come to the sons of the Achaeans, all of them. Then stricken at heart though you be, you will be in no way able to defend them, when in their numbers before man-slaughtering Hektor they fall dying. And then you will rend the heart within you in remorse, that you did no honour to the best of the Achaians.

As throughout Book 1, the narrative constantly works in and out of silence. Achilles, as he reflects upon the sceptre that he almost seems to discover within his hands (ναὶ μὲ τὸδε σκῆπτρον, 234), returns to speech where Chryses was reduced to silence, speaks out as he himself is moved step by step from his central place within the assembly to the position of outsider. In Achilles' verbal reflection upon the nature and significance of the sceptre, a number of possibilities is suggested. As an object held up in his hands before the eyes of the assembly, the sceptre serves as a demonstrable sign of a wrong, as a silent, but certain, manifestation of injustice. It is as if all the wrong were gathered into that single, visible, concrete object, an object which should, on the contrary, serve to

10. The speech rings with the word ἀλκή (34, 39; cf. Leaf, “ἀλκή [34] has the emphatic place in a rhetorical antithesis with ἀλκήν in 39”), with echoing ἀν-ἀλκής (35), ἀν-ἀλκῆς (41), “incapable of offering defence or resistance, spiritless, cowardly” (Cunliffe). Leaf translates the concluding phrase, “valour which is the greatest sovereignty,” an important implication in what is being stated here concerning κράτος. While the word has a range of meanings, including “physical strength, prowess, might, power, authority, rule,” this passage suggests the indissociability of two realms of sense: on the one hand, physical power or prowess, and on the other hand, political and social authority or sovereignty—in so far as the latter is founded upon ἀλκή.

11. I am indebted to a number of translators and commentators for the translations of Homer provided in this study, in particular, Lattimore and Lang, Leaf and Myers.
confirm the observance and preservation of justice (ἐν παλάμης φορέουσι δικαστάλωι, οἳ τε θέμιστας / πρὸς Διὸς εἰρύσται. 1.238-39). At the same time—if anything still remains of this possibility—the sceptre also serves to reinforce Achilles’ demand that justice be upheld.

The sceptre is exposed as a significant cultural object, cut from the distant mountains and caught within the contradictions of society. The imaginative description that traces through time its original transference from nature to culture is marked by language which ominously insists upon violence: severed and stripped by bronze, it can never again produce life, can never again bear leaf, shoot or bark (1.234-37). The unsettling resonance of this violence is suddenly recalled and developed in the conclusion to the oath, where Achilles dwells upon the destruction of the unprotected, thereby highlighting what the history of the sceptre had already suggested: the irrevocability of the oath is bound up with the irretrievability of life once lost. With the hurling of the sceptre and the formal withdrawal of Achilles, the sceptre-bearing king is left to preside over a community that he is pronounced powerless to protect against the blade. This severance from within society puts the necessary conditions for existence and survival not only at risk but in question. Among such conditions, a sense of justice may prove as essential as power, rule, might, and material resources, even as it is the sense of justice preserved (ἐἰρύσται, 239) which persists through the details of violence and destruction in the description of the sceptre. It may prove that some sense of justice is indispensable for the preservation of society, both in peace and at war—a possibility which it is not too early for this heroic society to contemplate in the intense moment of Achilles’ vivid and articulate protest.

It was the troubled note of ou τι χραίσμειν which announced the initial disturbance that engendered the narrative; it is repeated at the far reach of an introduction to the epic world that encompasses Olympos and the gods towards the end of Book 1. In echoing the opening to the epic, Zeus asserts his supreme power in terms of incontestable might:

άλλ’ ἀκέουσα κάθησο, ἐμῷ δὲ ἐπιπείθειο μῦθῳ,
μὴ υ’ τοι οὐ χραίσμωσιν δοσι θεοί εἰς ἑν ’Ολύμπῳ,
ἀδίαν ἵδιβ’, δὴ κέν τοι ἄκαττους χείρας ἐφείω. (1.565-67)

But go then, sit down in silence, and do as I tell you, lest all the gods, as many as are on Olympos, avail not to help you when I come near and lay my unconquerable hands upon you.

The narrative repeats the dissonant note but achieves a partial resolution, even amidst the restlessness of potential resistance, precisely by repeating the phrase once more; in this instance, however, the speaker for the first time concedes powerlessness in making a plea for acquiescence: τότε δ’ οὔ τι δυνήσομαι ἀχνύμενός περ / χραίσμειν (1.588-89, “and then I shall not, for all my sorrow, be able to protect you”).

While χραίσμειν in a negative construction functions significantly in the structure of some of the major utterances in Book 1 of the Iliad, lending such
speech the harsh edge of taunt and threat, the verb acquires a range in tone in the course of the epic as it is distributed across a number of distinct narrative forms. In its occurrences it serves to delineate the very boundaries it traverses. Outside the domain of the speeches, it forms a significant part of the narrator’s discourse, a voice removed from the immediate, close context of intense conflict, threat and the assertion of power.12

It is from a distance that the narrator focuses, for example, on the solitude and emptiness of the moment of death, the desolate void of vulnerability, where, in the absence of all assistance and any form of defence, it emerges that even excellence, the possession of a great skill, is nothing before the overwhelming force of death:

υίον δὲ Στροφίσσω Σκαμάνδριον, αἴμονα θήρης, Ἀτρείδης Μενέλαος ἔλ’ ἐγχει ἐδώθηντι, ἑσδόν ἡπετήρα διδαξε γάρ Ἀρτέμις αὐτή βάλλειν ἄγρα πάντα, τὰ τε τρέφει οὐρεοῖν ὠλη: ἀλλ’ οὗ οἱ τότε γε χραίοι ’ Ἀρτέμις ἱοχέαρα, οὐδὲ εὐθυβολίαι, ἤσιν τὸ πρὶν γ’ ἐκέκαστο. (5.49-54)

Menelaos, son of Atreus, killed with the sharp spear Strophios’ son, Skamandrios, a man wily in the chase, skilled hunter of beasts. Artemis herself had taught him to strike down every wild thing that mountain woodland nurtures. Yet Artemis of the showering arrows was of no help to him this time, nor was his skill in archery, at which he had until now excelled.

The moment of death is marked out in simple but emphatic temporal terms (τὸ τε γε ... το πρὶν γε) as an abrupt reversal, a sundering of all relations with the past. The narrative registers the disruption of continuity in the newly discovered helplessness of death, a rupture which disturbs the whole pattern of human expectation and that logic of continuity and consistency which is particularly prominent in ancient Greek prayer for help and protection—the very things that are now lacking.13 In this scission between “before” and “but now,” a sudden, violent change renders the whole of a past life irrevocably remote, out of reach exactly at the point where what it contained is most needed; the company and protection of the goddess are receding memories as her favoured hunter in the mountain woodland is himself now ruthlessly hunted down in battle: “but Menelaos the spear-famed, son of Atreus, struck him, / as he fled away before him, in the back with a spear thrust” (5.55-56). Within this context even the epithet of the goddess, who is characterized by her “profusion” of arrows (ιοχέαρα, 53), seems to lend force to the general sense of the absence of all protection (cf. 11.386-87, εἰ μὲν δὴ ἀντίβιον σὺν τεύχει πειρηθείσης, / οὐκ

12. As instances of chraismein are not discussed in the order of their appearance in the iliad, I include a list here of its nineteen occurrences, five of which (italicized) occur in the narrative as distinct from the speeches: 1.28, 242, 566, 589; 3.54; 5.3; 7.144; 11.117, 120, 387, 14.66; 15.32, 652; 16.837; 18.62, 443; 20.296; 21.193, 316.
13. For the pattern “before ... so again now” in prayer, cf., e.g., Chryses at II. 1.453-55, ἤμεν δὴ ποτ’ ἐμεῖν πάροικος ἐκλύσ... ἦς ἦς καὶ νῦν; with reference to his earlier prayer at I. 39-40, εἰ ποτὲ ... ἠ ἢ δὲ ποτὲ; see also II. 5.115-17 (inter alia), Sappho, 1.5-7, Soph., OT 165-66; cf. OT 46-51. Bollack (1990) refers to OT 165-66, εἰ ποτὲ καὶ προτέρας ... ἐλθετε καὶ νῦν as “la formule classique” (vol. 2, p. 96); for further examples see Ax (1932) 415-16. For the principle of precedent in prayer see Burkert (1985) 74-75.
If you were to make trial of me in strong combat with weapons/ your bow would do you no good at all, nor your close-showered arrows. The reflection on the warrior's helplessness is prolonged beyond the possibility of immortal assistance to embrace the source of his preeminence prior to this moment: ἀλλ' οὐ οἱ τότε γε χραίσμειν Ἀρτέμις ἰδοκέαρα, / οὐδὲ ἐκπολίσαι, ἥσιν τὸ πρὶν γ' ἐκέκαστο (5.53-54). The word for his skill, ἐκπολίσαι, is a hapax, possibly a lingering reminiscence of immortal attributes 14 at the moment where the mortal and the immortal are at their greatest point of separation.

