A CULTURAL THEORY OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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The spirit and its expression

Rage—siax, goddess, the rage of Achilles, the son of Peleus, the destructive rage that brought countless griefs upon the Achaeans.

Homer

This chapter develops a paradigm of politics based on the spirit and the need for self-esteem to which it gives rise. Following Plato and Aristotle, I contend this need is universal and distinct from appetite. The spirit is an individual drive but has great importance for politics because people seek self-esteem not only through their personal activities, but vicariously through the achievements of social units to which they feel attached, such as sports teams and nations. In classical Greece, citizens achieved standing and self-esteem individually and collectively through the triumphs of their city states. In the modern era, often called the age of nationalism, people achieve self-esteem in a variety of ways and many bask in the glory of their nations. Harold Lasswell and Hans Morgenthau, among others, argue that nationalism involves a degree of transference by individuals of their aspirations on to states. More recent research suggests that this relationship works in both directions. To build identities and mobilize public support, states construct and project characters and narratives of themselves to which many of their citizens become deeply attached. Policymakers find it in their interests to act—or give the appearance of acting—in terms of these characters and narratives, which can restrain their freedom of action and at times compel them to pursue policies at odds with their preferences. For citizens and leaders alike, questions of standing and honor can be very important and interrelated.

The concept of the spirit all but disappeared from the philosophical and political lexicon as a result of the Enlightenment and French Revolution. The spirit found expression in honor, a value and way of life associated with the ancien régime, that was considered politically retrograde. Adam Smith is a notable exception. He hoped to transform the potentially destructive "jealousy of trade" into a peaceful competition for national glory and honor. Tocqueville, who insists that "every time men are gathered in a particular place, honor is immediately established among them," is the last major theorist to speak of honor and the positive role it can perform for democracy, although not the last to write about its consequences for international affairs. I hope to bring the discourse of the spirit back to life—although not in the context of aristocratic values—by describing the key characteristics of the spirit, its principal behavioral manifestations and how they have been conceptualized in the past. I intend to show how the spirit remains not only relevant, but essential, to understanding contemporary individual and collective political behavior.

Plato and Aristotle provide the philosophical foundation for my paradigm, as they were the first to theorize about the spirit and its relationship to political order. I accordingly discuss their conceptions of the spirit and its relationship to political order. They were deeply influenced by Homer. The Iliad illustrates the values, characteristic modes of behavior and sources of stability of spirit-based worlds, as well as their tensions and pathways to their destabilization. I use the Iliad to construct a Weberian ideal-type honor society and template to study several real societies in which honor or standing were key state goals.

Many historical honor societies were warrior societies. Such societies value bravery on the battlefield most highly, and through its display—ideally in one-on-one combat—warriors achieve status and the possibility of political office. Warrior societies are governed by complex codes, although, as we shall see in the case of Homeric Greece, these codes are

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1 Homer, Iliad, 1.1–2.
2 Heider, The Psychology of Intergroup Relations, Cialdini, et al., "Basking in Reflected Glory: Three (Football) Field Studies," demonstrate that identification with a sports team enhances self-esteem when the team is successful. Dechene, Greenberg, Amdt and Schimel, "Terror Management and Sports Fan Affiliation," demonstrated the links among mortality, self-esteem and identification with sports teams. Those subjects primed beforehand to think about mortality showed a higher rate of identification with their favorite team.
3 Lasswell, World Politics and Personal Insecurity, pp. 23–39; Morgenthau, Scientific Man vs. Power Politics, p. 169; Kelman, "Patterns of Personal Involvement in the National System."

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4 This is a central contention of those who emphasize "ontological security" as a prime motive of state behavior. The argument and relevant literature are discussed later in this chapter.
6 Tocqueville, Democracy in America, II.3.17–18, 587–9, 595 (for quote); Krause, Liberalism without Honor, pp. 57–96.
neither unproblematic nor accepted by everyone in the society. Warrior societies are highly competitive, but seek to constrain internal competition and violence through friendship, marriage and gift-giving and the selflessness, self-restraint and reciprocity they entail. Warrior societies are another ideal type, because most societies in which warriors and honor play important roles are more complex and varied than any abstract description would suggest. Fifth-century Greece, Macedon under Philip and Alexander, early and middle Republican Rome, the Frankish kingdoms, the Vikings, Shang China (c. 1600–1050 BCE), India at various stages of its history, the Maori of New Zealand, the Inca and Aztec and the American Plains Indians are cases in point. Many, but not all, of these societies were aristocratic, as of course were the Greeks and Romans. The Vikings and Plains Indians were not. Outside of the most isolated regions of the Amazon Basin and New Guinea, warrior societies no longer exist, although some of their characteristics are found in the kinds of gangs that thrive in various inner-city and subaltern settings. Even fifth-century Greece, where warfare was frequent and the principal means of obtaining honor, had moved considerably beyond the world described by Homer. As we shall see, individual pursuit of honor was partly incorporated and sublimated into the city state’s striving for honor and standing. Within the polis, especially in Athens, other forms of standing and honor emerged, among them public speaking and private expenditure for the benefit of the city. Appetite was also a powerful motive, and one that gradually gained more acceptance. Europe from the Middle Ages to the French Revolution deviates further from the Homeric model. Europe of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is even further removed, although the spirit was still influential, if generally unacknowledged.

The Iliad is the prototype for other European honor worlds, and an essential starting point for analysis. Comparing real honor worlds to this ideal-type warrior society will help us better understand these societies and how some of them developed into something more diverse and complex. All societies retain some traditional practices, even when the values that initially sustained them have disappeared. In modern societies, it is not difficult to identify practices, or variants of them, that originated in warrior societies and still influence status hierarchies and the conduct of politics, diplomacy and war. Understanding how the spirit is encouraged and channeled in warrior societies makes it easier for us to identify its manifestations in other kinds of honor societies and in more mixed societies, and in those like ours that are assumed to be dominated by appetite.

Outline of a paradigm

The most useful starting point for any discussion of recognition, standing and honor is Plato’s Republic because it offers the first explicit account of the spirit. Plato has Socrates describe the appetite (to epithumetikon) as encompassing all primitive biological urges (e.g. hunger, thirst, sex and aversion to pain) and their more sophisticated expressions. Socrates divides appetites into those that are necessary (e.g. food and water) and unnecessary (e.g. relishes and fancy garments). We are unable to deny the former and benefit from their satisfaction. The latter we can avoid with proper training and discipline. Socrates uses the example of thirst, which he describes as a desire for a drink qua drink, to argue that appetites are a distinct set of desires and not a means to other ends. Socrates infers that there are desires beyond the appetites because someone can be thirsty but abstain from drink. The principal alternative source of desire is the spirit (to thumoeides), a word derived from the thumos, the organ that supposedly roused Homeric heroes to action. Socrates attributes all kinds of vigorous and competitive behavior to the spirit. It makes us admire and emulate the skills, character and positions of people considered praiseworthy by society. By equalizing or surpassing their accomplishments, we gain the respect of others and buttress our self-esteem. The spirit is honor-loving and victory-loving. It responds with approbation to any impediment to self-assertion in private or civic life. It desires to avenge all slights of honor or standing to ourselves and our friends. It demands immediate action, which can result in ill-considered behavior, but can be advantageous in circumstances where rapid responses are necessary.

The spirit requires conceptions of justice, esteem and shame. Indeed, our very sense of self depends on them. Justice and shame are acquired through imitation and education — what we today, call socialization —

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7 Finley, World of Odysseys, p. 113; Taplin, Homeric Soundings, pp. 7, 50.
8 Brock, Medieval Iceland, pp. 103–96, and Viking Age Iceland, pp. 134–7.
9 White, Street Corner Society, Cohen, Delinquent Boys, for the honor aspects of gang culture.
12 Plato’s conceptions of the spirit are developed in books V, VIII and IX of the Republic.
tend to be common to a family, peer group, and sometimes the wider society. Plato has Socrates distinguish the spirit from appetite and reason. His defining example is Leontius, who experiences pleasure from looking at corpses, but is angry at himself for indulging this shameful appetite. The spirit can also come into conflict with reason. When Odysseus returns home in disguise, he is enraged to discover that some of Penelope's maids have become willing bedmates of her suitors. He suppresses his anger because it would reveal his identity and interfere with his plans to address the more serious threat posed by the numerous and well-armed suitors.\(^{13}\)

Reason (to logosikon) is the third drive of the psyche. It has the capability to distinguish good from bad, in contrast to appetite and spirit which can only engage in instrumental reasoning. For Socrates, reason has desires of its own, the most important being discovery of the purposes of life and the means of fulfilling them. It possesses a corresponding drive to rule. Reason wants to discipline and train the appetite and the spirit to do what will promote individual happiness (eudaimonia) and well-being.\(^{14}\)

Plato conceives of the psyche's components as quasi-independent agents. He has Socrates compare the appetitive part to a many-headed beast, the spirited part to a lion and the rational part to a human being. Reason knows what is best for the psyche as a whole but must persuade the appetite and spirit that it is in their interests to accept its leadership. In healthy individuals, the appetite and spirit come to accept the rule of reason. Socrates acknowledges that few people attain this state of mastery, but insists that the closer they come, the happier they are.\(^{15}\) Justice is analogous to mental health because it trains and constrains the appetite and spirit in a manner best suited to human nature. It leads people into close relationships with others and teaches them respect for their fellow citizens and other Greeks. There is no conflict between justice and enlightened self-interest because the former is essential for the latter. It follows that justice ought to take precedence over other goals.\(^{16}\) One of the principal purposes of the Republic is to demonstrate that the happy life is also the just life and that self-restraint and respect for others, rather than depriving one of pleasures, makes those who have more enjoyable and satisfying.

