

The Mortal Race: Mankind and the First of the Funeral Games of Patroclus

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Each semester the Institute of Philosophic Studies hosts a colloquium at which papers representing the three institute concentrations—philosophy, literature, and politics—and written during the previous semester’s IPS core course are presented. Carle Mock’s paper on honor and justice in the Iliad was selected for publication in Ramify by Professors John Alvis and David Sweet from the many fine papers presented at the Fall 2012 colloquium on Homer and Virgil.

The search for honor is a prevalent theme in the *Iliad*. The key driver of the entire plot is the “dishonour” (1.171, 1.244, 1.412, 2.239, 9.110)¹ that Achilles suffers at the hands of Agamemnon in Book 1 when the latter takes Briseis, the “prize of honour” (2.237, 40), from Achilles to replace the girl returned to her father, the priest of Apollo, in order to end the plague. After having spent some time considering this ignominy, Achilles famously notes the choice that he has been given, whether to trade long life for even longer-lasting honor (9.411–6). Moreover, many heroic characters demonstrate particular concern for the honor and dishonor done to the bodies of fallen warriors, that is, the honor that lasts longer than life. Both the Danaans (7.333–5, 409–10) and the Trojans (7.376–7) share this concern about honor after death. Throughout the poem, in every battle scene, it is important to strip the armor from an enemy and to protect corpses of friends from both this plundering and especially from the ravages of beasts, that final dishonor to which the opening lines of the epic draw attention (1.4–5). After the death of Patroclus, Achilles holds a series of commemorative competitions as part of his attempt to honor his fallen friend. Studying how the first of these funeral games, the chariot race, bestows honor reveals that it may be profitably read as an allegory of human life. In this allegory, Achilles functions as a model

1 Lattimore’s translation is used throughout.

for all wise political rulers who want to know the best way to bestow honor in their communities.

This interpretation, while new, is not necessarily in opposition to other studies of the funeral games. It is not that other scholars have arrived at different answers to the question investigated here, but rather that Book 23 of the *Iliad* provides answers to many kinds of questions. This essay asks a philosophical question about how men should live their lives. In other words, it looks to the *Iliad* for wisdom. If one asks Homer, "What sorts of human actions are truly honorable?" or "By what criteria ought a good ruler to dispense honor?" one finds an answer in the account of the chariot race.²

As a funeral game, the chariot race is situated within a particular understanding of human life and afterlife. Human mortality is of course at the forefront at any funeral. Moreover, these particular games come shortly after the encounter between Achilles and the ghost of Patroclus, where Achilles learns something about the condition of a man after death: "[T]here is left something / ... but there is no real heart of life in it" (23.103–4). This account of the afterlife comes before the games, because the way in which human beings approach this earthly life will depend on how they view what comes next. The dreary view of the afterlife provided by the ghost of Patroclus informs Achilles and the reader that Hades is not desirable in itself. Human fulfillment must be sought in something else. What part of a man outlives the man himself besides his insubstantial shade? All of the *Iliad* before the funeral games points toward only one answer: his honor.

Human life is of limited duration, all men travel through life in the same direction—and toward the same conclusion—and men receive varying levels of honor from their fellows depending on what they accomplish with their lives. For these reasons, a race is a suitable metaphor for life, and there is textual evidence that the chariot race in Book 23 is

2 Some who have considered Book 23 closely are looking only for historical facts. Thus, M.M. Willcock asks what the *Iliad's* relationship is to previous poetry about the Trojan War. He, too, finds an answer in Book 23, yet his essay ("The Funeral Games") and the present one share little other common ground. Similarly, Michael Gagarin asks simply whether Antilochos actually passed Menelaos on the home stretch or at the turn ("Antilochos' Strategy"). Other commentators do draw a general lesson from Book 23. William C. Scott sees the structure of Book 23 as part of Homer's argument for, and explanation of, the rules that games must follow if they are to remain peaceful, and thus separate from the war around them ("The Etiquette"). Seth Benardete thinks that the funeral games exemplify the tragedy of Achilles, and emphasizes that Achilles has become powerless and isolated ("The Funeral Games"). Although the present author has no thematic disagreement with any of these authors, in some cases he interprets particular details recounted in Book 23 differently than they.