While the chraismein construction can heighten the sense of isolation in death, the exposure and helplessness of the victim who is struck in the absence of any defender, the construction can also serve to delineate another configuration of battle narrative, one in which the scene widens beyond the helplessness of the victim to include the helplessness of the spectator, the potential protector who, while present, is powerless to do anything. The threat posed as a future possibility in the oath of Achilles (τότε δ' οὐ τι διδόσασαι ἄχρυσμενὸς περ/ χραίσμειν, εὖτ' ἂν πολλοί ύφρ' Ἐκτόρῳ ἀνδροφόνῳ / θυράκοιτες πίπτεσσι, 1.241-43) is vividly realized in its immediacy on the battlefield, as a warrior from Mykenai, endowed with all heroic skills and qualities, trips, as he turns, on the outer rim of armour specifically designed to provide the maximum defence—the huge Mykenaian shield which stretches the length of the body (ποδηνεκής), a shield which should serve as a protection (ἔρκος ἀκόντων) but instead now precipitates death as Hektor pierces the fallen hero, takes his life before the very eyes of his helpless friends, “who for all their sorrowing could do nothing/ to help their companion”:

["Ἐκτόρῳ φίλοιν δὲ μιν ἐγγὺς ἐταιρῶν κτείν', οἱ δ' οὐκ ἐδύναντο καὶ ἄχρυσμενοι περ ἑταίρου χραίσμειν αὐτοί γάρ μάλα δειδίσαν Ἐκτόρα διον. (15.650-52)

Within the narrative the chraismein construction also provides the armature for an extended simile. The helplessness of fellow warriors is depicted in terms of the desperation of a creature who can do nothing to avert the destruction of her offspring, a doe whose anxious presence turns to panic on her own account, maternal concern giving way to feverish fear and flight, an attempt to escape the lunge of the predator in the ensuing pursuit through thickets and forest, far from the breached shelter of her former lair:

ὡς δὲ λέων ἐλάφῳ ταχείς νήπια τέκνα ῥηβίσως συνέαξε, λαβὼν κρατεροίοιν ἰδούσιν, ἔλθὼν εἰς εὐνήν, ἀπαλῶν τε σφ' ἄττορ ἀπινύρα: ἢ δ' εἰ πέρ τε τύχησε μάλα σχεδών, οὐ δύναται σφ' χραίσμειν· αὐτὴν γὰρ μιν ὕπο τρόμος αἰνός ἰκάνει· καρπαλίμους δ' ἥθε διὰ δρυμά πυκνά καὶ ὕλην

14. Cf., e.g., the epithets for Apollo, such as ἐκατηβόλος.
And as a lion easily crushes the innocent young of the swift deer, once he has seized them in his strong teeth after having invaded their lair, and rips out the soft heart from them, and the doe, even if she chance to be very near, cannot help them; for on herself too comes dread terror, and swiftly she dashes away through the dense thickets and woodland, sweating in her speed before the onslaught of the mighty beast; even so there was no one among the Trojans who could save these two from death, but they themselves were running in fear from the Argives.

In the dispersal of the warriors described in the resumption of the narrative, the usually impersonal ou tis of the construction is changed to ou tis as the presence of friends yields once more to the vacant site of utter vulnerability: “even so there was no one among the Trojans who could save these two from death, but they themselves were running in fear from the Argives.”

Within the Iliad the tragic sense of maternal helplessness evoked by this simile is reiterated by Achilles’ immortal mother, a goddess who, unlike the frail creature in desperate flight from destruction, goes, even though conscious of her powerlessness, to confront and participate in the scene of her son’s sorrowful mortality, a fate underlined by the notable shift of the verb ἀχυνμαί: 

δορα δέ μοι ζωεὶ καὶ ὀρὰ φάος ἦλελοιο
ἀχυνμαί, οὔτε τι οἱ δυναῖαι χρασιμμαί ιοῦσα.
ἀλλ’ εἴμι … . (18.61-63; 61-64=442-443)

Yet while I see him live and he looks on the sunlight, he has sorrows, and though I go to him I can do nothing to help him. Yet I shall go… .

The verb ἀχυνμαί is detached from what is its customary subject in a construction which is normally used to intensify the impotence of the observer who is moved to help but cannot (cf., e.g., τότε δέ οὐ τί δυνήσαι ἀχυμνεύνος περ / χρασιμεῖν, 1.241-42; τότε δέ οὐ τί δυνήσαι οὐκ ἀχυμνεύνος περ / χρασιμεῖν, 1.588-89; οἱ δ’ οὐκ ἐδύναντο, καὶ ἀχυμνεύνοι περ ἔταιρου/ χρασιμεῖν, 15.651-52). Here, by contrast, ἀχυνμαί is used, emphatically within the verse structure, not of the observer but of the victim, trenchantly recapitulating the grief of Achilles’ brief mortal life. The transference of the word and rearrangement of the structure also serves significantly to suggest a chain of powerless protectors: Thetis cannot save an Achilles who grieves over his own failure to protect Patroklos.

The stark contrast between a dying Patroklos unprotected by Achilles and a Troy defended by Hektor is asserted in the moment of Patroklos’ death at the hands of Hektor. Among the last words Patroklos hears from Hektor as victor standing over him are of a life lost on the battlefield, where even the greatness of Achilles as warrior proved, finally, no protection from death for his friend: ἄ δείλ’, οὔδε τοι ἐσθλὸς ἐὼν χρασίμησεν Ἀχιλλεύς, “Wretch! Achilles, great
as he was, could do nothing to help you" (16.837, a situation contrasted with Hektor’s emphasis upon his own role as protector of the Trojans, “When in front of these [τάξις δὲ πρόσθε] were the swift horses of Hektor/straining their speed for the fight, and I with my own spear/stand out among the fighting Trojans, I who ward from them [ἀμύνομαι] the day of necessity,”16.833-36). In the elaboration and echo of his oath in Book 1 (240-42, ἐὰν ποτ’ Ἀχιλλῆος ποθὴ θέται ὡς Ἀχαιῶν / σύμπαντας· τότε δὲ οὐ τι δυνήσεις ἄχυρον περ/χραιμεῖν, and 341, χρείω ἐμεῖο γενήσαι τείκεα λογίων ἀμύναι), Achilles had related helplessness to need, the chreid that emerges from the state of ou ti chraismein. His painful realization in Book 18 is that it is he himself, more critically than the king whose role he sought to challenge, who has failed in his role as philos, warrior and protector, the ἄρης ἀλκτήρα of whom Patroklos and his comrades had desperate need:

αὐτίκα τεθανατίν, ἐπεὶ οὐκ ἄρ’ ἐμελλόν ἐταῖρῳ
κτεινομένα ἐπαμίθων· ὃ μὲν μάλα τηλώθη πάτρῃς
ἐφίπτ’, ἐμεῖο δὲ δῆσαι ἄρης ἀλκτήρα γεινέσαι. (18.98-100)15

Let me die at once, since I was not to succour my comrade at his slaying; he has perished far from the land of his fathers and lacked in his sore need my power to protect him from harm.