For Aristotle, the principal division in the human psyche is between the desires (epithumiai) and reason, or "the calculating part" (to logosikon). Aristotle describes two kinds of desires. The first, which arises from "necessary" sources of pleasure (epithumia) — eating, drinking, sex and, more generally, touch and taste — is equivalent to Plato's appetite. The second is passion (pathē), which encompasses Plato's spirit because it generates desires for wealth, honor or victory. People whose appetites are unrestrained by reason succumb to passions and act against their better judgment, often in ways that are destructive to themselves and those around them. A product of an honor culture, Aristotle contends that giving in to the spirit (thumos) is less reprehensible and less damaging than overindulging appetites.\(^{17}\)

Aristotle's understanding of the spirit is somewhat more elaborate than Plato's. He describes it as an impulsive desire, and a source of both courage and anger.\(^{18}\) The spirit strives for honor through victory in competition, which is pleasing because it produces an image of superiority which all humans desire. It also makes people see themselves as good characters, especially when they are honored as such by others whom they respect.\(^{19}\) For the same reason, people are sensitive to anything that threatens their sense of individual worth, and grow angry in response to what they perceive as attempts to disparage them publicly, especially from people whom they regard as their inferiors.\(^{20}\) Honor is "the token of a man's being famous for doing good." It is recognized through sacrifices, commemoration in verse, prose or statues, privileges, grants of land, front seats at civic celebrations, state burial, public grants and precedence at home and abroad.\(^{21}\)

Aristotle follows Plato in his belief that "all men by nature desire to know." He distinguishes theoretical from practical reasoning. The former is conceptual knowledge (epistēmē) about the fundamental nature of things.\(^{22}\) Practical wisdom (phronēsis) is deliberative but directed toward action. It leads to knowledge about what is worthwhile in life, and seeks to educate the desires to act in accord with these goals. Phronēsis is the product of an arduous educational process that must begin in childhood and gradually allows reason to shape the psyche by weeding out

\(^{13}\) Homer, Iliad, 20.1–37; Plato, Republic, 439e1–440b.

\(^{14}\) Plato, Republic, 441c1–2, 441e6, 442c6–8, 580d7–8, 850d11–e1.

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 441d12–442b4, 46e–8, 445c5–444a3, 427b7–d2, 580c1–4, 588c7–d5.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., 430e6–431a2, 441d12–e2, 444e7–445a4.

\(^{17}\) Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, 1098a4, 1102b13–31, 1147b25–8 and b31–5, 1148a8–9, 1247b18–19, 1378a20–2, and Rhetoric, 1369b16–19, 1370a18–1370b4.

\(^{18}\) Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, 5.10, 1135b25–9, 1149a1–b23.

\(^{19}\) Aristotle, Rhetoric, 1370a32, 1371a8–18.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., 1379a30–b37.

\(^{21}\) Ibid., 1361a28–b1.  

\(^{22}\) Aristotle, Posterior Analytics, 1.2, Physics, 2.3, 194b23–25.
some pleasures, and reshaping others, all the while encouraging a taste for more complex ones. If successful, reason promotes a life of "moral virtue" \( (\text{ethikê arete}) \).^{23}

The good life consists of enjoying pleasures in a refined way. It also requires public service, which allows pursuit of the noble. Successful public service demands character traits that have been shaped by training, experience and reason. They enable us to make good judgments, build stable, trust-based relationships and gain the admiration of other virtuous people. Public service requires a high degree of maturity and self-discipline. We need to overcome the temptation to seek self-esteem and respect on improper grounds – notably, military prowess or wealth – because they come to us through good fortune, not through the exercise of our moral qualities.\(^{24}\)

Plato and Aristotle understand self-esteem as a powerful and universal drive, although its expression is culturally determined because esteem depends on conceptions of shame and justice, which vary across cultures and epochs. \(^{25}\) I follow Plato and Aristotle in assuming that people everywhere crave recognition for some kind quality or achievement, and feel better about themselves when they receive it. And all the more so when they gain the approbation of those whom they admire or who occupy positions of high status within their society. As Plato’s example of Leon-tius indicates, people are usually willing to make sacrifices to maintain or achieve honor and standing. This usually requires tradeoffs between honor and appetite, but in warrior societies it can entail one between honor and life.

Two caveats are in order. The first pertains to the cultural framework in which the spirit finds expression, a particularly relevant consideration for a study whose cases span several continents and 2,500 years. We must identify the diverse ways in which the spirit is encouraged, the varied expressions in which it is challenged and the different ways it can be stymied and arouse anger and desires for revenge. We must be sensitive to the links between individual self-esteem and the honor or standing of the collectivities with which people identify. This too varies across cultures. Finally, we must recognize that the language that we use to describe the spirit and its behavioral manifestations is culturally embedded. The societies in question sometimes embed the spirit in a different discourse, or do not describe or theorize about it at all. These discourses – or lack of them – in turn have important behavioral ramifications.

Since Darwin, modern conceptions of neurophysiology have attempted to explain emotions as states triggered by biochemical reactions in response to external stimuli and thus universal in nature.\(^{26}\) David Konstan ably demonstrates that emotions, like understandings of colors, are mediated by culture. The Greek lexicon of the emotions is not the same as ours, and Greek terms for seemingly shared emotions do not necessarily coincide with ours. This is most evident with respect to love, friendship and anger.\(^{27}\) For our purposes it is important to recognize that Greek conceptions of honor and shame differ in many ways from their nineteenth-century Southern United States and contemporary Mediterranean and Middle Eastern counterparts.\(^{28}\) For both, however, shame is a pain or disturbance concerning bad things that appear to lead to loss of reputation.\(^{29}\) Greeks and moderns differ in the greater diversity among moderns in their naming and describing of emotions.\(^{30}\) There are even greater differences between contemporary Western and non-Western understandings of emotions. The Japanese word for self-esteem – \text{serifu esutimu} – comes from English as there is no indigenous term that captures the concept of feeling good about oneself.\(^{31}\)

Unlike modern Europeans, the Greeks did not conceive of emotions as internal states of agitation. They understood them to be mediated, actually aroused, by the interpretations we place on the words, deeds and intentions of others. Thucydides and the playwrights recognized that emotions can be made self-validating when action based on them provokes the expected behavior.\(^{32}\) Aristotle considers emotions to be the result of reasoning and malleable because they can be altered by changing

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\(^{25}\) Konstan, \textit{Emotions of the Ancient Greeks}, ch. 1, for a critical discussion of this approach.

\(^{26}\) Konstan, "\textit{Philia in Euripides' Electra}," \textit{Friendship in the Classical World, Pity Transformed, and Emotions of the Ancient Greeks}; Konstan and Rutter, \textit{Envy, Spite and Jealousy}.

\(^{27}\) Cicero, \textit{On Duties}, I, 91, 7 and 155, 9. Southern honor has been extensively studied. See, for example, Greenberg, \textit{Honor and Slavery}, chs. 1–2; Franklin, \textit{The Militant South}, 1800–1861, chs. 3–4; Wyatt-Brown, \textit{Southern Honor}, ch. 4; Ayers, \textit{Vengeance and Justice}.


\(^{29}\) See, for example, Smith, \textit{Theory of Moral Sentiments}, Ill–III, on hatred, indignation and contempt. Unlike Cicero, Smith recognizes that the conceptions of justice, which ultimately determine the meaning of honor, are culturally bound.

\(^{30}\) Nisbett, \textit{The Geography of Thought}, p. 54.

a slight. Anger is a luxury for Greeks because only people who have the power to seek revenge can allow themselves to experience this emotion. This generally excluded slaves, women, the poor, and weak city states. For Aristotle, it can only be directed at individuals—unlike hatred, which can be felt towards entire peoples—and only toward individuals who can feel your anger. Reflecting a widely shared understanding, Aristotle considers someone who is in a position to avenge a slight and fails to do so servile and contemptible, and unworthy of being Greek.

Classical Greeks nevertheless recognized that anger not infrequently provokes ill-considered actions that have serious adverse practical consequences. Thucydides tells us how Athenians voted out of anger (hypo ergos) to kill all Mytilenean males as punishment for their unsuccessful rebellion. Diotodus convinces the assembly to reverse its decision, and in Thucydides’ account does so on the grounds that it is not in the Athenian interest.

Where does this leave us? Although our understandings of fear, envy, shame, anger and hatred are different from the Greeks, we see ample evidence of the kind of emotions Aristotle describes and that motivate Greek tragedies. In children, denial of sweets, toys and the like often leads to rage, and one sign of maturity is the suppression of such anger and general mastery over the appetites. The spirit and the sense of self-esteem it can build are also innate but require a social context to find full expression. The spirit is shaped in the course of socialization and responds in the same way the appetite does when frustrated. Road rage offers a nice example. It is triggered by the belief that someone who has just cut you off has intentionally insulted you or shown disrespect. Mature people learn not to treat all behavior of this kind as challenges, nor to respond to challenges they cannot win or involve more risk or cost than victory is worth, and to think carefully before acting in instances where they feel compelled to respond. Challenges to our self-esteem threaten our identities and sense of self-worth, and the fury they arouse is generally more difficult to suppress than that arising from denial of appetite. Thucydides makes it apparent that challenges to self-esteem and collective identities, not to security, were the underlying cause of the Peloponnesian War. Following Thucydides, I try to demonstrate that affronts to honor, and thus to self-esteem, have been at least as great a source of war as threats to material well-being or security.

32 Aristotle, De Anima, 1.4.436a16–b2, Rhetoric, book II. The latter describes various emotions and how they are a function of our understanding of others’ motives, worthiness, and comparative status.