intended allegorically. Homer prepares the reader to see the chariot race as a microcosm of life by including a complex simile in the previous book. While describing how Achilles chases Hector, the narrator describes first what it is not like, and then what it is like. On the one hand, it is not like just any race, "since here was no festal beast, no ox-hide they / strove for, for these are prizes that are given men for their running. / No, they ran for the life of Hektor, breaker of horses" (22.159–61). A human life is more important than these small prizes. Yet, on the other hand, life *is* in some ways like a race; in particular, like a chariot race at funeral games: "As when about the turnposts racing single-foot horses / run at full speed, when a great prize is laid up for their winning, / a tripod or a woman, in games for a man's funeral, / so these two swept whirling about the city of Priam" (22.162–5). Funeral games are those events in which competing for honor is closely connected with bestowing the last and most lasting honor for an entire life just ended. With this simile in mind, it is easier to understand why there is so much time spent on the turning-post in Book 23. Nestor's description of the turning-post for this race gives two possible origins for it: it may be either a "grave-mark," or a "racing goal" (23.331–2). In a life informed by the ghost of Patroclus, a life which seeks honor as its end, the two are the same. The goal of human life thus understood is particularly exemplified by an honorable burial. Life is a competition like a chariot race, with different prizes (burials) for different men, which they receive when the race is over, after they have died. If it is read as an allegory, the chariot race not only depicts human life as a search for honor but also instructs the ruler of a human community in how he can contribute to improving human lives.

To begin the comparison between life and race, one must consider the preliminary organization of the latter. The prizes of the race, like honors in life, do not come from the participants themselves. Just as a king distributes honors to the men in his kingdom, all the prizes come from the ships of Achilles (23.259). The account of the race itself (23.261–650) describes the six considerations which influence how those prizes are distributed to their eventual new owners. These same six are also parts of every human life. The first two factors presented are talent and property. In a chariot race, the talent that matters is horsemanship, and the important type of property is fast horses. Both talent and property exemplify *aretē*

(excellence, or virtue).³ The contestants in the race represent a variety of mixtures of these two kinds of excellence, corresponding to the variety of mixtures found in every group of men. First, there is “Eumelos / ... who surpassed in horsemanship” (23.288–9) and, as was stated in the catalogue of ships, has the best Achaean horses (2.763). Next there is Diomedes, who “for the driving / of horses ... [was] by far the best of them all” (23.356–7), and who has stolen the best Trojan horses (23.291–2). Menelaos has two horses of excellent pedigree, although they are apparently not as good as those of either of the previous teams, but his horsemanship is not worth mentioning (23.293–300). Antilochos has learned his skill from the best teachers (23.307), but his horses are slow (23.310). Meriones, like many of his fellow men throughout history, has neither much talent nor exceptional property (23.351, 530–1).

Before these five representative contestants actually start down the course, though, they find that the property and talent they have or lack are not the only things that matter. The third factor, the part that fortune plays in life, is represented by the shaking of lots (23.352). Although some scholars have characterized the starting order as a handicap,⁴ it is not strictly so. In order to emphasize how extreme the effects of chance can be, Homer shows the advantage of starting order given by fortune to be in one instance the complete reverse of the first two advantages, so that the last lot “was drawn by far the best of them all” (23.357). The last in *aretē* does not end up first, however, and one contestant remains in the same position.⁵ Random chance produces the following starting order, from best position to worst: first, Antilochos, second Eumelos, third Menelaos, fourth Meriones, and last Diomedes (23.353–7). Unlike talent and property, fortune in human life is not in complete accord with *aretē*, but neither is it in complete opposition.

Homer provides no further account of the race until after the teams have rounded the turning-post. At that point, though, the narrator comments, “But as the rapid horses were running the last of the race-course / back ... then the mettle [*aretē*] of each began to / show itself” (23.373–5).