Achilles’ sudden realization, ἐπεὶ φιλὸς ὀλέθ’ ἐταῖρος ... τὸν ἀπώλεσα (18.80,82), is strikingly (and unexpectedly) comparable to that of Hektor outside the walls of Troy, ἐπεὶ ὀλέσα λαὸν ... ὀλέσει λαὸν (22.104, 107).16 At these most critical points, the two warriors usually contrasted in their respective positions in relation to society—the hero of seemingly self-sufficient isolation and the hero enmeshed in social ties and obligations—approach a shared position in their echoing words. (Again, ironically, the same awareness which brings Achilles back to society isolates Hektor outside the walls of his city and community.) Across this spectrum of heroic possibilities an important point emerges. Within the epic all depends for its existence and survival upon alkē, where alkē is not simply “valour” or “prowess” for its own sake, pure physical might devoid of social meaning, but such a quality specifically in its capacity to help and defend.17

The extent to which the epic world is founded upon the need for protection is

15. Cf. 18.102-03, οὐδὲ τὰ Πατράκλοι θετείμην φάσος οὐδὲ ἐτάφροι / τοῖς ἄλλοις, οἱ δὲ πολέμῳ δάμεν
Ecceor δίκω, and with δῆσαι cf. 18.76-77 (τινὲς ἐπὶ ἐπηδουμένους, 77). Cronert (1912-14) gives as the meaning of ἄρης ἀλκτήρ “Helfer in der Not.”
16. Cf. also Agammemnon’s words, ἐπεὶ πολὺν ὀλέσα λαὸν (2.115, 9.22), which reinforce the irony suggested above.
17. A small example: the attribute of Achilles, ποδόκης, may acquire an inflection of protection when it is articulated as ποδ-ἀρχής, “succouring with the feet, running to the rescue” (LSJ). In its wider implications the “vocabulary of vulnerability” thus opens on to, and is important for, “the long story” which is the “genealogy of morals”: the complex of needs, values, necessities, requirements, and obligations, together with an emerging sense of significant distinctions within this complex. In this relation one might for now briefly note a few points. The sense “to be of use, service” sometimes given for chraismein (e.g., Chantraine et al. [1968-80] s.v.) always connotes particularly “use or service” for protection and survival. Scholars have often been drawn to a possible etymological link between chraismein and χρη (asserted unequivocally by Kretschmer [1930] 100); whether or not there is a connection, it is relevant that significant questions and concerns are shared by these verbs. For χρη in general cf. Redard (1953); see also the remarks of Tränk (1960) 183, with the important qualification provided by Vlastos (1970) 64, n. 45.
reflected upon in the final forlorn image of the defenceless father, a figure whose uncertain survival serves to magnify the fragility of all human existence. The vast epic is structured in such a way that its conclusion recalls its opening, as the narrative explores in depth the difficulties and complexities involved in reversing the abrupt negation first addressed to Chryses (cf. ou ti chraismein, etc.). In his plea spoken within the provisional shelter of Achilles’ tent, Priam locates another distant father in need of care and protection in the absence of his son; the Achilles who inflicts loss and suffering at Troy is at the same time far from an isolated father in Phthia, a particularly vulnerable figure for whom there is no one to act as arés alktér, no son to ward off the harrying, harmful incursions, the gathering forces of destruction in an imagined setting which mirrors the reality of Troy:

καὶ μὲν ποιοὶ κείνου περιναιεταὶ ἄμφις ἐόντες τέρσουσ’, οὐδὲ τις ἐστιν ἄρην καὶ λογίου ἐμὸναι. (24.488-89)

And they who dwell nearby perchance encompass him and afflict him, nor is there any to defend him against the bane, the destruction.

If the epic highlights a harsh world in which the prime defenders of the poem fail to protect their fathers, family and friends, it ends by creating a brief bond, in the midst of so much that is irreconcilable, precisely in the recognition of a shared need. It is this recognition which leads to Achilles’ precarious protection of the father of Hektor and his role as the last “protector” of the doomed Troy, a protection that is essentially passive and strictly limited in duration to the twelve days needed for Hektor’s burial.

WITHIN A WORLD where survival is constantly under threat, where existence is dominated by concern with the need for protection and help, a verb with the meanings that chraismein bears has an important function in the articulation of the stakes and struggle of such an existence. So much in this world hinges upon the necessity and capacity “to ward off, to defend, protect, succour, aid, come to the rescue.” One of the fundamental constructions in such a world is the wall (which may itself in turn be protected by a trench or fosse as in Iliad 7), the wall erected as εἶλαρ, “a means of defence or protection,” “a shelter.” Characteristically, the Ἰλιαδ captures the force of the breaching of such structures, even the “not to be broken, broken through or severed” (ἀρρηκτον), where, in the wall that does not avail, life is exposed once more to the possibility of destruction and the renewed need for defence:

ἐπεὶ δὲ νησίων ἐπὶ πρύμνηι μάχονται, τεῖχος δ’ οὐκ ἔχρασμε τετυγμένον, οὐδὲ τι τάφρος,

18. Cf. also the words of the figurative father Phoinix in ll. 9: ἀλλὰ σι παῖδα, θεοὶς ἀπείκελ’ Ἀχιλλεί, / ποιεύμην, ἵνα μεί ποτ’ αἰεικά λογίου ἐμὴν (494-95). For λογίον ἐμὸναι see note 7 above, and for ἄρην ... ἐμὸναι cf. ἄρης ἀλητήρα in the context of 18.98-100, cited and discussed above. One might note the personal construction here in οὐδὲ τις ἐστιν ἄρην καὶ λογίου ἐμὸναι rather than the other common Homeric expression for utter defencelessness, οὐδὲ τις ἀλή (e.g., ll. 21.528, Od. 12.120, 22.305), an expression which will be discussed further below in relation to Aeschylus.
Since now they are fighting by the stems of the ships, and the well built wall has not availed, nor the trench either, where the Danaans endured so much, hoping in their hearts that it would be an unbroken bulwark protecting their ships and themselves.

The verb *chraismein* does not simply state the effort to secure existence: in the *Iliad* it is always negated, and hence always negates; it forms a construction that is emphatic in its articulation of *ou ti, ou tis*—the "in no way" and "no one" that states what is *of no avail*. On the one hand, the verb *chraismein* belongs to the extensive system of words in Greek that denote help, defence, protection; on the other hand, in its consistent use in a negative construction, it marks the limits of that broad domain, the boundary that defines vulnerability and beyond which human endeavour enters the open, fully exposed space where further effort is potentially futile. In its construction *chraismein* always points to this void, to the absence of help, the collapse of effective protection, the failure of a means of defence; in pronouncing vulnerability the verb sounds a note of profound futility from which the opening of the epic issues and to which the *Iliad* insistently returns. If this persistent note continued to haunt Greek literature, it was because, like the epic in its conception, that literature sought to meet a profound human need, to confront the silence of emptiness without surrendering to the knell of futility.

**II**

In itself the verb *chraismein* is but one delicate strand of an extensive and changing vocabulary in Greek that emanated from, and constantly returned to, the ineluctable reality of human vulnerability. Within this intricate and difficult area of words and needs, the verb *chraismein* provided a distinctive contribution, a defining perspective. But the very disappearance of the word opens for consideration the limits and possibilities of a vocabulary which functioned to articulate human vulnerability as well as to voice the stark need for the structures whereby man sought to secure survival. From a single word soon to be lost, our attention might shift slightly to include the layers of articulation within the language that indicate something of the extensive range, richness and refinement of this vocabulary in Greek.