33 Lebow, "Power and Ethics."

34 Konstan, Emotions of the Ancient Greeks, p. 1.


36 Aristotle Rhetoric, 137b11–12; Homer, Iliad, 18.109.

37 Aristotle, Rhetoric, 137b63a–32.

38 Ibid., 1379b17–19.

A second caveat concerns the Greek understanding of the psyche with its three fundamental and different impulses. Modern authorities have offered different descriptions of the psyche and human needs. I noted Freud's conception of the psyche in the introduction and how it reduces all fundamental drives to appetite (primarily sexual) and reason to an instrumentality. Another prominent formulation is Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, developed from his study of great people and what accounted for their achievements. On several occasions when I gave talks about the psychological foundations of my theory, colleagues from psychology and political science asked why I did not base it on Maslow instead of the Greeks. Maslow, in his credit, captures some of the qualities of the spirit under his category of "ego needs," which describes the need for self-respect and respect from others. Unlike Plato and Aristotle, he does not analyze any of its behavioral attributes or the consequences of ego frustration, which are essential for any analysis of political behavior. More troubling from my perspective is the hierarchical nature of Maslow's scheme, with self-actualization at the apex.

Self-actualization is a Western concept associated with the Romantic movement of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It would have provoked a quizzical response from earlier Europeans, as it does today from many non-Westerners. Some Western psychologists, moreover, believe the emphasis on self-actualization in American education and health care to be overblown and counterproductive. Maslow has taken a purely local understanding of human excellence and transformed it without justification into a universal one. His description of the so-called "B-values" associated with self-actualization — truth, goodness, beauty, unity, transcendence, aliveness, uniqueness, perfection, justice, order and simplicity — are more virtues than values, making the concept of self-actualization fuzzy and all but impossible to operationalize even within the confines of a single culture. Empirically, Maslow is also on shaky ground as more recent biographers of at least some of the figures whom Maslow associates with these values or virtues (e.g. Jefferson, Schweitzer, Huxley) draw very different and far less idealized portraits of them.

Although the spirit all but dropped out of the political and philosophical discourse during the Enlightenment, self-esteem has been rediscovered by modern social science, especially psychology. Inspired by the pioneering work of Fritz Heider, psychologists have framed the concept very differently than did Plato and Aristotle. Another important line of research that relates to the spirit is the work of Henri Tajfel and his successors on collective identity. Tajfel emphasizes the social construction of identity and defines collective identity as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group." Tajfel and his co-researchers contend that social identities buffer anxiety and build self-esteem by allowing individuals to bask in the reflected glory of a group's achievements. In-group identification leads to a bias in favor of those who are part of the in-group and can lead to prejudice against those who are not, providing a psychological explanation for the tendency, noted in the introduction, of people to invoke binaries of "us" and "others." There is evidence that people will allocate resources differentially across groups in response to this bias even when it is disadvantageous to themselves.

Social identity theory suggests that people join and maintain groups for varied and multiple reasons. The evidence for self-esteem as a motive nevertheless remains strong. Research indicates that members of low-status groups usually define their choices as collective action to improve

48 For example, Randall, Thomas Jefferson; Hitchens, Thomas Jefferson.
49 Turner, Status and Inequality, Status, Power, and Legitimacy; Rosen, War and Human Nature; Frank, Choosing the Right Pond; Thaler, The Winner's Curse, all suggest that status hierarchies are a universal aspect of social life.
51 Tajfel, Differentiation between Social Groups, p. 63.
the standing of their group or defection to a group with higher standing.54 Studies using sports teams as the foci find that people tend to identify with highly ranked teams and disassociate themselves from teams that decline in the rankings.55 Cross-cultural research supports the finding that people prefer to identify with high-status groups, and that the pattern of group identification (social versus political) varies across countries.56 Group and contextual variables, of course, complicate the relationship between self-esteem and group identification, making the choice of identity maintenance strategies very sensitive to context.57 There is evidence that these preferences are also displayed by state actors.58 Collective identities allow individuals to overcome some of the limitations of self-hood and its finitude. They require groups with a real existence, and D. T. Campbell coined the term "entitativity" to describe this quality.59 In the 1990s, social psychologists were drawn to entitativity as a means of studying prejudice.60 Recent research shows that entitativity leads to heightened perceptions of agency, security and standing, all of which encourage group affiliation and maintenance of group boundaries.61 This research has important implications for international relations. Castano, Yzerbyt and Bourguignon found that identification with the European Union increased among EU citizens when perception of its

entitativity was heightened and declined when it was lessened.62 Castano and Dechesne argue that individuals have a strong incentive to see their in-groups as more entitative when they perceive their sense of continuity as human being as being at risk.63

The self-esteem and the social identity explanations of group existence and solidarity might be subsumed within a larger research program known as Terror Management Theory (TMT). Pioneered by Greenberg, Pyszczynski and Solomon, it seeks to develop and test a general theory of human behavior based on the existential dilemma posed by mortality. It assumes that the inevitability of death would give rise to paralyzing terror in the absence of psychological mechanisms to cope with it. The most prominent of these mechanisms is a cultural system of meaning, or world view, that imposes meaning, order, stability and continuity on life. It confers symbolic immortality on those who perform well the social roles derived from this world view, or live up to its behavioral standards. The second mechanism is self-esteem, also derived from performing roles well and acting consistently with the expectations of a shared world view. It has been described as a stimulus for our species to develop and sustain complex social orders and to improve the quality of life through a range of social and scientific innovations.64

Terror Management Theory has stimulated considerable research, much of it lending support to the claim that culture is an important buffer for anxiety associated with death.65 Taubman, Ben-Ari, Florian and Mikulincer carried out two interesting experiments in which they examined the relationship between self-esteem and risky driving. Participants whose self-esteem was not enhanced by reckless driving expressed lower intention to drive recklessly after being reminded about death than participants for whom self-esteem and reckless driving were linked. Participants who admitted that reckless driving buttressed their self-esteem also drove

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54 Elmers, "Individual Upward Mobility and the Perceived Legitimacy of Intergroup Relations"; Abrams and Hogg, "Social Identification, Social Categorization and Social Influence."
55 Dechesne, Greenberg, Arndt and Schimel, "Terror Management and Sports Fan Affiliation."
56 Taylor, "Multiple Group Membership and Self-Identity"; Freeman, Liking Self and Social Structure; Oldmeadow and Fiske, "System-Justifying Ideologies: Moderate Status = Competence Stereotypes."
58 For example, Johnston, "Testing International Institutions as Social Environments"; Flockhart, "Complex Socialization"; Zimbardo, "Nationalism, Internationalism and Chinese Foreign Policy"; Narlikar, "Familiar Chauvinism or Strategic Calculation?"; Suzuki, "China's Quest for Great Power Status."
59 Campbell, "Common Fate, Similarity, and Other Indices of the Status of Aggregates of Person as Social Entities."
60 Yzerbyt et al., The Psychology of Group Perception, for a recent review of the relevant literature.
61 Sacchi and Castano, "Entitative is Beautiful"; Castano, Yzerbyt and Bourguignon, "We Are One and I Like It."
62 Castano, Yzerbyt and Bourguignon, "We Are One and I Like It."
63 Castano, Yzerbyt, Paladino and Sacchi, "Transcending Oneself through Social Identification"; Castano and Dechesne, "On Defeating Death."
64 This last point is made by Castano and Dechesne, "On Defeating Death." For a general review, Solomon, Greenberg and Pyszczynski, "The Cultural Animal."
more recklessly in a simulator. A related experiment showed that people who derive self-esteem from sex rated it more appealing still after being primed about death. Mortality salience is also known to increase in-group bias, another finding with obvious political implications.

Castano, Yzerbyt, Paladino and Sacchi found that Italians primed by thoughts of mortality identified more strongly with their nation than did fellow citizens in the control condition. Their judgments of Germans was unaffected. When subjects are primed with thoughts about mortality, they are likely to predict that their favored team will score a higher number of goals in its next match.

The spirit also draws empirical support from research on self- and other-reactive emotions. Fritz Heider’s “balance theory” implies that the success of others is a psychological resource that we can exploit to buttress our self-esteem. The Self-Evaluation Maintenance (SEM) model builds on the insight that someone else’s performance relative to one’s own can be consequential for self-evaluation. It hypothesizes that reflected glory in another’s outstanding performance can enhance self-esteem, but only when the domain in which they perform is of low relevance to the actor. Comparison to someone else’s superior performance in an area of high relevance is likely to generate negative effect and lower self-esteem. In modern societies there are many routes to standing, and the SEM model reasonably suggests that we are most likely to resent those who do better than us in those competitive realms in which we try to excel because they are important to our sense of self-worth.

The psychological research of the last three decades has not in any way been influenced by the writings of Plato and Aristotle. There are nevertheless striking parallels between the ancient Greek understanding of the psyche and research associated with the TMT and SEM research programs. The core assumption of TMT is that people fear death because it disrupts continuity. They seek to overcome the acute anxiety mortality would otherwise arouse through comprehensive world views and self-esteem. The former provides order, continuity and meaning to their lives, and with them a sense or feeling of permanence. The latter provides figurative immortality, and is achieved by living up to the behavioral standards associated with the world view. Individuals attempt to transcend mortality by membership and contribution to groups that endure beyond their lifetimes.

Plato and Aristotle also posit the drive for self-esteem as innate and universal. Unlike TMT, they offer no explanation for why human beings so desperately seek self-esteem. They nevertheless make an implicit connection between self-esteem and death, as they recognize that for Greeks the most satisfying traditional means of achieving self-esteem is through deeds that bring enduring, if not immortal, fame. They offer a richer and more nuanced formulation of self-esteem, which stresses its competitive and social aspects, and emphasizes the extent to which honor and standing are relational qualities. This makes them difficult to achieve and maintain, and this is why threats to self-esteem or one’s ability to achieve it provoke anger, if not rage. Plato and Aristotle are interested in the social and political consequences of the spirit, which are only hinted at by psychologists working in the TMT program. In contrast to TMT, which frames the problem of mortality and the mechanisms for coping with it as entirely cognitive, Plato and Aristotle envisage self-esteem as cognitive and affective. It has an important cognitive component because it is more socially dependent than appetite. It requires conceptualization, observation, imitation and reflection. However, self-esteem is a psychological state; we feel good or bad about ourselves, and these feelings generate other emotions such as pleasure, anger and envy.