3 In the *Iliad*, in fact, horses and men are the only mortals who are described as having *aretē*. The word appears sixteen times in the poem, of which only one (9.498) refers to the gods. Four of the sixteen instances are in the account of the chariot race (23.276, 374, 571, and 578), which means that this one event contains more uses of this important word than any other entire book of the *Iliad*. See Bernardete, “The Funeral Games,” 48.

4 See Richardson, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, 213.

5 Bernardete notes that in the order determined by the casting of lots, “no one is in his right place except Menelaus.... Menelaus, who was third in excellence and third in victory, is also third when mere accident tells his position ... mediocrity is all that you can trust [Chance] to find out” (“The Funeral Games,” 78).

The advantage provided by chance is significant, but temporary. By a little past the half-way mark, *aretē* has triumphed over fortune. At that point, the two leaders are Eumelos and Diomedes (23.377), the men with the best horses and the best talent, respectively. The lesson here seems to be that excellence in either skill or possessions can overcome chance. The race, however, does not end here. The fourth factor, divine intervention, appears next when Apollo knocks the whip from the hands of Diomedes (23.382–7) and then Athena restores it and breaks the axle of Eumelos (23.389–397).

Divine intervention differs from chance in that it is not random, but specifically targeted and driven by emotion: Apollo is “angry with Diomedes” (23.383) in particular, and Athena takes revenge against Eumelos “in her wrath” (23.391). There are identifiable reasons for the anger of the gods as there are not for the assignments of fortune. As Roger Dunkle notes, “Two possible causes of Apollo’s anger are Diomedes’ earlier attempt to slay Aineias despite the god’s protection (5.431–442) and his present effort to defeat Eumelus, whose horses Apollo bred for Eumelus’ father Admetus (2.763–766).”⁶ The former is actually mentioned in the account of the race itself (23.292). Similarly, Athena intervenes now because she has decided earlier in the poem to bring “glory” to Diomedes (5.3). Before the gods come, the outcome of the race is in doubt (23.382), but afterwards Diomedes easily comes in first (23.399, 506) while Eumelos comes in last (23.532). It is perhaps not clear which kind of excellence is more conducive to victory, that of the driver or that of the horses, just as in life it may not be clear whether talent or possessions matter most, but one certainly must avoid the wrath of the gods.

The winner is clear, but there is a close competition for second place, which illustrates the fifth factor in the determination of honor: craftiness, or skill used improperly. Menelaos, with better horses, leads Antilochos after the wreck (23.401), yet finishes third (23.516). Homer shows Antilochos overtaking Menelaos by using Machiavellian tactics. Antilochos taunts (23.409) and threatens his horses (23.412), ruling them with fear (23.417). He plans ahead (23.415) and then acts in a “reckless” way to force Menelaos to slow down (23.426), out of fear for both their lives (23.436–7). Despite being passed in this way by Antilochos, Menelaos almost catches up by the end of the race (23.526–7), but Meriones, without any drama, finishes ahead of only Eumelos, whose chariot was destroyed by Athena (23.528). Homer’s account shows both that “guile” (23.585) or “taking advantage” (23.515) can overcome the influence of *aretē* (whether

6 Dunkle, “Nestor, Odysseus, and the *Mêtis*,” 5, note 11.

of talent or property) in life, and that someone without any advantages, by escaping the attention of either malicious gods or impetuous men, may still accomplish more than someone who attracts too much attention.

Before the account of the race comes to an end, however, Homer also details the actions of one more man. Achilles, though neither a contestant nor a god, also changes the outcome of the race. He represents the sixth and perhaps most important factor in the distribution of honor: political authority. In human communities, the rulers have considerable influence over whether and how honor is bestowed. Part of ruling is establishing the parameters within which the action will occur and setting out in advance how much honor will be bestowed for an achievement of a given magnitude. Furthermore, some honors, like the great honor especially considered in Book 23, honorable burial, are impossible to provide without an entire community organized under its leader because of their scope and complexity. Every ruler faces a crucial question, however: How should he determine whom to honor? Different criteria produce different winners. Should a ruler follow one of the factors considered already and honor either the luckiest man or the man with the most divine favor, for example? If so, how can he know which factor? The *Iliad's* account of the chariot race indicates that rulers should look to the purpose for which they are bestowing honor in order to know the correct criteria by which to make their decision. In this allegory, Achilles is an exemplar for every king and governor, and his actions both before and after the chariot race show how the best man allots honor, represented in the race by the bestowal of prizes.