In studying the verb *chraismein* and related terms, it is possible to map some

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19. At 14.67 I have preferred Leaf's reading οἶς to the OCT's ὁς, for the reason given by Leaf, that it includes the wall, "the most important part of the έλαρ."  
20. The one instance in the *Iliad* which may seem to be an exception to this consistent negative construction is a conditional use, in which a negative is implied, at II. 21.193; this will be discussed below in relation to 21.130-32. On this point see Stephanus (1954) s.v. (col. 1609): "Apud Homerum hoc verbum non legitur nisi in sententiis negativis, uno excepto loco II. 193 ... quo ipso quoque significatur ὃ ὅνωσαι χραισμεῖν." LSJ notes that Homer uses *chraismein* "with negs. expressed or implied (in II. 21.193, ἐ ὅνωσαι τι χραισμεῖν is ironical for δότι χ. δόναται), cf. 15.32." LSJ also notes that *chraismein* does not occur in positive clauses until Apollonius Rhodius and later epic writers, a significant change that marks not only a break in the epic tradition but also the extent of the difference from the Homeric force of the exclusively negative *chraismein* and the perspective this conveys.
of the strata in the history of the language of Greek literature, to trace the fissures of change and to examine what persists across such changes in the language. Something of this history of the language, as well as the distinction between poetry and prose, can be registered in Plato's version of the striking opening note from the Iliad. In the course of transferring the speeches of the epic to the mode defined as diégésis, Plato also replaces the epic verb: the Homeric μὴ νῦ τοι οὐ χραίσμην σκῆπτρον καὶ στέμμα θεόν (II. 1.28) becomes μὴ αὐτῷ τὸ τε σκῆπτρον καὶ τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ στέμματα οὐκ ἐπαρκέσοι (Plato, Republic 3.393e6, “otherwise his sceptre and priestly garlands might afford him no protection”).

Already within the Iliad chraismein coexists with another verb which shares many of the same senses, and which will eventually replace it. The closeness in usage can be illustrated by a passage in which the two verbs occur in relatively close proximity. The passage itself, from Book 20, includes a survey of a broad span of history. In focusing upon Aeneas, it highlights a single, slender possibility of survival and continuity, while at the same time heightening the sense of the imminence and totality of Troy's fall; in its reach it both encompasses a time from the distant past when the sacred city of Troy had not yet been founded (ἐπεὶ οὖ πω Ἀιών ἱρὴ / ἐν πεδίῳ πεπόληστο, 20.216-17) and contemplates, beyond the destruction of that city, a time when Troy will no longer exist. Through the history of the emergence of the city and its eventual disappearance, the line of Dardanos has been destined to survive. But even this assurance of continuity is placed in jeopardy in the immediate perils of battle, and Poseidon is moved to protest at the risk that Aeneas, the destined survivor, takes in engaging Achilles. In relying upon the protection of Apollo, “the far-shooter,” Aeneas appears heedless of the limits to even divine protection in war:

νήπιος, οὖδὲ τί οἱ χραίαμενει λυγρὸν ὀλέθρον. (20.296)

Poor fool, since Apollo will in no way keep grim death from him.

This articulation of the chraismein construction, which includes a direct object, follows closely upon a similar formulation with a different verb, where the possibility of protection from lugron olethron is affirmed in arkein (“to ward off, keep off,” “to defend, protect”):22

21. One might compare this substitution of ἐπαρκέσοι for χραίσμην with the dialect gloss provided by the scholiast on Ap. Rhod., 2.218, cited in note 1 above; Hesychius gave βονθίου as the meaning of χραίσμην; it is interesting that βονθίου is not used in Homer, although the Iliad knows the adjective βονθός (II. 13.477, 17.481). At II. 1.588-90 Hephaistos underlines his present helplessness (οὐ τι δουλεύσαι ... χραίαμενει) with reference to his earlier attempt to help (Δλέξζεμα). In terms of equivalents, one might also note, for example, the Odyssey’s use of Δλαλκέων in place of the Iliad’s χραίαμενει at Od. 3.236-38, particularly οὐδὲ τεθίς τῇ φίλῳ ἀνδρὶ δοναται Δλαλκέων. There, the speaker on the possibility of saving a man’s life is Athene: at the opening of II. 4 Zeus provokes Athene by specifically addressing her as Ἀλαλκομενή (cf. also ἄρτηών, 4.3), the weighty epithet accentuating the contrast made withἈφροδιτί φιλομαμάθης and her active protection of her favourite on the battlefield (4.5-12).

22. Willcock (1984) comments ad loc. on the “extension” in use here (followed by Kirk [1985] in his comment on 7.143-44); cf. Schmidt (1968) 363-64, Schwzyzer (1953) includes chraismein within a list of intransitive verbs (vol. 2, p. 144), distinguishing it from transitive verbs for defence (146); as can be seen, chraismein in its use straddles the distinction.

23. Cf. Lfg ※ v. “etwas von jem. m abhalten, abwehren u. ihm dadurch ein Schutz sein; genügen.”
Here, as elsewhere, arkein affirms where chraismein always negates. While it is this possibility of affirmation in arkein which distinguishes the use of the two verbs, arkein itself also often functions in the negative, like chraismein, to sound the note of futility and of defencelessness. The compound form ep-arkein occurs in language that is, notably, identical to the chraismein example just cited, when, towards the very end of the long catalogue of forces at Troy, the poet reflects upon the golden adornment of the warrior and his unavoidable death—a lugron olethron from which not even armaments of gold could ever guarantee protection: νῆπιος, οὐδὲ τι νῦν ἐπὶ τοῦ γὰρ ἐπίρκεσες λυγρὸν ὀλέθρον (II. 2.873 “[fighting in golden raiment.] poor fool, nor did this avail to keep grim death from him”; cf. 20.296, νῆπιος, οὐδὲ τι νῦν χραίσμησεν λυγρὸν ὀλέθρον).

The two verbs chraismein and arkein are interwoven in the movement towards the clash between Achilles and the river Skamandros in Book 21. After hurling the corpse of the slain Lykaon into the river, Achilles pronounces death for all in his unimpeded path of destruction across the plain right up to the city itself. For the Trojans there will be no shelter from this devastation, a slaughter which the river will not be able to hinder—a divine power declared powerless to provide protection in return for all the sacrifices the Trojans have made to it:

οὐδὲ ὑμῖν ποταμὸς περ ἐόρροος ἀργυροδίνης ἀρκέει; ὃ δὴ δῆθα πολέας ἰερεύετε ταύρους. ζωοίσ δ’ ἐν δίναις καθίετε μῶνυχας ἱππῶς. (21.130-32)

Nor even the River, strong-running, silvery-whirled, shall avail you, the River to whom you have long been sacrificing many bulls, and casting down alive into his eddies whole-hooved horses.

This denial of the possibility of the river’s assistance is restated by Achilles, this time with a variation upon the usual chraismein construction:

καὶ γὰρ σοὶ ποταμὸς γε πάρα μέγας, εἰ δύναται τι χραίσμεν’ ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἔστι Διὸ Ἐρυνίου μάχεσθαι. (21.192-93)

For there is a great River beside you, if he were able in any way to help; but it is not possible to fight Zeus, son of Kronos.

This vaunting claim recalls a number of instances of chraismein in the epic: it makes play of the powerlessness of the one who is present and prepared to help (πάρα, 192), just as it echoes the force of the assertions of might in the declarations of Zeus’ supremacy. What is different is the implied negation with chraismein: the possibility of help and deliverance on the part of the “silvery-whirled, strong-running River” is suspended, briefly, before being denied, a
change which seems to be a product of the relation between *chraismein* and *arkein* within the context. For here the construction of negated protection has been articulated first with the verb *arkein*, a possibility that underlines the close association of these two verbs.

In this confrontation the river's "reply" to the challenge of Achilles not only marks a return to the emphatic negative; as in so many instances of *chraismein*, it functions to negate constitutive elements of the heroic world and of the hero—here, his strength, beauty, and all "his arms in their splendour," including the great shield, an immortal work of art which would encompass and preserve the sum of mortal existence, but which, ultimately, cannot protect its mortal bearer, cannot ward off inevitable death:

Φημι γάρ οὔτε βίπν χρασιμοσεμεν οὔτε τι εἴδος, οὔτε τά τεύχεα καλά. (21.316-17)²⁷

For neither, I say, will his strength or his beauty in any way protect him, nor his arms in their splendour.

Where the verb *chraismein* is used of arms generally here, negated *arkein* is, in a comparable construction, specifically associated in the epic with a particular piece of armour, the θυρής ("breastplate" or "corslet"):

οῦδ᾿ ἥρκεσθαι θυρής / χάλκεος, οὐ φόρεσθαι (13.371-72=397-98)

and the corslet of bronze he wore did not serve as protection.