Plato and Aristotle also have a different understanding of the social. The TMT program, and social psychologists more generally, take the individual as their unit and retain the essentialist character of the individual regardless of the extent to which people interact with or associate with collectives. Group membership benefits individuals but does not change them ontologically. For the Greeks, involvement in families, friendships, fraternal associations and cities is transformative. Positive relationships with other human beings stretch our identities, together with our conceptions of ourselves and our self-interest. More significantly, relationships provide rewards not available to autonomous individuals, allowing people to realize their full potential as human beings. This is why Aristotle insists that the good life is only possible in the polis. For Plato and Aristotle,
relationships allow individuals to overcome their inherent limitations by extending themselves in space as well as in time.

The Greek understanding that competition evokes elation, satisfaction and anger, and builds or weakens self-esteem, provides a link with the SEM research program. Plato and Aristotle provide a conceptual framework that accounts for divergent responses to competition, something currently lacking in the SEM program. TMT and SEM researchers could profit from a careful reading of the relevant Greek philosophers and playwrights.

There are also unexplored connections between the TMT and ontological security research programs. Giddens's variant of ontological security assumes that people require confidence in their understandings of the physical and social world and the patterns of responses they sustain. The largely routinized nature of social intercourse helps us to structure our identities and enhances our capacity for agency and accordingly becomes a major component of our security system. As we have seen, the concept of ontological security has been applied to states. Researchers attribute concepts of self to states which are embedded in biographical narratives and sustained through foreign policy routines. Leaders can feel pressure to act in accord with these narratives and can feel compelled to risk war to build or defend state identities. Terror Management Theory provides a more profound explanation for the importance of biographical narratives and behavior consistent with them. Such narratives not only prevent disorder, but build self-esteem and encourage the illusion of immortality by enhancing continuity, provided the groups, organizations or states in question and the ideals they represent are perceived as enduring.

I neither assess the relative merits of these research programs nor use them to build my theory. It is derived largely from the ancient Greeks and supplemented with insights from modern philosophers and social scientists. I have discussed these research programs to show that some of the most important insights of Greek philosophy and literature find resonance, even empirical support, in contemporary research. My theory and cases are relevant to these programs in a double sense. They can enrich our understanding of self-esteem and the strategies by which it is achieved, embed them in a more comprehensive understanding of human needs, and root that conception in a larger and ever-changing cultural and historical setting. By revealing the important links among partially parallel research programs in sociology, international relations and psychology, they highlight the need for greater exchange across disciplines. They also demonstrate the need to go outside of social science to literature, philosophy and the arts for ideas, insights and defining examples.

In this sense too, this book continues the project I began in *The Tragic Vision of Politics*.

The world of Achilles

Troy was a Bronze Age city for over two thousand years, from about 3000 to 950 BCE. It is in the Troad, that part of western Anatolia bounded by the Dardanelles in the north and the Gulf of Edremit in the south. The ruins of what we think of as Troy consist of dozens of layers of settlement, sometimes sharply divided, covering about 75 acres. The city is built around a natural rock citadel that overlooks a fertile plain and the sea, and its Bronze Age economy depended on local agriculture, horse-breeding and trade. Its location made it a convenient stopping point for ships transiting the Dardanelles, plying between Europe and Asia, as part of a long-distance trading network. Trojans spoke a language akin to Hittite and were culturally distinct from the Greeks.⁷³ The Trojan War — if it actually occurred — took place before the so-called Greek dark age (ca. 1150–750 BCE), sometime between 1230 and 1180. In about 1180, Troy was consumed by fire, and discoveries of arrowheads, spear points, slings stones and unburied human bones all point to a sack.⁷⁴

There is a general consensus that the *Iliad* was composed, or at least put into its final form, sometime between 800 and 650 BCE. The epic offers us an ideal-type description of a warrior-based honor society. It illustrates the dominant values, behavior and inner tensions of such a world. The Greeks, whom Homer refers to as Achaeans, Danaans or Argives, have been fighting on the plain before the walls of Troy (*Ilios*) for ten years. They will ultimately triumph and destroy the city and its inhabitants. Homer tells us nothing about the outcome of the war in the *Iliad*, and confines his tale to a mere fourteen days, with most of the action taking place over the course of three days.⁷⁵

According to Greek myth, the Trojan War is the direct result of Paris' seduction of Helen, wife of the Greek King Menelaus, and their elopement to Troy. It is a violation of her husband Menelaus' honor and of guest friendship (*xenia*), a convention common to most traditional societies.⁷⁶ In Greece, the obligation to receive guests was considered so important that hospitality was made one of the epithets of the father of the gods:

⁷⁶ Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, pp. 105–8, thought that *xenia* was probably the one universal form of conduct.
Zeus Xenios. In return, the guest must not abuse his host’s hospitality or overstay his welcome. Menelaus defends his honor by attempting to punish Paris and regain Helen. He is also defending his position, as he would be regarded as weak by rivals and neighbors if he failed to act. He asks Zeus to grant him revenge “so that any man born hereafter may shrink from wronging a host who has shown him friendship.”

Honor requires Greeks connected to him by ties of obligation, family or guest friendship to come to his aid. On the Trojan side, honor and guest friendship compel King Priam to offer refuge to his son Paris and the woman he has abducted even though he and most Trojans thoroughly disapprove of the pair.

Much of the Iliad focuses on the conflict between Achilles and Agamemnon, which is also driven by honor. In an act of moral blindness (ἀθέα), Agamemnon takes a slave girl from Achilles to replace the one he must return to her father. Achilles is furious, withdraws from the struggle, refuses gifts subsequently offered him by Agamemnon, and only returns to the fighting to avenge the death of his beloved Patroclus. Homer ends his tale while the war is still raging, but his listeners know that Troy will be captured and its inhabitants slaughtered or enslaved, though not before Achilles and many other Greek heroes die. Menelaus will bring Helen home but his brother Agamemnon will be murdered by his unfaithful wife Clytemnestra, who has never forgiven him the sacrifice of their daughter.

In honor-driven societies, honor is so highly valued that one’s survival and that of one’s family become secondary considerations. In Aeschylus’ Oresteia, Agamemnon sacrifices his daughter Iphigenia at Aulis to gain a fair wind to carry the Greek fleet to Troy. In the Iliad, Achilles opts for immortal fame over a homecoming and long life, knowing full well that participation in the war will bring his own death. King Priam provides sanctuary for his son Paris (Alexandros) and Helen, although he recognizes that it could lead to the destruction of Troy. His son Hector, makes a similar choice when he seeks battle with Achilles, knowing that his death will hasten the fall of Troy, the enslavement of his wife and the death of their young son.

Emphasis of the spirit leads to a corresponding depreciation of the appetite.

Wealth is not valued for what it can buy, but for the standing it can confer. tripod, cauldrons, bars of iron, shields, livestock, female slaves and other booty taken in raids are the mark of heroes. These possessions enable warriors to claim status and to make friends and gain influence when they give them to others as gifts. Glauces and Diomedes exchange gold and bronze armor, Hector and Ajax end their duel by exchanging gifts, Achilles awards prizes ranging from unworked iron to talents of gold at Patroclus’ funeral games, and Menelaus presents Telemachus with a silver mixing bowl. Many of these items had been previously received as gifts, and their histories add value to them and create links of friendship along the chain of givers and receivers. Gift-exchange represents and sustains the long-term social order, in contrast to trade which maintains it in the short term. When short-term, individual-oriented exchange supports the longer-term communal exchange, it has beneficial effects.

In this connection it is interesting to note that the Indo-European root for gift is *ghab(h)*, which also means to take hold or have. Habit has the same root, implying that at least for peoples who speak Indo-European languages gifts were once the basis for social relations and the *nomos* that sustained it.

In honor societies markets are considered a necessary evil, as are the people who make their livelihood in trade. In the Iliad, the presence of markets is acknowledged because the two armies are continually resupplied with animals and other needs, but never apparently by Greeks. No details are provided, and there is no mention of money. Homer’s banishment of trade to the periphery presages Marx’s observation that commerce first develops on the margins of communities, where they come into contact with foreigners.

There is feasting in the Iliad, but the diet is monotonous. Appetites are sated, not indulged. Sheep and goats are slaughtered and roasted, but

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78 Homer, *Iliad*, 3.331–4. All quotes from the Fagles translation.
79 Seaforth, *Reciprocity and Ritual*, pp. 13–25, on gift exchange in the Iliad; Taplin, *Homeric Soundings*, pp. 56–8, on the problematic nature of these obligations.
80 Homer, *Iliad*, 9.413, 497–505. 81 Ibid., 2.189.
82 Taplin, *Homeric Soundings*, p. 125, argues that Hector must win *klos* while he can because he knows his city will be destroyed.
84 Ibid., 4.125–9, 23.897–8, for illustrations.
87 Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, p. 50; Seaforth, *Reciprocity and Ritual*, pp. 18–19, for a discussion of trade in Homer.
the finest cuts are burned as offerings to the gods. The meat is consumed with bread and simple relishes and washed down with wine mixed with water. Food and drink are distributed equitably among those present, and Homer tells us at the end of each meal or feast that every man ate until he was satisfied. Homer never uses the word nomos, which first occurs in Hesiod, where it refers to sacrifice or the eating habits of animals. Sacrifice is, of course, a kind of gift, but not one necessarily to be returned because the giver does not have the receiver's standing. By the fifth century nomos had become a term that encompassed laws, rules, procedures and customs, but still retained a connotation of equality in the word isonomia (equality of political rights). Homer uses nemein, and the compound epineimein, whenever he refers to food and drink in the active voice. As nomos derives from nemein, this usage suggests the degree to which early Greeks and Homer envisaged the system of food distribution as a core constituent of the political order.