Achilles clearly controls both the prizes and the rules of the race from the beginning. As noted above, he chooses the prizes from among his possessions and determines which prize will be given for which place (23.262). He also chooses the turning-post (23.333), stationing a judge there "to bring back a true story" (23.361). In the same way, a ruler needs to organize the community and give the citizens something to strive for, but he cannot do it alone. He needs an impartial observer to determine the facts, prevent fraud, and ensure that the competition for honor produces an accurate result. Achilles does not stop with setting up the race, however. He also intervenes after it has been run. The reason for this is that the race, like human life, is not merely entertainment. Honor is at stake, because the game has a purpose. Everything that Achilles does in the account of the chariot race is with the purpose of the game in mind.

Its purpose can be deduced from the rules that govern it. A chariot race is a contest of speed, and the only obvious rule for such a race is

the length of the circuit. The crowd at the start/finish line watches the contestants to ensure that they begin at the same place and strive for the same goal, while the judge watches to make sure that all contestants round the pole and thus complete at least a certain minimum distance. There is no judge compelling the racers to keep within a certain maximum, because the object of the race is to bestow honor on the man who races fastest. One who can take a wide turn and still win would deserve perhaps more honor, but certainly not less. It is also important to note that chariots are tools of war, and thus the purpose of the race is to give a reward to those who demonstrate that they can accomplish something that is useful in battle. The honor that comes from competing in the funeral games of Patroclus is an excellent inducement for men to keep ever ready to protect the city. Honor such as Patroclus receives because of his death in combat is meant to reward those who actually do protect it. The good of the city requires that competitions like funeral games, and burials like those given to Patroclus, produce men who are able to preserve their community. It is best, therefore, if the reward of honor goes to the man who can win the battle when it comes. Rules and enforcement of rules are necessary in a race just as laws and unbiased judges are necessary in human life in order to preserve the connection between honor and the good of the city, or the common good. The principle that recognizes the common good as the ultimate purpose for giving honor is justice.

Rules are not always enough, however, to ensure that honor remains linked to the common good. The setting of this chariot race shows that this serious purpose of games can be lost even when the rules are followed. These funeral games are held in the midst of battle. There is little need at this point in the Trojan War to keep the chariot skills of the warriors sharp. In fact, by keeping the tradition of funeral games, the soldiers are away from the real battle for longer than they otherwise would be. Also, the actions of Antilochos prove that all games of this sort suffer from a false assumption. Antilochos erroneously treats the race as an end in itself. Menelaos, in contrast, understands that there are more important things. He warns Antilochos, "Be careful not to crash your chariot and wreck both of us" (23.428), and then he lets up lest "the men / themselves go down in the dust through their hard striving for victory" (23.436–7). The city does not benefit through the damaging of equipment or the injury or death of its men, but because Antilochos does not see the deeper purpose, the race becomes counter-productive. The honor intended as a reward for good behavior instead encourages misbehavior. The assumption behind the bestowal of honor as a reward is that it encourages men to do something

good for their community. Antilochos in this race and arguably Patroclus in the fight that brought about his death and these games both show that this assumption is often mistaken.

Simply honoring the winner according to the rules has another defect as well. Rules that reward the winner only serve their purpose if the victory is the result of the actions of the men competing for that honor. Men will not be motivated to strive their hardest for victory if they realize that their own effort does not determine whether they get the prize. Homer's presentation of the chariot race clearly illustrates that sometimes a competitor's finishing place is not his own to determine. The intervention of the gods in this race shows that winning is not entirely in human control at all. Similarly, the encounter between Antilochos and Menelaos shows that even without divine interference, one man's efforts can be frustrated by another's. These circumstances can—and in this race do—affect the outcome. Also, if the purpose of a chariot race is to find out which man has the ability to move his chariot most quickly and most skillfully so as to be of most use to his city, then honoring a victory achieved through other factors—like gods who love individuals more than the city, unrepeatable good luck, or sabotage—is counter-productive. Excellent men and excellent horses will be useful in other situations in the future. Divine favor and luck might work to the city's disadvantage, rather than its good, while the actions of Antilochos in particular serve to obscure the *aretē* of another. Of all the factors that may contribute to victory, only excellence is both truly and reliably useful to the city. Therefore, justice requires that it alone be rewarded.

