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# In Praise of Unhappiness

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## CHAPTER I

### IN PRAISE OF UNHAPPINESS

While studying Greek literature many years ago, I was not very surprised to learn that happiness was nurtured on material possessions, so to speak, and being happy essentially meant “having more,” having land, houses, slaves, amphorae, clothes. These possessions served to secure one's ever unstable and fragile existence. Sustained by the body, by its needs, by its health, life would logically find a sort of balance in these “real” things that helped to defend and affirm it.

Yet in the imagination and in human fantasy, these possessions appeared to result from neither effort nor work. Nestled in the very middle of the Greek word for happiness, *eudaimonía*, was chance, in the form of a goblin, a *daímon*, who capriciously granted mortals their gifts. As harsh proof of absolute injustice, of insurmountable arbitrariness, the image of Croesus and other powerful beings [renowned for their wealth] floated in the mythic air of Athens. The Greeks must have asked themselves, “Why so much for them and so little for us?” Was there some reason, some hidden reward, underlying that essential fickleness? Or was it simply a matter of the whim of gods who, by gratuitously granting favors within the realm of need, provided provocative and cruel proof of absolute chance?

Attention to this indisputable fact, proof of the corporal and indigent nature of existence, persisted throughout Greek literary history. However, during this same history an exemplary evolution occurred. “Well-being” essentially implied the absence of anguish and concern for “well-having;” unrelenting nature's first lesson: perpetually demanding a daily offering of food, a reminder of the real and indispensable structure of our needy corporality.

However, another form of happiness began to emerge on the margins of that indigence. As language took on more intimate functions than those of merely signs indicating objects in our surroundings and communication about those signs, words began to discover and describe a more abstract universe, more ideal than the narrow reference to the tangible. And in this discovery a sense akin to “well-being” began to emerge, not as the result of the sense of security derived from tangible things, the things one had, the possession of which was life affirming. “Well-being” became “well-essential-being”. Happiness, derived almost exclusively from the world of possessions, now became possible in the world of feelings. In Greek literature a number of words began to describe that balance, that wisdom, that joy, that came from the unexplored territories of selfhood; a sense of inner peace, like in the teachings of Epicure, that needed very little, merely to hush the voice of the flesh that demanded sustenance, light and air to thrive.

Of course the idea of needing so little was simply a metaphor, but a metaphor that described the exact limits of nature beyond which existence became corrupted. True democratization of the body and of life demanded respect for this corporality which needed to be fed, to be able to feel, understand, and perceive life as “energy and joy.” This was an essential right of all human beings, and the tendency to politics of equality was nothing more than the recognition of that right, one from which friendship, justice, and the possibility of coexistence were derived.

Perhaps one’s sense of balance and inner peace is continually threatened by the consciousness of abject poverty, violence, and ever-greater cruelty that humanity has experienced since the time of the Greeks. Because, in effect, if one sees, in one’s individual life, social ills and corruption destroying collective life, happiness is impossible. That is unless our own minds have become so corrupt and the desire to possess, especially in a consumer society, ends up consuming the very existence of the consumer and desensitizing his view.

The peace and serenity necessary for the consciousness to be “essentially” happy is impossible if happiness is threatened. The dream of balance and friendship with our own selves is ever full of nightmares and dissatisfaction. Only a well off, self-satisfied individual can delight in his own possession-derived and blind happiness, and invent ideologies to accommodate his individual delight. It is true that, in order to thrive, human life also requires spaces of inner and outer serenity, pleasure in, and identification with, nature or with art. It is also true that the sense of pleasure and joy is one of the most valuable gifts that the nature of our body and mind have to offer; but the philosopher wrote that the origin of all of the relationships we establish with the world and with others is rooted in the friendship we have with ourselves. This friendship has nothing to do with selfishness, but rather is related to a more humane way of being, a relationship with ourselves that makes us become a person, become beings worthy of the ability to love ourselves, despite contradictions and hardships.