Despite the symbolic importance of food, honor societies on the whole consider appetite an addictive distraction that can weaken, if not dissolve altogether, men's commitment to risk their lives in the pursuit of honor and the safety of their community. Appetite is blamed for making men flabby, effeminate and unfit for battle. The most corrupting appetite is considered lust for women. Honor societies tend to propagate stereotypes of women as sensuous, weak-willed, seductive and addicted to luxury. The beautiful, sexy and exquisitely dressed and perfumed Helen personifies these qualities and holds lovesick Paris in thrall. Her elopement causes war between two distant cities and peoples who have had no previous quarrel. Paris lets Hector and his other brothers and half-brothers bear the brunt of the fighting. He is finally goaded into a combat with Meneleus, and saved from death by Aphrodite, who wraps him in a deep mist and snatches him away from the battlefield. While Meneleus is stalking the battlefield in search of him, Paris is making love to Helen on a fancy bed in a secluded chamber inside the walls of Troy.

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88 Homer, Iliad, 1.602, 4.48, 7.318-20, 9.225, 15.95, 23.24-35, 23.56, 24.69 for formulaic sentences to this effect.
89 Gifts may be returned indirectly by the gods. Chrysies prays to Apollo for help when Agamemnon will not return his daughter, and the god sends a plague on the Greek camp. He is responsive because of the many sacrifices Chrysies has made to him.
90 Seaford, Money and the Early Greek Mind, pp. 49-50.
91 They are not alone in doing this; misogyny is common to Hebrew, Greek, Christian and Islamic culture.
92 Homer, Iliad, 5.245-447.
93 Homer, Odyssey, 11.475.
95 Accessed on 2 May 2006. Multiple searches reveal frequent changes in the numbers, but not in the overall ranking.
96 Waters, "Achilles at the River Plate"; Weinberg, A World at Arms, pp. 70-1.
97 Homer, Iliad, 1.88-214; Williams, Shame and Necessity, pp. 29-36.
a gift bestowed by the community, and thus a special prize of honor. The conflict is political as much as personal, because to give Briseis up is to renounce his standing in the community. Agamemnon should understand this because his loss of Helen had similar consequences for his standing, which is why the Greeks have gone to war. Agamemnon’s selfishness, just like Paris’ lust, threatens the system of centralized reciprocity that binds together the community of warriors. Achilles also removes himself from this system and its conflict-healing potential when he refuses the compensation and apology that Agamemnon is persuaded by other Greeks to offer him. “Hateful to me are his gifts,” he spittter.

In preindustrial societies, there are limited ways of gaining honor; it is most often won through prowess in hunting or battle or skill in medicine or necromancy. Women generally have to achieve status through their relationships with powerful men (fathers, brothers, husbands or lovers). Because of her faithfulness and guile, Odysseus’ wife Penelope would become a role model for later Greek women. “Hero” nevertheless has no feminine gender in Homeric Greek. Modern societies offer a wider range of possible routes to standing, but status can still be subject to caste or class restrictions. If so, competition for standing within particular castes or classes can be more intense than it is between them. This is arguably true in the Iliad, where the feuds between Achilles and Agamemnon and Achilles and Odysseus are constructed by Homer as conflicts between social equals, and accordingly have an emotional intensity absent in the wider dispute between the Greeks and Troy.

**Competition for honor is restricted to an elite**

In Homeric Greece, as in many traditional societies, competition was open only to warriors of aristocratic background. Feelings among equals are highly ambivalent as they are characterized by in-group solidarity but also by rivalry and jealousy. Members of the elite are likely to express disdain,

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98 Homer, Iliad, 1.118-20; 9.379-86; 367-8; Taplin, Homeric Soundings, pp. 60–3.
99 Homer, Iliad, 9.378. Seaford, Money and the Early Greek Mind, pp. 37, 39, notes that Achilles’ rejection of Lycaon’s offer of ransom, and of gifts from Hector, is a continuation of this crisis.
100 Finley, The World of Odysseus, pp. 32–3. Foley, Female Acts in Greek Tragedy. Penelope was contrasted to powerful women in Greek tragedy such as Clytemnestra and Medea who violate norms of female behavior: they speak and act decisively, often violently, in their own interests and represent puzzling deviations from the cultural norm.
101 Marks, “The Ongoing Nexus: Thersites, Odysseus and Achilles.”
103 Ibid., 2.212–77. In Troilus and Cressida, I, iii, Shakespeare refers to Thersites as “a slave whose gall coin here slanders like a mint.”
somewhat ambiguous and therefore open to challenge. In the *Iliad*, there are no challenges from below except from Thersites, who openly expresses resentment. The mass of ordinary soldiers and servants remain nameless and voiceless. Homer is writing for the well-off elite.

Standing is signaled and sustained by mutually understood markers

Standing may be informal and affirmed by outward signs of deference. It can be associated with titles, ranks, privileges and membership in elite bodies. In the *Iliad*, there is a formal (ascribed) hierarchy with kings at the top, followed by their sons, other aristocrats and their followers (*hetairoi*). Agamemnon is at the apex of this hierarchy on the Greek side, and Homer gives him the title *anax* — a variant of *wanax* — a Bronze Age term for a king. On several occasions Agamemnon refers to himself as "the best of the Achaeans" (*aristos Achaion*) or its equivalent, and is described once by Homer as the "best" (*aristos*). 104 There is also an informal (achieved) hierarchy, where standing is primarily a function of valor, but secondarily of wisdom. Old Nestor, in his day a brave warrior and champion wrestler, is now admired for his sage advice. 105 Odysseus is respected for his fighting skills and cool head. Achilles unquestionably has the highest achieved status, a position conferred on him by his peers, who show him many signs of respect, and Homer, who repeatedly refers to him as "the best of the Achaeans." 106 Achilles’ conflict with Agamemnon accordingly takes on an additional and symbolic dimension because Agamemnon is attempting to usurp an honor that is rightfully Achilles’. Homer encourages us to conclude that strife is inevitable whenever there are multiple hierarchies headed by different people with at least one of them unconcedled to the status of the other. Upward (or downward) mobility within the achieved status hierarchy is possible, but only among warrior aristocrats who are allowed to compete.

The conflict between Agamemnon and Achilles indicates that standing and honor are not always equivalent. Agamemnon has standing — high status and office — because of his kingship, but his anger, imperiousness and selfishness imperil the Greek cause and arouse grumbling among his followers. He loses honor while Achilles gains it through valorous displays,


105 Homer, *Iliad*, 2.16–18.


the games he holds in Patroclus’ honor and his killing of the much feared Hector in one-on-one combat. Honor does not always require success. In many ways, Priam is the most honorable and sympathetic figure in the *Iliad*. He is also the biggest loser in the Trojan War; he, his sons and grandsons are killed, his city is destroyed and his wife Hecuba is carried off to Greece as a slave. He is sympathetic because he is the victim of a dilemma not of his own making, in which the choice open to him — expelling Paris and Helen, or sheltering them at the cost of war with the Greeks — forces him to choose between the good of his city and the code by which he is expected to live. He honors the same *xenia* that Paris, his son, violated, with equally tragic consequences for himself, his family and his city.

People with standing are expected to feel a strong sense of obligation toward their society and those who honor them.

The elite must uphold the values and *nomoi* of the society through their everyday behavior and serve as a role model to others. Like Priam, they may have to do so at enormous personal cost, a sacrifice which only enhances their honor. Homer provides numerous examples of how this code operates in everyday practice. At the end of the Cyclops episode in the *Odyssey*, Odysseus and his followers break up into groups to hunt. They share the spoils, with each man getting ten goats, except for Odysseus, who gets eleven, including the ram that was Cyclops’ favorite. He promptly gives the ram as a gift to his companions, and they roast it and feast together. 107 The leader (*bashileus*) has accepted a gift and bestowed one in return, acknowledging his primacy and his charity. By contrast, the conflict between Agamemnon and Achilles is the result of Agamemnon’s double violation of the norm of reciprocity. In the most insulting manner, he rejects the generous ransom that Chryses, a priest of Apollo, offers for the return of his daughter Chryseis, who had been taken by the Greeks on an earlier raid. Chryses prays to Apollo for revenge and, as noted, Apollo, in acknowledgment of his priest’s service over the years, sends a plague to decimate the Greek army. The Greek seer Calchas tells Agamemnon that he must return Chryseis to end the plague, and Agamemnon agrees to do this if he is compensated with somebody else’s prize. He insists on taking

A Cultural Theory of International Relations

Honor worlds require a robust society

The Greek word for fame (kleos) derives from the verb to hear (kluein). As Homer knew, fame not only requires heroic deeds, but bard to sing about them and people willing to listen and be impressed. There must be a consensus, and preferably one that transcends class distinctions, about the nature of honor, how it is won and lost and the distinctions and obligations it confers. There must be rules and procedures for awarding honor and recording and commemorating the names and deeds of those who achieve it are also essential. This requires a society with shared values, traditions and institutions. Competition for honor and standing can sustain these values and institutions and socialize others into assimilating and acting in terms of them. It nevertheless has the potential to destabilize society when it becomes so intense that actors ignore or violate the norms and procedures that govern and constrain competition.

The Iliad provides stunning examples of destructive and constructive behavior by Achilles in response to the death of Patroclus, who is first wounded and then run through by Hector’s spear. Achilles seeks out Hector and rejects his appeal that each of them promise, if victorious, to return the other’s body for a proper burial. After a prolonged chase, he kills Hector, then pierces his “Achilles tendons,” passes rawhide straps through them, ties him to the back of his chariot and drags him back across the battlefield to the Greek camp and twelve times around Patroclus’ funeral pyre. Achilles flings Hector’s body down into the dust, subjecting him, in Homer’s words, to “shameful treatment.” He announces to his Myrmidons and the dead Patroclus that he has fulfilled his promise to drag Hector’s body before him, give it to the dogs to eat raw and slit the throats of twelve splendid Trojan children before his funeral pyre. Apollo now compares him to a lion “going his own barbaric way, giving in to his power, his brute force and wild pride, as down he swoops on the flocks of men to seize his savage feast.” Achilles feels no pity and has no sense of shame, and has become more animal than human.