Demonstrating some awareness of this true purpose of the race, Menelaos, after being forced to slow down by Antilochos, brings up an important point: Simply crossing the finish line first might not be enough to obtain the prize (23.441). The rules are not the last word in honoring the contestants. Justice is not simply equivalent to law. Homer shows that Achilles, and by implication any other good ruler, takes into account what the competition is trying to encourage and makes corrections when necessary. Bernardete has recognized that, in the initial description of the competitors, "we see that Homer has presented the horsemen in the order in which they should, but do not win."⁷ Justice sometimes requires the ruler to align what did happen with what should have happened.

After the race is over, the distribution of the prizes is altered four times, all relating to the pregnant mare which Achilles had assigned as the prize for second place (23.265–6). All these changes are required,

7 Bernardete, "The Funeral Games," 78.

more or less explicitly, by justice. First, Achilles gives Eumelos the second place prize although he came in fifth (23.538). Next, after Antilochos, who actually came in second, claims the prize, Achilles restores that prize to him and gives Eumelos a different prize (23.565). Third, Menelaos claims the mare for himself, claiming that Antilochos won unfairly (23.566.585), and Antilochos accedes to the wishes of Menelaos and hands over the mare (23.597). Fourth, Menelaos, while still claiming the mare as his own, gives it back to Antilochos (23.609–610). Finally, since Eumelos, who came in fifth, is given a better prize, and thus nobody has claimed it, Achilles gives the prize assigned to fifth place to Nestor (23.617).

These reassignments of prizes give insight into what the whole assembled community considers to be proper and improper ways of achieving victory, and thus indirectly shows that there is general agreement regarding what a chariot race should test. Before the race even starts, Achilles publicly states the reason why he would certainly win if he entered: His “horses surpass in their speed [*aretē*] all others” (23.276). Nobody indicates that they think this would be cheating. During the race, however, Menelaos clearly thinks that Antilochos has done something improper (23.439–440), and afterwards he complains that Antilochos won by “guile” (23.585). The narrator agrees, and contrasts the proper with the improper way of winning: Antilochos wins “not by speed, but by taking advantage” (23.515). Menelaos, though, alludes to two reasons that he himself should have won when he accuses Antilochos of “defil[ing his] horsemanship [*aretē*]” and “foul[ing his] horses” (23.571). Menelaos is completely confident that all the people assembled there will share his view (23.580). There is agreement, then, that the race is supposed to test excellence, but should it be that of the driver or of the horses or both?

If both the excellence of the man and of his horse are acceptable reasons for winning a race, victory as a result of excellent horses would seem to require correction just as much as victory by divine intervention. Since the purpose of honor is to motivate men to perform good actions, how could it be just to reward a man for what not he, but his horses, did?⁸ The difference is that horses, unlike gods, are within human control. Men who seek honor can breed, buy, or steal excellent horses, to the

8 It is certainly not the case that a man and his horse were considered inseparable. The narrator makes a clear distinction between “the Trojan horses” and “Aineias himself” (23.291-2). Similarly, when speaking to Antilochos, Nestor contrasts “[his] horses” with “[his] work” and, regarding his son’s opponents, talks separately about the “horses of these men” and “themselves” (23.309-311). Finally, even when the victory is due to divine help, the achievement is done through the beasts, but the reward goes to the man: Athena “inspired strength in [Diomedes’s] horses,” but not to them, but “to himself gave the glory” (23.400).

advantage of their city during war. A race which honors both excellence in horsemanship and in horses is really honoring two types of *aretē* in men: that of driving horses and that of obtaining the best horses. In human life more broadly, a ruler should honor both military skill and the talent of acquiring wealth, as both are for the good of the city.