But this love of self is rooted in mental clarity, the freedom to understand. Being with ourselves —that silent dialogue we incessantly have with ourselves— tells us that we will never be fully satisfied with our singular existence if it is dulled by the gnawing circle of senseless prosperity. Unhappiness that comes from without, from our surroundings, such as social tensions, violence and stupidity that so often ruin collective life, serves to hinder the well-being we seek. On the other hand, that inevitable insecurity serves as a stimulus and impulse as we pursue goals that inhabit the realm of the ideal, where one finds comfort and direction for one's life. Dissatisfaction teaches us the most impassioned meaning of every human endeavor, and constantly pushes us toward a personal happiness that is impossible if it does not in some way include the company and happiness of others. It is a utopia that is paradoxically within our reach and that can only be achieved by recognizing and accepting the insurmountable finiteness of our generous unhappiness.

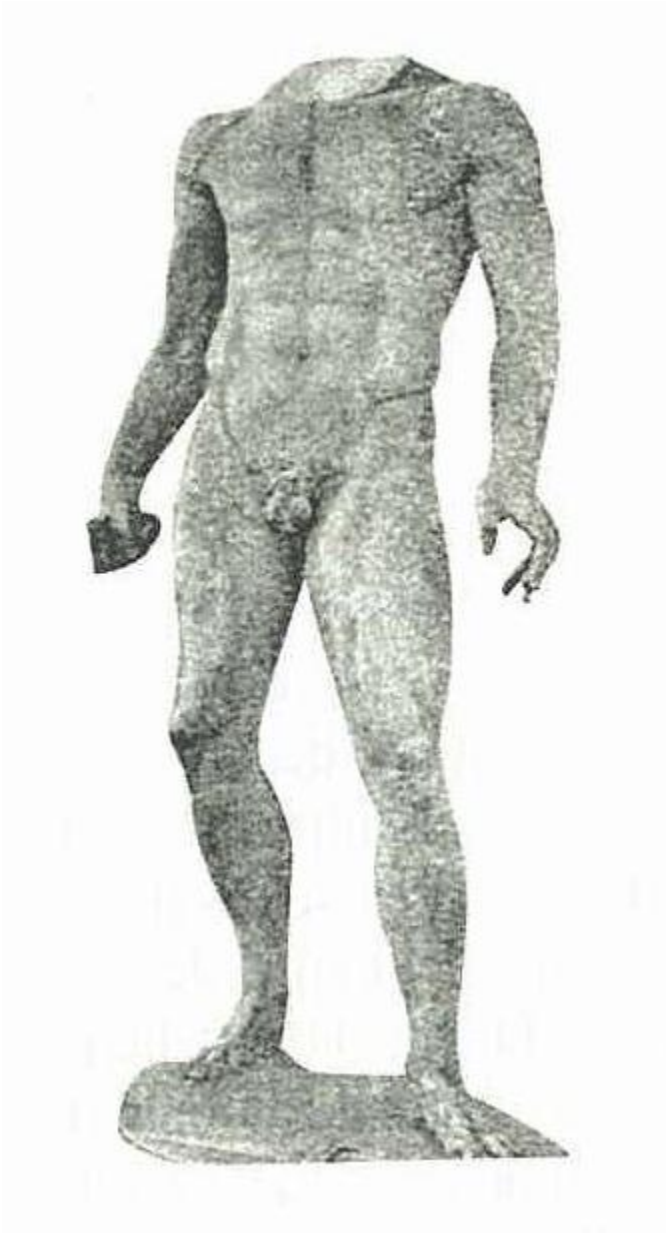
## CHAPTER II

### ON THE ORIGIN OF CORPORALITY

A REFLECTION ON THE BODY, PAIN, AND DEATH IN HOMER

I. There is a sculpture of a warrior's body in Exhibit Hall I of the National Archeological Museum in Naples. Like other athletic figures sculpted by Greeks in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century BC, this piece demonstrates the genius of the great works of the classic period. The artist's vision of a people who discovered the universe of ideas and shapes with their own eyes, and intuited the order and movement of the stars, also sets its sights on the human figure and begins to tell us what it is like. The result of this artistic vision is called *theoría*, "what can be seen," that which the mind reflects from its experience with things. This marble narration is a *theoría*, a vision that speaks; in it, every muscle, every surface, becomes distinguishable in the paradigm of a real organism, approaching the ideal of a man who, far from other cultures' heart-breaking dreams, would establish the principles of knowledge, intellectual communication, rationality, and wisdom.

But this body, which is so powerful and so delicately carved, is not inspired by the same force, peace and serenity of the familiar Phidias or Praxiteles works. The grandiose musculature that sustains it is no longer useful for building such beautiful structures, nor shooting arrows, nor throwing discuses. Stripped of armor, nude in an unreal combat in which only his right hand retains the hilt of a broken sword, this body, with the slight mark of a wound on its chest, withstands the harsh slap of a fatal wind that announces imminent, instantaneous debilitation. Not even the *Dying Gaul*, the bronze sculpture found in another exhibit hall in the same museum, and of which there are many replicas, represents with such sensitivity in the very height of life —that perfect body—, the inevitable presence of death.