This collocation suggests the possibility that another verb may have entered the traditional epic vocabulary, alongside *chraismein*, in association with the emergence of a new piece of armour. This conjecture derives some plausibility from the history of the development of arms and warfare, and from the status of the metal (or, more specifically, bronze) θυρής as a later innovation closely connected with the emergence of the hoplite formation. Hence, passages referring to the metal θυρής, which were until quite recently regarded as later interpolations into the epic, may register in their language a historical change integrated within the course of the epic tradition. The archaeological evidence, however, tends, if anything, to contradict rather than to lend support to such a conjecture. Nevertheless, the possibility of a link may still stand, depending upon how far back within the tradition one is prepared to allow a shift in relations involving the verbs *chraismein* and *arkein*, and the introduction of a metal corslet—independent of its association with hoplite tactics.²⁸

²⁷. For an ironical version of this formulation cf. Hektor's rebuke to Paris at 3.54-55, οὐκ δὲ τον χρασιμον κίσερις τα τε δοστιν ἀφροδίτης, / ἐν τε κόμη το εἴδος, δοτ' ἐν κοίμησι μυγής. Zeus' reproach to Hera at 15.32-33 is in much the same vein: ἐφρα ιδῆς ἣν τον χρασιμον φιλότης τε και ευνη, / ἤν εμήγη ελθοῦσα θέαν ἄποι καὶ μ' ἀπάτησας.

²⁸. On the significance of the introduction of the metal θυρής and a restatement of the formerly held view that passages referring to it are to be excluded as later intrusions, see Lorimer (1947), esp. 108-14, and Lorimer (1950) 196-211. On this question see also Leaf, Appendix B III, vol. 1, pp. 576-79, and Wace (1962) 506-10. More recent archaeological evidence (see Verdelis [1967]) has led to a necessary revision of Lorimer's views; see, e.g., Snodgrass (1964) 71-90, 171-73. On the early evidence see also Vermeule (1964) 135; Chadwick (1976) 160-65;
But even in its association with the θεώρης, arkein—in its defining difference from chraismein—appears without the negative, thereby affirming the possibility of effective protection:

[Dolos] τότε Φυλείδαο μέσαν σάκος οὕτας δουρὶ ἐγγύθεν ὄρμηες: πυκνὸς δὲ οἱ ἥρκες σε θεώρης; τὸν ρ’ ἐφφει γνάλοιοιν ἄρηστα: τὸν ποτὲ Φυλεύς ἤγαγεν εἰς Ἐφύρης, ποταμῷ ἄπο Σελλέντος. ξεῖνος γὰρ οἱ ἔθωκεν ἄνας ἄνδρῶν Εὐφήτης ἐς πόλεμον φορέειν, δηλὸν ἄνδρῶν ἀλεωρίης ὅς οἱ καὶ τότε παιδὸς ἀπὸ χρόνος ἥρκεσ ὀλέθρον. (15.528-34)

[Dolos] from close up pierced with his spear the centre of the shield of Phyleides, but the corslet he wore defended him, solid and fashioned from curving plates of metal, which in days past Phyleus had taken home from Ephyra and the river Selleis. A guest-friend, Euphetes, lord of men, had given it to him, to bear into battle, to wear as a defence against the enemy; and now it guarded the body of his son from destruction.

The telling of the history of such objects, arms as gifts, points to that important social practice within the heroic world, where the exchange of gifts enacts, consolidates and symbolizes bonds of friendship. But this entire social fabric of reciprocal relations, the interweaving of alliances of guest-friendship which men meshed as a protective net across and against a hostile world, could never sufficiently close that stark gap which left the individual suddenly and fatally isolated, exposed on the battlefield in the face of death. The death of Axylos marks the point of undeniably vulnerability, not of a particular piece of armour, but of the practices that constitute society as such:

"Ἄξυλον δ’ ἄρι ἐπεφυο βοην ἀγαθὸς Διομήδης Τευθρανίδην, ὃς ἔναιυν εὐκτιμεῖν ἐν Ἀρίσθῃ ἄφενις βίοτοι, πιλος δ’ ἦν ἀνθρώπωι: πάντας γὰρ φίλεσκεν ὄδωρ ἔπι σκία ναιον ἄλλα οἴ τις τῶν γε τότε ἥρκεσι λυγρὸν ὀλέθρον πρὸςθεν ὑπαυκτίας. (II. 6.12-17)

Diomedes of the great war cry cut down the son of Teuthras, Axylos, who had dwelt in strong-founded Arisbe, a man rich in substance and a friend to all humanity since in his house by the wayside he gave warm welcome to everyone. Yet there was none of these now to stand before him and keep off the sad destruction.

The single, critical moment of death (τότε) is set against a life of ever generous hospitality (emphasized in the iterative φιλέσκεν), the shelter and provisions of...
a home made available to every passing wayfarer (there is a certain irony also in the phrase ἄφρειδος βιώτοιο—a man rich in “the means of living” can no longer sustain life). The one who was philos to all (πάντας) has in the end no one at all (οὐ τις τῶν γε) to stand between him and death from a hostile hand on the homeless field of battle. Friend to all, he is isolated, exposed to an unknown enemy, ironically the hero Diomedes who will later in the same book retrieve the relation of guest-friendship from time long past in the famous scene with Glaukos.

It is within this setting of guest-friendship that the *Odyssey* recapitulates a point repeatedly made in the battle narrative of the *Iliad*. In his quest for knowledge concerning his father which makes up the opening movements of the narrative in the later epic, a story in search of a story, Telemachos hears tales from Troy while being entertained by Menelaos and Helen. Where, in the *Iliad*, the attributes of the hero Achilles had been enumerated only to be negated in their protective potential—“for neither, I say, will his strength or his beauty in any way protect him [chrainamein], nor his arms in their splendour” (21.316-17)—the *Odyssey* similarly assembles a certain portrait of its hero’s qualities in order to question their efficacy, but now with the verb arkein, which has displaced the *Iliad*’s chrainamein. The recollections of a distant Odysseus produce accounts of the lost father’s great deeds at Troy, in particular how, in the role of protector, he saved all the warriors concealed within the wooden horse (σάκος δὲ πάντας Ἀχιλλῆς, Od. 4.288) by manifesting the singular inner qualities of his βουλή τε νός τε (4.267) and φίλον κήρ (4.270)—qualities which tend to distinguish this heroic portrait from that of Achilles in the *Iliad*. Telemachos responds with the comment that nothing of all of this (τάδε), nor even a heart of iron—neither all the man was or could be—would or did protect him from wretched destruction:

ἀλγιον οὖ γάρ οἷς τί τάδ’ ἡρκεσε λυγρὸν δικήρων, 
οὐδ’ ἐφ’ οἷς καθήν γε σιδηρὴν ἐγὼδεν ἤνε. (Od. 4.292-93)

So much the worse; for none of all this kept dismal destruction from him, nor would it have protected him if his heart within him had been of iron.

If the *Odyssey* is a hero’s prolonged quest for home, the poem is also the narrative of the search on the part of that oikos for its protector. Home is not simply a goal finally achieved after a lengthy passage through distant lands: it is a site introduced from the first book of the epic in its emphatic need of defence and protection. The oikos is in the process of being plundered in its master’s absence, the absence of the needed warrior registered in the detail of the row of spears still standing in numbers within the house as silent reminders of his prowess (1.128-29). In his speech before the public assembly, Telemachos gives voice to the fundamental lack felt by those who have no alke:

31. S. West in her contribution to Heubeck et al. (1988-92) vol. 1 notes the “slight ellipse” is 293, observed implicitly in the translation provided in Stanford (1998-59).
Most of our substance is wasted. For there is no man here such as Odysseus was, to ward off this bane from the household. We ourselves are not the men to ward it off; we must be powerless in such a case, with no knowledge of the prowess that protects. I assure you, I myself would take the role of defender if the power were in me.