The struggle for second place also reveals the attitude of the characters towards the gods. Achilles rewards Eumelos, the contestant who was injured by divine anger. This implies that the actions of the gods sometimes hinder justice. Antilochos claims instead that Eumelos was punished for impiety (23.546–7), but no one agrees, and Antilochos himself has no objection to Eumelos being rewarded, as long as it is with another prize (23.551–4). It appears that worshipping the gods is not seen as necessarily effective, and that innocent behavior is sometimes punished by them. The gods reliably aid justice only by lending force to the oath (23.584–5).

Reassigning the prize to Eumelos and giving another to Nestor are the two changes in prize distribution that Achilles does himself, and they both provide examples of how rulers can help bring human lives to their proper fulfillment: by justly rewarding *aretē*. Achilles corrects the action of the gods because Eumelos is the “best man” and thus deserves “some kind of prize” (23.536, 538). Antilochos objects to giving Eumelos a prize merely because “he himself is great” (23.546), but Achilles recognizes that honors are rewards for excellence, and the race is only a means to reveal that excellence. Perhaps Antilochos, like many men in many societies, objects on the basis that reputation is no substitute for results. Here, however, there is no basis for that supposition. Eumelos is rewarded for what he himself did, not for who he is. Why, then, does Achilles give Eumelos a second-place prize rather than first, since Eumelos was in the lead before the gods interfered (23.376)? This makes it seem that Achilles is honoring Diomedes with the first-place prize for reputation rather than *aretē*. The narrator explains that it did not appear that Eumelos would maintain his lead. Either Diomedes “might have passed him or run to a doubtful decision” (23.382). Thus Achilles gives Eumelos the prize for the place he most likely would have achieved without hindrance from gods over the full length of the race, based on extrapolation of the evidence of the *aretē* Eumelos demonstrated up until the interference. Achilles makes a judgment, true, but not one *a priori*.

This episode demonstrates the difficulty any ruler has when facing an old injustice. Eumelos was unjustly deprived of his place, but restoring it to him brings anger from the new possessor, who himself did

nothing to Eumelos. It was Athena, not Antilochos, who destroyed the chariot of Eumelos. Both men therefore have a just claim on the same prize. In human life, situations arise that vex a ruler in a similar way. For example, if land is obtained by fraud and then sold several times, who owns the land when the fraud is discovered many years later? Is it the current owner, who paid for the property and knew nothing of the fraud, or the descendants of the owner who was cheated so long ago? Achilles finds that redistributing property exacerbates the problem, so he adds another prize from his ship for Eumelos instead (23.560). There is no suggestion, however, of what to do in the more common political situation where no more land or prizes can simply be produced by the ruler in order to satisfy all sides. Sometimes, given the limited amount of offices, wealth, and other such prizes which bring honor in human political communities, justice may be impossible without obtaining something from outside the city.⁹

Achilles also corrects an omission by awarding the fifth-place prize to Nestor, who did not even compete (23.617). This is just because it promotes the purpose of the games. Nestor deserves honor because he has demonstrated excellence in past competitions (23.630–7). He helped the city then, and is still helping now by trying to counsel his son towards excellence before the race (23.306–348). His value to his city, even as an old man, has been made clear throughout the poem. He has urged his people to fight (4.294), has “stirred the spirit and strength in each man” (6.72), and has given advice to honor the dead and build a wall and ditch (7.325). In each case, Nestor has contributed toward victory for his city and thus deserves honor. Honoring Nestor also increases the motivational power of the games for the other contestants, since it is more valuable to them if they know that their deeds will not be forgotten in the future (23.648).

Achilles does not intervene in the third and fourth assignments of the mare because he does not need to. The dispute between Antilochos and Menelaos provides an example of formal justice that does not require the direct action of the ruler. Homer shows a paradigmatic judicial procedure which produces the proper result. The suit opens with the appeal by Menelaos to the “leaders ... and their men of counsel / [to] judge between the two of us now; and without favour” (23.573–4). The first step in any judicial dispute is to bring it before impartial judges. An alternative is also possible: A man may make a public judgment himself, if it is so clear that no one “call[s] it in question” (23.580). Then, the defendant is placed under oath and questioned about his wrongdoing (23.582–5). Antilochos

9 See Cicero, *De Officiis* 2.81-82.

concedes at once. He mentions two motivations: He does not want to “fall from [Menelaos’s] favour and be in the wrong before the divinities” (23.595). Shame and fear of the gods combine to achieve justice even without the ruler.