Cooperation is both more difficult and easier in honor worlds

Cooperation among individuals or political units invariably involves some degree of coordination and leadership. Actors are continually measuring themselves against others and are loath to accept subordinate status, making it difficult, at times impossible, to cooperate when it involves recognizing the authority of another and accepting the loss of autonomy this may entail. This is another reason why Achilles is so resentful of Agamemnon. Honor societies nevertheless inculcate a strong sense of obligation to leaders, kinsmen, guests and others to whom actors are linked through gifts or favors. In the Iliad, this makes it possible for Agamemnon and Priam to mobilize a wide range of relatives, friends, clients and their retainers to fight for them in a conflict in which many have no direct stake, and to remain committed to the struggle for ten years.

Warfare is frequent in honor societies, but generally limited in its ends and means, and governed by rules

Warfare between political units that are members of the same society frequently resemble duels. They are arranged beforehand, fought in of the things that distinguished human beings from animals for the Greeks, so here too Achilles is showing his animal nature.

Clausen, On War, book 1, ch. 1, pp. 75–6, equates war to a duel in which each combatant tries through physical force to compel the other to do his will. “His immediate aim is to throw his opponent in order to make him incapable of further resistance.” Countless duels make a war, but their purpose is the same. “War is thus an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will.”
an agreed-upon location and with the goal of establishing precedence or reestablishing honor. Honor in warrior cultures produces a class of fighters ready to serve at a moment’s notice and face death unflinchingly for their homeland. Honor societies, in effect, encourage aggression and deflect it outwards. We must nevertheless avoid the inference that such societies are a rational response to anarchical international environments and the security threats they generate. In the *Iliad* and historical honor worlds, warriors frequently seek honor at the expense of their community’s security and other fundamental interests.

Warfare ideally takes the form of highly stylized combat or contest (agon) between two warriors, closely governed by a series of rules, well-understood and respected by all participants, that encourage a fair fight. Single combats are widely attested to in honor societies. The Torah gives a vivid description of the contest between David and Goliath, and David’s victory becomes the basis for his subsequent kingship. We find numerous examples of single combats in other warrior cultures, including Republican Rome, the Aztec Empire, among the Plains Indians and in Papua New Guinea. Homer’s battles are set pieces to provide descriptions of such encounters. Combatants are generally — although not always — keen to win honor by fair means. At one point, Ajax invites Hector to strike first, and Hector in turn warns Ajax that he should be on his guard because he does not want to kill him “with a sneaking shot, with an eye for my chance, but in open fight.” The purpose of war is as much to provide a stage for individual aristocratic participants to gain honor as it is to advance any broader goals of their political units. *Iliad* battlefield scenes depict champions dismounting from chariots or stepping forward from the ranks to challenge warriors in the opposing army. Chariots are taxis, that transport heroes to and from the battlefield, not weapons of war. Combat is always brief and nearly always fatal, with compatriots on both sides observing, but generally not interfering once the contest begins. Wounded warriors die quickly, unless they are just nicked, but sometimes survive just long enough to utter final words.

As the old adage has it, exceptions prove the rule, and Homer offers several with telling effect. The Trojan Lycaon, stunned with terror, dodges Achilles’ blow, grabs his knees and pleads for his life. Achilles rejects his promise of ransom, telling him that better men have died in the war. Lycaon’s spirit collapses and he sits down with both hands outstretched. Achilles thrusts downwards with his sword, sinking it into his body up to the hilt. If no mercy is shown on the battlefield, there are restrictions on who can fight. In book 4, Glaucus and Diomedes, both eager for battle, advance to confront each other. In the course of announcing their lineages and exploits, they discover that their families are linked and they are accordingly “guest friends.” They grasp hands and exchange armor, even though it requires Glaucus to give away his gold armor in return for bronze. Homer tells us that Zeus must have taken away Glaucus’ wits, offering evidence that the system of gift exchange was breaking down at this stage in the war.

More fundamentally, the desire to gain honor determines the strategy of war. The Greeks have no choice but to take war to the Trojans, but they never try to besiege and starve the city into submission. Instead, they offer fair combat on the plain below Troy. For their part, the Trojans do not seriously oppose the Greek amphibious landing on their shores, and play their game by coming out from behind their walls to fight. They would have been much better advised to have worn the Greeks down with indirect resistance in the form of ambush, harassment, raids and efforts to cut off the long supply line on which the Greeks depended for their food. We know from Homer that the Greek army was tired of fighting and only kept from sailing away by Odysseus acting on instructions from Athena. Hector’s strategy of frontal assault played up to the Greek strengths, and only makes sense, as does his decision to remain outside the walls to do combat with Achilles, as a reflection of his commitment to gain glory through decisive battle.

### Tensions

The *Iliad* is a saga, not a rule book, and Homer shows us how norms and human nature interact and give rise to serious tensions even in this ideal-type representation of an honor society. The structure and beauty of the poetry suggest an ordered and stable world in which gods, people and words have a proper place. The narrative tells us how the defense of *nomos* nearly destroys it, and transforms handsome, accomplished and noble young men into ugly, rotting corpses that become carrion for wild dogs and vultures. The jarring juxtapositions of beauty and tragedy, life and death and order and disorder heighten our awareness of the fragility of

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honor-based warrior societies. This fragility derives in the first instance from the intense competition such societies encourage. It is channeled into violence, where it can readily escalate out of control, as it does for Greeks and Trojans, and almost does for Achilles and Agamemnon. Violence arouses intense emotions, among them fear, anger, and the desire for revenge — what anthropologists call negative reciprocity. Greeks and Trojans come close to a settlement in book 5 when they agree to a contest among champions, with Helen and all her possessions going to the winner. Athena persuade an angry Trojan archer to violate the truce and wound Menelaus. Agamemnon, his brother, is enraged, and swears to destroy Ilium. The fighting resumes and from that point on moves inexorably toward its tragic finale.120

Achilles embodies within himself the central tension of warrior societies. His uncompromising sense of self-worth is the source of extraordinary vitality, and his god-like wrath (mēnis) energizes him on the battlefield.121 It also gives rise to implacable anger that makes him a threat to the social order. Unlike Odysseus, he finds it difficult to exercise self-restraint. In the opening book of the Iliad, he refrains from drawing his sword against Agamemnon, but insults him publicly and withdraws from the fighting on the grounds that the Trojans have never done him any harm.122 He returns to the battle for the wrong reasons — personal revenge as opposed to social obligation — and kills without restraint. His defilement of Hector’s body is a violation of nomos that ranks with Paris’ violation of xenia. In the closing book of the epic, Achilles facilitates a restoration of nomos. He returns Hector’s body to Priam, suitably oiled and wrapped, and lifts it on to the wagon that Priam has brought with him from Troy. He becomes a participant in Hector’s funeral, symbolically bridging the gaps between Greece and Troy, peace and war and life and death.

In battle Achilles is like an animal, and his murderous wrath makes his adversaries become animal-like in expressing their hostility to him. They want to tear his flesh apart and eat his liver raw, actions Greeks associate with animals.123 His human qualities resurface only when he empathizes with Priam over the loss of his son. He softens when he pictures his father mourning him. This scene concretizes a traditional Greek understanding of the nature of community embedded in many tragedies and, we will see in chapter 4, made explicit by Pericles in his funeral oration and Plato in his Protagoras. Community is based on expanding circles of friendship. War narrows those circles, destroys empathy, makes human beings animal-like and has the potential to destroy community.

There is a striking contradiction between the goals and means of war. The Greeks have come to Troy to retrieve Helen or destroy the city for harboring her and Paris. They have no strategic plan to achieve this goal beyond engaging Trojan forces in a war of attrition on the plain in front of their city. The combats that ensue are not really battles, with the possible exception of the melee that erupts when Hector and the Trojans breach the Greeks’ defensive wall and threaten to burn their ships. Armies are only occasionally organized by either side to make maximum use of the forces on hand, and almost always in exceptional circumstances.124 Most of the fighters on both sides do not appear to engage and merely observe individual combats between heroes. Some of the most intense and bloodiest fighting is over trophies, as one hero and his supporters attempt to strip the armor from a dead opponent, while the other side struggles to regain the body and its armor.125 None of this violence contributes to the broader objectives of war.

Homer does not recount a single strategy session in which Greek leaders make reasoned arguments for or against different courses of action. Their councils are dominated by quarrels about disputed claims for precedence in which participants attempt to intimidate one another with harsh words and threats.126 The only significant strategic advice on the Greek side is given by Nestor, who suggests they build a protective wooden wall in front of their beached ships. The Greeks heed his advice, and the wall saves their ships from being burned by Hector and the forces under his command. On the Trojan side, Polydamas urges the Trojans, and Hector in particular, to withdraw behind the walls of the city and wage a defensive war. His sound advice is angrily rejected by Hector, who spurns omens and good counsel as cowardice. “One omen is best,” he insists, “to fight back for one’s fatherland.” Hector goes outside the walls to do

120 Homer, Iliad, 4.100–274.
124 Important examples are Nestor’s careful arrangement of his infantry and cavalry, along with his orders that “Let no man in the pride of his horsemanship and his manhood dare to fight alone with the Trojans in front of the rest of us,” 4.293–308; Ajax, mustering his troops in defense of Patroclus’ body, 17.354–9; and Polydamas arranging the dismounted Trojans into five companies to attack the Greek ships, 12.61–107. Lond, Soldiers and Ghosts, pp. 29–30.
125 Homer, Iliad, 17.352–65, for the fight over Patroclus’ body and armor.
126 Finley, World of Odysseus, p. 114.
combat with Achilles, only to lose his life and his city. Personal honor routinely triumphs over strategic considerations, and is often pursued at their expense. In Homer's fictional Greece, social obligation requires heroism. Nestor and Odysseus are nevertheless admired for their strategic wisdom and good counsel, which sometimes favors restraint. They can voice reason-based arguments because they have reputations as great warriors.