The phrase ἅρην ... ἀμύναι is familiar from the Iliad; but it now applies specifically to the oikos. When, at the conclusion to his speech, Telemachos throws down the sceptre, the difference from Achilles is marked. With that gesture Achilles publicly withdrew his protection in Iliad 1; Telemachos yields to the sheer helplessness of his own unprotected position and estate, a predicament articulated on his behalf by Nestor’s son Peisistratos in Book 4:

πολλὰ γὰρ ἄλγει ἔχει πατρὸς τάς οἰκομένοις ἐν μεγάροις, ὡς μὴ ἄλλοι ἄσσοντι ἔσοιν, ὡς τὴν Τηλέμαχο ὁ μὲν οἰχεῖται, οὐδὲ οἱ ἄλλοι εἰς’ οἱ κεν κατὰ δήμουν ἀλάκοιεν κακότιτα. (4.164-67)

For a child endures many griefs in his house when his father is gone away, and no others are there to help him, as now Telemachos’ father is gone away, and there are no others who can defend him against the evil that is in his country.

The suitors interpret Telemachos’ journey in quest of his father’s kleos as the potential threat of a possibility that remains unrealized within the epic—a search for amuntes from Pylos or Sparta (2.326-27). As the terms for protectors and protection proliferate, it becomes increasingly evident that the possibility of deliverance for the oikos in Ithaka rests upon a sole amuntor, Odysseus himself.

Without knowing of Odysseus’ return, Penelope echoes Telemachos’ earlier words defining the oikos’ lack of a protector (17.537-40; cf. 2.58-59). The disguised Odysseus himself, who has suffered assault within his halls, experiences and states the absence of safety and security within an oikos exposed to the wilful violence of its intruders: “For even now, as I went through the house, doing/ no harm, and this man struck me and gave me over to suffering,/ Telemachos could not afford me protection from this, nor could any other [οὔτε τι Τηλέμαχος τὸ γ’ ἐπήρκεσεν οὖτε τις ἄλλοι]” (17.566-68).

The central question of an amuntor, “protector, helper, defender,” was broached when the returned Odysseus revealed himself to Telemachos (amuntor, 16.256, 261; epamuntor, 16.263). As father and son confer, Odysseus asks for information concerning the suitors—their number and their quality as warriors—so that he can decide whether the two of them alone can match the suitors in force or whether they will need to seek help from others (16.235-39). Unable

32 Cf. Telemachos’ own statement of this need to his mother at 18.231-32.
to envisage the possibility that they might engage their opponents unaided, Telemachos seeks to impress upon his father both the great number of the suitors and the need for considerable assistance. His insistence upon the problem of finding any such protection or help elicits from Odysseus an affirmation of one of the poem’s founding assumptions and its guiding conception: justice is overseen by the gods and they will support—and secure—rightful vengeance.

"άλλα σύ γ’, εἰ δύνασαι τιν’ ἀμύντορα μεριμνεῖαι, φράζει, ὡ κεν τις νόου αμύνοι πρόδρομον θυμῷ."

... ... ... ... ...

"τοιγάρ ἔγων ἐρέω, οὐ δὲ σύνθεο καὶ μεν ἄκουσον καὶ φράσαι ή κεν νόϊν Ἀθηνὴν εἰς Δίῃ πατρί άρκεσέν, ή τιν’ ἄλλον ἀμύντορα μεριμνεῖον.

(16.256-57, 259-61)33

"Then if you can think of anyone to defend us and with forthright spirit be our protector, speak of him to me."

... ... ... ...

"So, then, I will tell you. Hear me and understand me and consider whether Athene with Zeus father helping will be enough for us [άρκεσε], or whether I must think of some other helper."

The moment of this confirmation of one of the poem’s central principles also seems to mark a significant transition in the sense of the verb arkein. In his comment on Odyssey 4.292 (ἀλγον’ οὐ γάρ ο’ τ’ τάδε ήρκεσε λυγρόν ὀλέθρον, / ο’ έι ο’ κραδίη γε σύνθει ενδοθεν ήν, 292-93), Stanford had maintained that “ήρκεσι always = ‘ward off, defend,’ never ‘suffice, be enough’ in H[omer].” But in the writing of the second volume of the commentary some years later, this passage from Book 16 seems to have caused him to revise his earlier categorical assertion, even if he does not concede this directly and explicitly. Like LSJ, Stanford does not, initially at least, allow arkein the meaning “to suffice, be enough” until after Homer.34 Odyssey 16.261 does, however, seem to have produced some hesitation, and although at this point he only comments that “ήρκεσει is best translated ‘will protect us.’” he refers the reader to 17.568, where we find the following postponed reflection upon the sense of 16.261: “ἐτήρκεσεν: ‘did <not> prevent it.’ In Η. ήρκέσει and its compounds have not yet fully acquired the meaning of ‘suffice, be strong enough to,’ though it approaches it in 16, 261.”35

Within the context of Book 16, and particularly given the concern with

33. Cf. also Odysseus’ affirmative words at 16.267-69 in reply to Telemachos’ comment, ἐδικά τοι τούτῳ γ’ ἑπαμύντορε, τοὺς ἄγρενες, γ’ ἑρμὴν πέρ ἐν νεφέσει καθήμενοι (263-64).
34. LSJ, s.v. άρκεσο, “ward off; keep off; defend; assist, succour; III mostly in Trag., and always in Prome, to be strong enough, suffice, c. inf., first in πρ. ο. 9. 3.” Interestingly, the analogy with “the song which sufficed” in Pindar, Olympian 9 (μέλος / φωνάδε μέλος / φράζει ... άρκεσε, 1-3), is developed in terms of the weapons of the poet’s art (άλλα σύν’ ἐκαταβόλας Μοισίου αἵτω τόξων, 5), thereby intertwining song and weapons, arts and art in a juxtaposition which may evoke the older sense of άρκεσι in relation to defence, as well as the new sense “to suffice.” Cf. also Pausan 2.20-21.
35. Cf. his comment on Od. 16.257: “Telemachus’ φράζει implies that the problem of finding a helper and defender will be a lengthy one and perhaps impossible to solve: O’s νέος suggests that an instant’s consideration will satisfy Telemachus that Athena and Zeus will suffice.” There is no comment on the question of the sense of the verb arkein here in the most recent commentary on the Odyssey, by Heubeck et al. (1988-92).
whether it would be necessary to seek more or other (ἡ τιν' ἄλλον) supporters, it does seem that, within the *Odyssey*, the verb *arkein* has already made (or is in the process of making) the significant semantic shift to what increasingly becomes the more dominant meaning, "to suffice.”36 But even once this shift has taken place (and whether or not this is the first instance of that shift), it is important to recognize the degree to which the relation between the two senses is not entirely severed and, more notably, that the sense "to suffice" first emerged in the context of a response to the need for help and protection. In Greek it is a word meaning "to ward off, to protect" that comes to supply the general sense of "to suffice," a history in language that serves not only to locate a fundamental condition of life—the need for defence and protection—but also to measure the never-ending efforts made to meet that need.37

In briefly outlining the semantic development of the verb *arkein* ("protéger," "secourir," "d’où souvent dans les trag. et toujours en prose ‘suffire, être assez pour’"),38 Chantraine concludes: "Les sens des termes de cette famille semblent diverger, mais peuvent trouver leur origine dans la notion de ‘sécurité, sûreté’ qui développe dans des conditions diverses celles de écarter, défendre, garantir, assurer et aussi celle de suffire.”39 Although Chantraine does not discuss the significance of these meanings and the questions they raise, it is notable that his understanding of the senses of the word differs from the account provided by Buttmann in what has long been cited as the standard authority on the semantic range of *arkein* and related terms.40

In what may now appear a rather idiosyncratic treatment, Buttmann rejects the idea that "warding off" was the original meaning (or even the "Grundbegriff" [224]) of the verb *arkein*. He argues that this understanding of the sense of the word is the product of a false analogy with the Latin *arcere*, maintaining that "the common meaning of *árkeiv, to be enough, to suffice, cannot be deduced from the same idea as *arcere* without force and harshness" (543-44). In support of this