Menelaos then returns the mare to Antilochos, out of his own concern for honor, “so that these men too may be witnesses / that the heart is never arrogant nor stubborn within [him]” (23.610–611). Menelaos again shows an understanding of honor superior to Antilochos’s. He realizes that the prize is only a symbol of honor, and that there is more than one way that honor comes. Antilochos acts improperly during the race in order to win the symbol, and realizes only afterwards that he has lost the real thing. Menelaos successfully reclaims the symbol justly, yet gives it up so as more surely to hold true honor. In any community, there is a similar difference between tokens and truth. Obtaining military decorations through burglary does not make someone a war hero, cheating to win a ball game does not make someone a good athlete, and getting a prize for curing cancer by fooling people with a fake does not help society. In all such cases, whenever the lack of excellence becomes generally known, the community will no longer honor such a “winner,” despite his possession of a prize.

Although the acts of fortune, too, sometimes require correction by justice in order to be in accord with the common good, there is no example of such a correction in this account. None is needed, because the effects of fortune are so temporary. The list of competitors given by order of excellence in the introduction to the race—Eumelos, Diomedes, Menelaos, Antilochos, Meriones; 23.288–351—is exactly the same as the order they are running in just after the turn (23.377, 401–2). A typical human life is long enough for excellence to overcome misfortune, and for lack of excellence to manifest itself despite initial good luck.

There is no question that the final result of justice here is a happy one. The only emotions mentioned in connection with a final distribution of a prize are positive (23.512, 565, 598, 600, 625, 647). These replace the anger that earlier parts of the race produce (23.385, 417, 438, 446, 543, 567). A ruler must realize that if honors are simply given to those who actually achieve some goal, *aretē* may lose out to guile and the whims of fortune and the gods, and the result will be indignation among the citizens. Justice, in contrast, produces peace and happiness. Thus, rewarding excellence not only contributes towards the common good of the citizens through encouraging the most skilled warriors to save the city during a war with enemies, but it also promotes unity and peace within the city itself.

A peaceful community has been the goal of Achilles all along, as Scott notes.¹⁰ Even before the race ends and justice is applied in the awarding of prizes, Achilles aims for concord in a less weighty matter. After the intervention of the gods, when Diomedes has taken his large lead, a dispute arises in the stands between Ajax and Idomeneus over whether or not it is really Diomedes that they see out in front (23.450 ff.). Both begin to speak “in anger” (23.473, 482), and the fight is about to get worse when Achilles intervenes (23.490–1). The solution is obvious—to simply wait for the leader to get closer so they will be clearly visible (23.495–8)—but it is enough to stop the fight. This episode helps to show a ruler how to deal with those in the community who are not even trying to achieve recognition. Even they have a sense of honor: Even they take offense at insults and deserve justice. Peace in any community requires attention to all sources of conflict.

Achilles rules the chariot race well. By this point in the poem he seems to understand the lessons that a reader may learn from Book 23. Perhaps he has always been aware that his life is a race toward death and a competition for honor, but after the chariot race he also understands that such honor ought to be justly earned. Perhaps he reflects on what he has achieved, and how. How much has been due to chance or accomplished by the help of the gods? Perhaps he even sees that ultimately honor is a reward given for actions that tend to produce civil peace. Achilles has finished the race first. He has turned the tide of the war and defeated Hector. Is it for this that he wins everlasting honor? Or in the redistribution of prizes after the race, does he still come out first because of his accomplishment in Book 24, where he returns Hector’s body to his father for proper burial rites? Perhaps the greatest and most lasting honor is won by the man who ensures that even enemies are given the honor they deserve according to justice, and who thus shows the way toward lasting peace.

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¹⁰ Homer, Scott writes, is concerned with “maintaining peace and averting violence ... report[ing] ... regulated games rather than war” (“The Etiquette,” 219).

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