There is an equally prominent and unresolved tension in combat itself. Killing other warriors in close engagements, generally in one-on-one encounters, constitutes a claim for glory (euexos). The Iliad is nevertheless filled with examples of heroes killing unheroically. Hector slaughters Periipetes while he lies on the ground, and delivers a coup de grâce to the wounded and dazed Patroclus. Deiphobos kills Hypsenor by mistake. Achilles throws spears through the backs of fleeing warriors and kills others who are cowering along the banks of a raging river. Such unheroic violence can be attributed to the aroused state of the warriors, but it also reflects the standing of the fighters who are killed. The fame won from victory is very much proportional to the status of the dead hero, which is why Homer often provides us with long genealogies of these warriors and their accomplishments. When Hector is killed, the Greeks tell themselves: "We have won ourselves enormous fame. We have killed the great Hector whom the Trojans glorified if he were a god in their city." At the other end of the spectrum, less distinguished warriors and unnamed soldiers can be killed by any available means because their defeat does not constitute a claim for euexos.

Homer's take on archery points to another contradiction. When Paris hits Diomedes from a distance with an arrow, the wounded Diomedes calls him a "foul fighter," and dismisses his arrow as "the blank weapon of a useless man, no fighter." "Arrow fighter" is on the whole synonymous with cowardice because courage involves risk, and this demands fighting at close quarters. In the funeral games, archery is nevertheless one of the competitions. Teucer, brother of Ajax, wins fame for bringing down so many Trojans with his bow, as does Odysseus in the Odyssey, for killing the suitors with a bow that only he can string. The codes governing combat in the Iliad are at least in part at odds with themselves.

The Iliad can be read as the first great work of literature with an anti-war theme. It glorifies warfare and the heroes it creates, but depicts combat as a thoroughly bloody and gruesome affair. Homer provides graphic descriptions of the various ways in which warriors die. Spears pierce their skulls, teeth, tongues, necks and torsos, and swords slash their necks, abdomens and limbs. Eyes and teeth pop out, blood gushes from wounds and orifices, heads and joints are severed or remain attached by folds of skin or all-but-severed ligaments. The wounded scream, double up in agony, reach out for their intestines, claw the earth or silently collapse as black night covers their eyes. Greek and Trojan heroes willingly enter into combat and are killed in large numbers. Countless others succumb to disease. Self-aggrandizing generals such as Agamemnon, tricksters such as Odysseus, and cowards such as Paris are the most likely to survive.

Myth has it that when Troy fell the hatred and rage of the Greek army found release in the slaughter of a defenseless civilian population. If it had been described in the Iliad, the sharp contrast between this dénouement and the bloody but honorable combat between warriors would have pushed this unheroic aspect of the conflict into the background. Greek legend attributes victory to a desperate, clever ploy: the famous Trojan Horse of Odysseus. Calm, rational and courageous, Odysseus was also calculating and indirect. Helen describes him to Priam as "the master of all kinds of trickery and clever plans." Homer emphasizes the sly nature of his tactics early in the Iliad, where he recounts a nighttime ambush that Odysseus and Diomedes carried out to capture Trojans from whom useful intelligence might be gleaned. Odysseus' balance of judgment are a nice counterpoint to the anger and questionable leadership of Agamemnon and Achilles, but his behavior on and off the battlefield clashes with the heroic code that emphasizes direct and open engagements between
opposing champions and denigrates the use of tricks to overcome an enemy, or indeed any tactic that minimizes the risk of warfare. Odysseus’ trickery is all the more threatening because of its success.  

The final book of the *Iliad* describes the dramatic encounter between Priam and Achilles. There are striking parallels in language and detail between this scene and the opening scene of the saga where another old father, Chryses, appeals unsuccessfully to Agamemnon for the return of his daughter. On this occasion, the supplication succeeds and forges a momentary bond between the two men. Both know their reconciliation is temporary, that war will resume and that Priam is at great risk within the Greek camp, as is Achilles for receiving him. By focusing our attention on the story of two families of honorable men from opposing sides, Homer leaves us with a tragic understanding of war and its consequences. For political as well as artistic reasons, he had every reason to end his story with the walls of Troy intact.

**Historical worlds**

The *Iliad* is a fictional work that describes a fictional world. Ruins and artifacts aside, much of what we know about the age of heroes – Bronze Age Greece in the Late Minoan period – comes from myths, later writers such as Homer and Hesiod, and the poems of the “Epic Cycle.” Six of these poems narrate events from the Trojan War that are not described in either the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey.* Homer, if he actually existed, lived sometime in the ninth or eighth centuries BCE, some three or four hundred years after the Trojan War is supposed to have occurred. It is possible that the *Iliad* portrays a real war on the basis of stories passed down by word of mouth through the Greek Dark Ages. At some stage, bards combined these stories into larger narratives – the *Iliad* is 15,000 lines – and improvised many of these lines in retelling them according to a sophisticated set of rules. Improvisation inevitably, perhaps purposefully, introduced some of their society’s values, ideals and practices. The bards constructed what Max Weber would call an ideal type: a mental construct that will never be encountered in practice but nevertheless offers insights into real worlds.

With this ideal type at hand, let us turn to the analysis of historical societies, beginning with fifth-century Greece, in which honor seems to have been of paramount importance. I start with classical Greece because Athens and Sparta took Homer as their model, just as Rome and Europe from the Renaissance on were influenced by Homer and classical Greece. There were over 1,000 city states in fifth-century Greece, and we have little or no information about most of them. We know something about Sparta, and a lot about Athens, so must be careful about generalizing to Greece as a whole. From Greece I move to the Hellenistic period and then to the early, middle and late Roman Republics and the Roman Empire. In later chapters I analyze feudal and early modern Europe, and Europe and the United States in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Ancient Greece and Europe illustrate not only the characteristics of honor-oriented societies but their principal tensions. The ways in which these societies coped with these tensions, and their different degrees of success, sheds further light on the character of honor worlds.

All my cases are European, but honor-based worlds and warrior societies are by no means exclusively Western phenomena. In the absence of Homer, they developed on roughly parallel tracks in the Middle East, Southeast Asia, China and Japan, Scandinavia, Oceania and Meso- and North America at different stages of their history. Honor has been extensively studied in some of these societies, revealing practices in many ways similar to those of Homeric Greece and historical European honor societies. I include one non-European case: Japan in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Classical Greece and Europe differ in important ways from the world described by Homer. They are larger and more developed, especially with regard to their political institutions. In the Greece of Homer and fifth-century playwrights, the state was more or less synonymous with the leader, and the army with his followers and their dependants. There is no levels-of-analysis problem because the goals of kingdoms generally reflect those of their leaders. It is straightforward and credible to describe

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138 Vidal-Naquet, The Black Hunter, constructs an elaborate theory around the contrast between straightforward combat and hunting and subterfuge. Drawing on anthropology, he argues that initiation rites often involve a logic of invention, in which young men are encouraged to act out prescribed roles, including those inimical to hoptole warfare.

139 The *Cypris* describes the outbreak and first nine years of the Trojan War; the *Aethiopis* is about Troy’s Ethiopian and Amazon allies; the *Little Iliad* provides detail on the Trojan Horse; the *Nestoi* describes the return of those Greek heroes, especially Agamemnon, who made it back safely from the wars; and the *Telegony* picks up where the *Odyssey* leaves off.

any consensus about its substance. Critics of realism have long contended that the national interest is a fuzzy concept at best, and that one that is more useful as a normative goal or rhetorical ploy than an empirical description of policymaking.

Liberals make a similar and equally problematic move with respect to interest. They assume the majority of people in the modern world have material well-being as their primary goal, and that governments, to the extent they are democratic, must satisfy their desires to stay in power. States accordingly act as if they were motivated by appetite. Public opinion polls and elections reveal that electorates have wider goals, and that material interests are not always paramount. In the 2004 American election, a significant percentage of the working class and middle class voted against their economic interests. They cast their ballots for Republican candidates for the White House and Congress on the basis of their social agenda and security concerns. In a poll conducted by the Pew Foundation, 44 percent of Bush voters said moral values were the single most important issue for them in the campaign. When governments privilege economic concerns, they are not always those of the electorate. They can act to the benefit of powerful special interests which can be at odds with those of the community as a whole.

To assert that political units are motivated by fear, interest, honor, or any other motive, is not the same as demonstrating it. To do this, we must show that important decisions over time reflect these motives. Alternatively, we can engage in process-tracing and show that leaders acted on the basis of these motives. We can also search for revealing cases where different motives, say interest and honor, pulled leaders, or appeared to pull them, in opposite directions. None of these tests is particularly easy, let alone definitive. In the conclusion to chapter 2, I noted how difficult it is to devise good indices for motives, and how much more difficult still it is to identify the motives behind actions that appear to be consistent with multiple motives. On the eve of the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides has Athenians tell the Spartan assembly that "the nature of the case first

144 Machiavelli, Discourses, writes that “without an unambiguous brief, reason of state was liable to become a general doctrine of prudence and a technique of secretive statescraft.” Translation from Hunt, Jealousy of Trade, p. 12.

145 In 1950, Morgenthau, In Defense of the National Interest, felt compelled to write a book identifying the national interest because there were such differences of opinion about it and a general tendency to describe American policies in other terms with reference to other goals.

compelled us to advance our empire to its present height; fear being our principal motive, though honor and interest afterwards came in.\textsuperscript{147} The actions in question—the Corcyraean alliance, the siege of Potidaea and the Megarian Decree—are consistent with all three motives, and it is apparent that Spartans assign them a reverse order from the Athenians.\textsuperscript{148} Thucydides' account of this and other episodes makes us aware that actors are not necessarily in touch with their own motives, let alone those of their adversaries. It is hardly surprising that the key decisions leading up to the Peloponnesian War remain a subject of intense debate among scholars.