36. The meaning specifically given for *arkein* at 16.261 by, e.g., both Cunliffe and *LfgrE*.
37. This is not to overlook adjectival constructions with, e.g., ἄλλος or the post-Homeric ἰκανος.
39. Chantraine notes that "le dérivé primaire *árko* signifie chez Hom. 'assuré, sur quoi on peut compter';" cf. Boislucq (1938) s.v. *árko*: "qui écoute le danger; assure, sûr;" and s.v. *árkev*: "écarter, repousser; résister; tenir bon; suffire." It would appear that the adjective *árkev*, from its first appearance in Homer, already bears a meaning at one remove from the original sense of the verb in the development in meaning which we are tracing. On the other hand, *LfgrE*, s.v. *árko*, explains the analogy quite well: "'lebensnotwendig, ausreichend, genügend,' nur von βίος und μετέχει ..., bezeichnet urspr. wohl die Menge an Gütern, die notwendig ist, um Hunger u. Kälte abzuhalten u. dadurch das Leben zu schützen, ganz wie Panzer oder Schild im Krieg vor Verwendung oder Tod bewahren (*árkeiv, *ekteiv*); a. entspricht genau der Bed. von *árkev*, nur auf einem anderen Lebensgebiet." Within the *iliad* (15.502-03, ών *árkev* ἢ ἀπόλλειν ἢ ἁπασθήναι καὶ ἀπόκοπαθαι κακα κατανακα, cf. 2.392-93), the word has an almost paradoxical, if not consciously ironic, aspect to its sense: in one respect "[ce] qui écoute le danger" has become associated with "un danger que l'un assuré, sûr," so that it is destruction that is said to be "secure, certain." (One might compare the expression ὁδὸς ἐπιστό- θερος, ll. 13.773, Od. 5.305, 22.28.)
40. Buttmann (1968). Buttmann's discussion is cited, for example, by Leaf *at ll.* 2.393; by Elledt (1965) s.v. *árkev/*; and by M. L. West (1978) 244 (on *WD* 351).
perception of an inherent incompatibility between the senses “to ward off, defend” and “to be enough, to suffice,” Buttmann argues, “To connect this meaning of ἀπελθεῖν with arcere it would be always necessary to supply the idea of want [Mangel], to drive away want, though that idea is never found expressed with ἀπελθεῖν either in Homer or elsewhere” (544, n. 2). The assumption made by Buttmann cannot be taken as axiomatic and it is precisely in what it misses that perhaps the most significant point lies. A fine distinction can be made, one which recapitulates the general significance of the word and its semantic development. It is not strictly necessary that the word always signify “to ward off want.” What is, however, notable is that in the early Greek context “to ward off, defend against, or protect from” hostile forces or harm did constitute a primary need; and the word for the action that answered that need understandably developed the general sense of “to suffice” in a range of contexts sometimes far removed from man’s first bid for survival.

It is particularly significant, then, that this Greek word meaning “to suffice” generally seems to have emerged from the earlier sense of “to ward off” in a world where the need was first and foremost for help and protection against attack, assault or whatever threatened existence and survival in a most fundamental sense. That which met such need “sufficed.” And it is from this attempt to secure a fragile and vulnerable existence that we can assemble the many and various components that formed the defensive design of what almost amounts to an entire heroic world: armaments, like the corslet of bronze, the close-fitting helmet, the mighty, many-layered shield, the bow and its shower of arrows, the mace of iron; structures such as the wall and trench constructed by the Achaians to protect their ships—precarious, improvised versions of the more securely founded, longstanding stone fortifications of a walled city; the oikos, as shelter and the bonds of a shared household; the whole fabric of social relations across family, philoi, guest-friends, compatriots and comrades in arms; a king’s resources and power, the protection of the anax; the sceptre and stemmata of a god, and the gods themselves—god of the silver bow, “the far-shooter,” Artemis of the showering arrows, and Skamandros, the “silvery-whirled, strong-running River.” In the midst of these, or isolated, often far from them, armed, or exposed without protection from gods or men, there is the hero, endowed with strength, beauty, alke, arete—either generally or in a particular skill in battle, be it with spear or bow—or endowed with singular inner qualities, noos, boulé, “a heart of iron”; the warrior decked with golden adornment or fitted with armaments of gold—“the splendour of arms,” the sheltering shield. However, like the magnificent, immortal shield of Achilles, which would assemble in its own design the sum of mortal existence but which cannot protect its mortal bearer from death, all the constituent elements listed are, at some critical moment, specifically mentioned in Homeric epic as failing in their defensive role, found wanting, in poetry where the words for needs unfold a world of often stark and unmitigated vulnerability.

41. II. 7.143-44, ὀδύρειν ὑπὸ κόρυνθι οἵ διῆθροι / χραίσμε αὐδαρέην.
The precariousness of the world depicted in all this might seem to signal a tilt towards futility, were it not for the epic itself, which protects even that which has been lost. Something of this force, this power to preserve, emerged, even within the narrative, in the Odyssean telling of the tales—recapitulated as “all of this” (τάδε, 4.292)—tales of the hero who, lost and as if dead, was about to begin the move from the fringes of existence, to undertake the final struggle in a striving for survival which would reverse the traditional linguistic structures and achieve, against the doubt embedded in the negated arkein, preservation of self, and long-sought protection of the oikos, in the process of his hard-won homecoming.

III

In Aeschylus’ Agamemnon Kassandra laments the utter destruction of her city in terms which recall and rework the formulations of futility developed in the Iliad. The verbal structure is somewhat more intricate as Kassandra reflects upon the inefficacy of the sacrifices to the gods on behalf of the city, before considering herself as one now city-less and about to become the victim of sacrifice.

The compound ἐπαρκεῖν now bears the meaning “to provide in or at need,” something which was to an extent implicit in the Homeric context, where the word meant “to suffice.” This association of provision and protection, or preservation, remains paramount.43

42. The translation here is by Fraenkel (1950), with Lloyd-Jones’ version (1970) for the reading ἔχρην in Page’s OCT where Fraenkel reads ἔχει.

43. In Homer cf. II. 2.873, νῆπιος, οὐδὲ τι οἵ το γέ ἐπήρκεσα λυγρὸν δέλθρον. On the sense of “furnish at need” for erakein with the accusative, Jebb (1896) comments at Ajax 439 (where arkein itself also seems to have this meaning): “Though ἐπαρκέω could not mean literally ‘to ward off,’ epic precedent warranted its use in an equivalent sense, which was strictly that of bringing one help against a danger.” Once again the notion of need supplied leads to a meaning of “to suffice.” This association of provision and protection, or preservation, can be seen in Plato, Protagoras 320b5-321a (esp. “Epeimetheus assigned the powers... And when he had made them defences against mutual destruction [διάφυγος ἐπηρκέσα], he devised for them protection against the elements” [tr. Taylor (1976)]). On ἐπήρκεσαν at Ag. 1170 Fraenkel cites Headlam’s translation, “yet they availed not for any cure to save my country from her present plight,” and argues (n.2) that in Prometheus Bound 918 the construction with ἐπαρκεῖν is the same. At Prom. 918-19, οὐδὲν γὰρ αὐτῷ ταῦτα ἐπαρκεῖ / τὸ μὴ οὗ / πεισών ἀτίμως πτώματι’ οὐκ ἄνασκετά, the reference is to the thunder and lightning of Zeus, thus signalling a reversal of the power of Zeus which had been characteristically registered by οὐ πεισέων τῆς Κρατάτης ἢ τῆς τοίνυν, Campbell (1881) explains the construction by maintaining that “the verb ἐρέσακε is used absolutely in the original sense of ‘to ward off danger,’ and this uncommon use is supplemented by the epexegetic clause.”