Fate has stripped the warrior statue of its head. What did the face that Kresilas sculpted to accompany this impressive creation look like in the moments before its complete collapse? We do not know, but it surely would have a gesture of neither pain nor desperation. The body of *Vulneratus deficiens*, the name given to the solitary warrior, “the wounded man about to fall,” shows none of the violence or tension of someone rebelling in the face of such incomprehensible and unforeseen injustice. The lack of armor with which Homer’s heroes defended themselves, demonstrates that the mortally wounded warrior is fighting an ideal battle, and the subtle aura that surrounds the figure of the still alive, still upright,

still firm, dying man is not busied with the din of arms, nor the gods of death who surround the combatants in front of the walls of Troy. The artist sculpted the idea, the mortal shape that the marble takes, penetrating life and summarizing the full history with which the man finally came to terms with his own finiteness.

Greek culture derived its privileged status of originality from precisely this obsession with the immediate relationship with the world and with humanity, without the intervention of forces or gods or fantasies to divert them from the original impulse to look and understand. This originality is captured in, among other creations, the discovery of *lógos*, rationality hidden in language. Their singular way of relating to the world was guided by a number of ideas that made up the ideological – theoretical – space of all of the Greek creations. Nature (*phýsis*), politics (*politeía*), language (*lógos*), knowledge (*epistéme*, *sophía*), education (*paideía*), good (*agathón*), justice (*díke*), etc. were not only terms relating to their particular way of living and relating to the world but they also determined the direction of all the development of what would become Western culture.

This direction is found in the evolution of philosophical, scientific, literary and artistic history, but the current pace of accelerated development of science and knowledge in our time has hardly made us feel the need to look retrospectively at our origins and learn from the time when a great part of our existence emerged. Each person is memory. Without a physical or psychic link with what we have been, our cells and the organic structure that sustains them would consist of an eternal present, starting anew each day in the most absolute solitude and, of course, in the most absolute impossibility. Without memory, in the broadest and most intense sense of the word, there is no life, no being.

But turning our gaze to the past, reflecting on history is not simply an archeological game, an innocent pastime with which to relieve the oppressive inertia of our days. In a world like ours, drowning in limitless elements of information, news items darting back and forth that fracture and disorient us, there is an urgent need for synthesis, for conceptual universes, for theoretical projects that pose that elemental question presented in Plato's Socratic Dialogue, *Gorgias*, "How should one live?" (492d).

The Greeks provided numerous answers to this question, while they created one of the highest points in what is known as the human spirit. Perhaps their extraordinary contribution to posterity was due to their tireless probing into the essential questions of existence. The pursuit of these answers undoubtedly stimulated their mental and physical creations.