These problems should not deter us from making careful efforts to determine the hierarchy of motives behind foreign policy decisions. They nevertheless make it essential that we supplement these efforts with other approaches. One promising line of inquiry focuses on the dominant discourses of the society. What motives do they recognize as legitimate? What hierarchy, if any, do they establish among them? Do actors justify their behavior in terms of these motives and their associated ends? Do they do this even when it appears likely or obvious that they are acting in response to other motives? Does admission of illegitimate motives, or those that are considered inappropriate in the circumstances, provoke shock, protest or other negative consequences? Even partial answers to these questions ought to provide valuable clues about the value structure of the society, the degree to which these values represent a distant ideal or are expected to govern everyday practice, the extent to which they do, and the ability and the willingness of actors to police practice.

We must also be sensitive to changes in discourse as they can be powerful indicators of changes in the hierarchy of motives. Shifts in the relative emphasis and evaluation of motives can presage, accompany or follow shifts in practice, so we must exercise care in making inferences directly from a discourse without also examining behavior. The problem is further complicated by the presence of multiple discourses in many, if not most, societies. Shifts in the appeal and primacy of these discourses are likely to tell us something about changes in values or behavior, which are, of course, related. It is useful, indeed essential, to supplement our analysis of a society's discourses with the observations of its members, especially when they are recognized by contemporaries as astute observers of their culture. What I am describing here is a variant of the hermeneutical approach to texts.\textsuperscript{149}

\textsuperscript{147} Thucydides, 1.76.11–13.  
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid., 1.24–66.  
\textsuperscript{149} On hermeneutics, see Berger and Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality; Gadamer, Truth and Method, and "Text and Interpretation"; Habermas, On the Logic of the Social

I make use of all these strategies in my analysis of Greece, Rome and Europe. I quote extensively from contemporary sources, relying on what they have to say about the value hierarchies of their societies, the tensions they embody and the nature of challenges to them. I also offer my own analysis of texts and practices. With respect to the latter, I look for patterns indicative of value hierarchies in the practice of foreign policy and for illustrative cases where different values appear to be pitted against each other in the choices policymakers confront. As I am treating multiple societies over a span of more than two millennia, I use these several strategies in a selective rather than a systematic manner. My case studies are intended to be illustrative and provocative, not definitive, and to highlight key features of value hierarchies and their political consequences.

Real political units differ from ideal types in another important respect. One motive may be dominant, but others are also important, giving rise to mixed societies with complex interactions that are correspondingly more difficult to analyze. Classical Greece, Macedonia, the early and middle Roman Republics and eighteenth-century Europe put sufficient emphasis on the honor and standing that it is appropriate to describe them as honor societies. Appetite was also an important motive for individuals and political units, as was fear, which in some circumstances was dominant. We cannot ignore these other motives when analyzing the spirit and its consequences because they constrain it and shape its expression in important ways. Each motive, like the spirit, embodies its own tensions.

I have described those associated with Greece of the Iliad. In the next chapter I do this for classical Greece. In fifth-century Greece, Macedonia, the early and middle Roman Republics and pre-French revolutionary Europe, I treat these drives as relatively distinct and describe these societies as mixtures. In the modern world, we shall see, appetite and spirit increasingly blend, leading to worlds that are more solutions than mixtures, and accordingly with a somewhat different set of characteristics and tensions.

**Theoretical summary**

Before turning to my cases, I think it useful to recapitulate for the reader in abbreviated form the principal characteristics of honor-based societies.

and the tensions associated with them. I revisit and expand upon these propositions at the end of chapter 4, drawing on my ancient world case studies and, in the theoretical conclusion to the book, drawing on all my case studies.

The starting point of the paradigm of recognition, standing and honor is the universal need for self-esteem, which the ancient Greeks associated with the spirit. It finds expression in a competitive quest for honor and standing, which are defined and pursued differently depending on the society and epoch. Plato's and Aristotle's model of the psyche includes two other drives: appetite and reason. They also generate ideal worlds. Classical liberal theory portrays an ideal world of interest, although does not acknowledge it as such. Plato's Republic constructs an ideal world based on reason.

Real worlds are mixes of all three motives, and in those I refer to as honor-based societies honor is more important for the elite than appetite. The reverse is true in interest-based worlds. For either kind of society to exist in practice, reason must to some degree restrain and educate spirit and appetite alike. When reason loses its hold over either, other actors become increasingly concerned about the prospects of achieving honor, satisfying their appetites or preserving their lives. This can prompt a rapid phase transition into a fear-based world.

My analysis of the Iliad suggests that honor-based worlds have the following generic characteristics:

1. Honor takes the form of external honor, defined as acceptable, or, better yet, outstanding performance of socially determined roles. Failure to act honorably induces shame.
2. Death is preferable to dishonor for individuals and political units. Survival is an important but secondary goal. It will be put at risk, or even knowingly sacrificed for the prospect of honor and immortal fame or of avoiding dishonor.
3. Honor and standing are intended to be synonymous. Societies aspire to have as perfect an overlap as possible between achieved and ascribed statuses.
4. In their earliest iterations, honor-based societies are warrior societies. Bravery in battle is the most highly regarded social activity, and the principal claim to honor and standing. It may be an essential prerequisite for political office.
5. To the extent that honor is valued, appetite is correspondingly devalued. Excessive appetite for wealth or women is considered corrupting.

Luxuries and women are thought to make men less capable warriors and less willing to risk their lives for honor. Homosexual love is often encouraged and channeled by warrior societies to stimulate bravery in battle.

6. Honor societies are relatively closed societies. They do not easily admit or assimilate outsiders. Some honor societies are rigidly stratified, as was Bronze Age Greece of the Iliad. Others are not, cases in point being the Vikings, Plains Indians or many tribes of Papua New Guinea. Entry into the elite in these societies is most often achieved through bravery in battle.

7. Honor societies are commonly divided into a relatively undifferentiated mass and an elite. The elite usually consider themselves to be ontological equals, but are organized hierarchically on the basis of ascribed and achieved status. Hierarchy often involves multiple gradations in rank.

8. Honor and standing are conveyed by generally understood markers. These can include special titles, costumes and privileges. Failure to acknowledge or respect them arouses anger because it is considered a slight to one's honor.

9. Honor worlds require a robust society based on a core of widely shared values. Honor can only be achieved in societies where there is a consensus about what it is, how it is won and lost, and who awards or takes it away.

10. The hierarchies that constitute honor worlds come with rule packages for each status that must be followed for the hierarchy to remain legitimate and effective. Statuses and their associated privileges must also be enforced and defended when challenged by those who benefit from them.

11. Honor requires public recognition, and actors are willing to make sacrifices to achieve it only if they believe they will be honored in their lifetimes or afterwards.

12. Warfare between honor societies is frequent and rule-governed. The ends and means of war are limited, and its principal goal is to establish precedence through competitive displays of bravery. A secondary goal of war is to seek revenge for slights to one's honor or standing.

13. Warfare between honor- and non-honor-based societies is usually about security (defense) or conquest (offense) and is neither

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150 Pitt-Rivers, "Honour and Social Status," on how honor depends on the ability to silence anyone who disputes one's standing or the system that confers honor and standing.
rule-governed nor limited in its objectives. Prisoners are rarely taken unless they are held for ransom or used or sold as slaves.

Honor societies incorporate key tensions:

1. There is tension between competition for honor and the nomos that makes that competition possible and meaningful. Honor hierarchies are steep and competition for them is correspondingly intense. Actors are sorely tempted to take short-cuts to attain honor. If the rules are consistently violated, honor becomes meaningless.

2. The quest for honor requires a proliferation of ranks or statues. These gradations intensify conflict when they are ambiguous, and create difficulty in establishing precedence across rankings of achieved and ascribed status or among multiple forms of achieved status.

3. In practice, ascribed and achieved status hierarchies are often distinct and diverge. The relative standing of these hierarchies and those within them can constitute a powerful source of conflict.

4. Warfare conducted by the rules of honor societies privileges the honor of individual warriors over the honor and security of the society as a whole. Adherence to these rules can make defeat more likely by adversaries who are not similarly constrained. Strategies and tactics intended to maximize the chances of victory are equally threatening to the survival of honor societies.

The survival and stability of real-world honor societies depend on their ability to moderate and control these four tensions. As they interact synergistically, failure to do so can lead to a rapid transformation of an honor-based world into a fear-based one. However, success and the orders it brings make the accumulation of wealth more likely and threaten to transform honor-based societies into worlds dominated by appetite. Honor-based societies are inherently fragile and subject to decay and transformation by two distinct dialectical processes.

This is aretē (excellence), the best possession that man can have. The noblest thing that a young man can endeavor to win.

Tyrtaeus¹

Honor is a great thing for the sake of which people will make every conceivable effort and face every conceivable danger.

Xenophon²

Honor is clearly the greatest of external-goods.

Aristotle³

What else is an enemy but a perpetual opportunity for you to show your mettle and win glory?

Camillus⁴

Classical Greece (480–325 BCE) is the first of my historical cases in which to demonstrate the power of the spirit and the central role it played in politics, foreign policy and international relations. It is an “easy” case because Greeks and modern-day scholars alike consider it a society in which honor was an important, if not the most important, value for the elite. The quote from Aristotle above expresses a belief that would have met little dissent from fifth- and fourth-century aristocrats, and a nod of agreement from citizens of other Greek city states. Although it is an “easy” case, it is a theoretically productive one because of the many differences between it and the Homeric ideal-type honor society. These differences, and the complexities to which they give rise, provide additional insights into the nature of honor societies, their tensions and the interaction between the spirit and other motives.

¹ Tyrtaeus, 12.13–14 in the Lattimore translation. Tyrtaeus was a seventh-century poet who lived in Sparta.
⁴ Livy, The History of Rome from its Foundation, 6.13.7.

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1. A CULTURAL THEORY OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
2. THE ANCIENT WORLD