In the Septem the question is posed, τίς ἔροι ᾤδοται, τίς ἔροι ἐπαρκεῖ / θεῶν ἢ θεῶν; (93-94), the gods themselves being invoked at 166 as παρακρατεῖς (v.l. παραλεικεῖς) θεοί. “O you gods all potent to save, you gods and goddesses that have full power to guard the bulwarks of our land ... stand round the city as its saviours ... succour
The sacrifices Kassandra recalls are specifically πρότυρογοι (1168), a word for which, since Fraenkel at least, critics have favored the meaning "before the walls."44 Fraenkel himself was, however, somewhat ambivalent about this interpretation, and his argument for it is not entirely convincing: "There was no need to say explicitly that the sacrifices of Priam were made for Troy; and in Cassandra's nostalgic reminiscences it would not be unnatural that a single feature of the scene ('before the walls') should stand out in her memory." In relation to what there was "need to say," it may be said that, within the context, the question of need is precisely what is at issue, whereas the matter of a "natural" pictorial tendency of memory seems more arbitrary. The central concerns of the passage lend support to the earlier tradition of interpretation, which is summarized by Fraenkel in his note on πρότυρογοι: θυσία: "Sacra pro turribus facta, i.e. pro salute urbis. Minus recte Stanleius, sacrificia antemoenalia," says Blomfield; he has been followed by most scholars and by Wilamowitz explicitly on Pers. 860 ("UTPE τής πόλεως"). It may be suggested that the detail πρότυρογοι highlights the supplementary structure of the city's system of defense: the structures of protection (πύργοι) are themselves in turn in need of protecting, and sacrifices are made in the attempt to secure the fortified walls constructed to safeguard the city.

Kassandra's lament is a cry of distress for the defenselessness of the city—the walls and the sacrifices were all ultimately to no avail. From the heart of this play she articulates a cry which not only voices the prevailing condition of the Agamemnon, but also provides a final significant poetic formulation of the theme we have been considering: ἀλακ δ'/ ἐκάς ἀποστατεῖ (Ag. 1103-04). The words constitute an emphatic restatement of the Homeric οὐδὲ τῆς ἀλής, that stark condition in which there is quite simply no alke, no "protection, defense, help."45 In this world devoid of alke, Kassandra calls upon her god Apollo not, as customarily, for help, but as an Apollo who is her apollón, a protector who is her destroyer (1080-81=1085-86).46 Her cry of distress is not a call for defense,
but an acknowledgement of the power overseeing her destruction; in the absence of all protection she laments, protests, and turns defencelessness into a single, final gesture of defiance:

\[ \text{τι διήτ' ἐμαυτῆς καταγέλωτ' ἔξω τάδε, καὶ σκήπτρα καὶ μαντεία περὶ δέρπη στέφη:} \quad (\text{Ag. 1264-65}) \]

Why do I preserve these things to mock myself, this staff and these fillets of prophecy about my neck? (tr. Lloyd-Jones)

We are a long way from the opening scene of Greek literature which this passage recalls. Where in Homer the priest of Apollo was taunted with the lack of protection that the sceptre and fillets of the god would provide when needed (μὴ νῦτοι οὐ χραίσμη σκήπτρον καὶ στέμμα θεοῦ, II. 1.28), here the prophetess of Apollo herself perceives the emblems of divine favour and protection as taunting signs of derision, symbols of her helplessness rather than of sanctity and safety, superfluous accoutrements of which she divests herself in anticipation of her destruction (Ag. 1264-78). But the distance from the beginning of Greek literature and the earliest stage of the poetic language can also be measured in the marked difference in that tragic inflection whereby the verb which initially served to articulate the concern to protect life, to ward off death, has been inverted to become a cry of self-negation, abandonment, despair — ἀρκεῖτω βίος, “let life suffice,” “enough of life” (Ag. 1314).

IV

In following a few strands in the rich weave of epic vocabulary, it becomes possible to discern points of departure into larger questions. While it would be premature to attempt to answer those questions here, it might at least be possible to suggest some considerations that bear upon them. If needs shape values, values also determine needs; further, values shape the nature of the response to what is judged to be a need. It is this latter aspect of the complex relation which tends to be lost in an approach such as, for example, Adkins' Merit and Responsibility. Within the heroic world it is not the case that “Not kennt kein Gebot.” Nor is it the case that the bid for survival is incompatible with the need to protect certain quite fragile but essential values that compose what is prized as a life worth defending, and hence worth risking. It is this paradox of

47. At 1270 Denniston and Page (1975) felt that ἐποπτεύομαι δὲ μὲ “demands a finite verb in the sequel”: ἵδιον δ᾽ Ἀπόλλωνος αὐτὸς ἐκδύων ἐμὲ / χριστάσας ἐσθήτ', ἐποπτεύομαι δὲ μὲ / κὰν τούτῃ κόσμῳ καταγελομένη, τιμάτα / φιλῶν ὑπ’ ἑξήδρων οὐ διχορρόπως τιμάτα (Ag. 1269-72)—“It looks as though ματήματι may conceal some quite different word, presumably a finite verb; or else a line is missing from the text after 1272.” In his recent edition of Aeschylus, M. L. West (1990) has supplied a line with the verb ἀρκεῖν, highlighting the futility of Cassandra’s foretelling: <τὰ πιστὰ θετισσαμένα, σοῦ ἐγὼ ἴρευν,> (1272a). Fraenkel, on the other hand, argues at 1270 for the dramatic effect of the structure as it stands. For the usually protective connotations of the verb ἐποπτεύεσθαι, see Fraenkel’s note on Ag. 1270, where he concludes, “The rendering of ἐποπτήρας by βοήθος in the scholiast’s paraphrase on Sept. 640 is appropriate.”

48. See Fraenkel’s comment on 1314, “The sense is rightly given by Stanley: haecenus vivisse satis esto”; cf. Denniston-Page ad loc.; ἀρκεῖτω βίος is thus very different in sense from the Herodotean phrase βίος ἄρκεσαν ὑπῆρ (Hdt. 1.31.2; cf. 7.28.3), just as it is far removed from the Homeric uses of ἄρκειν, as in, e.g., τοῦ ὀμ ἴρευεσ λυγρὸν δλέτρου (II. 20.289).
destruction and preservation which, along with so many other stakes, is played out in the hero’s death on the battlefield. It is not the case that survival is all, a “categoric” need divorced from all other claims and relations; again, survival consists of more than maintaining a biological existence at the expense of all other considerations in a single, absolute form of “success” easily and instantly assessed by a simple process of empirical verification. And yet all of Adkins’ work, it might be argued, is ultimately founded upon the seemingly self-evident truth that what is, is. In the argument of the “last resort,” the critical moment of stress, “human nature being what it is” (and if it is to be) “must” choose “life.” The unshakeable confidence of this assertion is grounded in the apparently irrefutable “fact” that some bare form of pure creatural existence is the single necessary condition for any other possibility or ideal that we might care to envisage as a potential human achievement. Is there an answer to this fundamental challenge?

Let us not for the moment take a stand which might too readily be characterized as a futile, self-erasing cry, “fiat justitia, pereat mundus.” But in taking time to prepare a response, we should perhaps consider the extent to which, in the important domain of values, as in other areas, the Homeric poems have long been defined according to an “historical” distribution of dualisms (each itself often structured by an undeclared hierarchy of value): in this instance, existence and ethics, “must” and “ought,” the practical and the theoretical, fact and value, the necessary and the good. This is not to argue for the elimination of such distinctions (and indeed the place of the necessary and the sufficient has still to be considered in relation to Adkins’ proposals); but we should be aware that it is from such a schema that a reductive, monistic version of the Homeric world has been created. To find a way beyond the structures of a debate which has acquired a certain fixity would be to engage in the difficult reconsideration of that history and that hierarchy of values. For now, we can briefly begin to map a possible direction by recalling that when the most tenacious survivor in the epics sets sail, alone on a craft that he himself has made, finding his way across the expanse of the sea by the stars at night, the island which had offered an immortal existence and comfortable preservation recedes as the hero journeys to retrieve the very mortal values, relations and existence that make up the identity “Odysseus.” With a certain shift of emphasis we might state that the epics do not so much assure and preserve an existence as seek to protect, in their constitutive vulnerability, those premises from which human existence derives significance and value—to protect, to celebrate certainly, and, quietly, to justify.49

49. I should like to acknowledge the generous support of my research by the Social Sciences Research Council of Canada.