II. Reflecting on this universe developed by *theoría*, I would like to call to mind, that is introduce into the present, in homage to that wonderful sculptural creation, Kresilas' wounded man about to fall, another memory lost in what was man's first relationship with his body, with pain, wounds and death. However, I will not discuss the *Corpus Hippocraticum*, the first document in which the

Greek physicians demonstrated their clarity of vision and wealth of experience. I am going to skip a couple of centuries and consider the *Iliad*<sup>1</sup>, the first literary monument in which the body and [human] life are also discussed.

Thanks to Malgaigne and Darenberg's<sup>2</sup> research in the last century, and the more recent work of Körner, Kudlien, Snell, Gil, Albarracín<sup>3</sup>, etc., we have discovered the problems that Homeric anthropology poses, and we possess the knowledge of anatomy and surgery that allows us to understand it. With extraordinary philosophical expertise, these studies have catalogued all of the references to the body appearing in the epic poems. Developments in philology, and especially a careful reading of these poems allows us to reconstruct that original point at which man began to be conscious of his life, through the vision that revealed the structure of his own corporality.

Among the different terms that comprise the first theory of *Iliad* anthropology are those that sustain the conceptual landscape in which its protagonists appear. These terms are *phýsis* (nature), *pólemos* (war), *lógos* (language, communication). The word *phýsis* and the theory of its forms, its genesis and meaning, mark the very beginning of what would afterward be called Greek philosophy.

The first writings presumably composed by some of those first "ideologues" of Hellenic society who from the coasts of Asia Minor would populate the entire Mediterranean region, demonstrated a quest for an understanding of the concept that would encapsulate the original experience of the development of life and the dawn of existence. What was meant by *phýsis* was that force that by itself and from itself is capable of shaping, determining and invigorating reality. The verb from which this noun is derived means "to bloom", "to be born", "to appear", "to develop". Thus, the opposite of "to terminate", "to end", "to perish" But just as this creative force nurtures the impulse seen in the immense show of the universe, it also indicates the limitations of all beings, of all of the concrete lives that derive from it.

Only the immortals, the happy inhabitants of Olympus, are unencumbered by the burdens imposed by being both part of that nature and, at the same time, dependent on it. That is why human beings are frequently defined as those "who

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<sup>1</sup> The translations [into Spanish] of the Homeric texts were, with minor exceptions, produced by the great Hellenist Luis Stegalá Estalella, who died in one of the bombings that Barcelona withstood during the Spanish Civil War. The beauty of this translation, the strength of its language, and the truly ideal humanist that his work reveals, are a magnificent example of intellectual generosity and passion. I would like to dedicate this book to his memory.

<sup>2</sup> B. Malgaigne, "Études sur l'anatomie et la physiologie d'Homère," *Bulletin de l'Académie royale de Médecine*, vol. VII Paris, 1842; Ch. Darenberg, *La Médecine dans Homère*, Paris, 1865

<sup>3</sup> O. Körner, *Die ärztliche Kenntnisse in Ilias und Odyssee*, Munich, 1929; F. Kudlien, *Der Beginn des medizinischen Denkens bei den Griechen*, Zurich, 1967; B. Snell, *Die Entdeckung des Geisters. Studien zur Entstehung des europäischen Denkens bei den Griechen*, Hamburg, 1955; L. Gil, *Therapeia. La medicina popular en el mundo clásico*, Madrid, 1969; A. Albarracín Teulón, *Homero y la medicina*. Madrid, 1970.

eat the fruit of the field” (*Iliad*, VI, 142)<sup>4</sup> or those who “ate bread upon the earth” (*Odyssey*, IX, 89; X, 101)<sup>5</sup>. They, nature’s children themselves, are connected by this same link that ties them to all creatures, and that delineates the territory of their inevitable imperfection. Needing the fruits of the land is to be condemned to death.

At the dawn of literature, when men began to be conscious of their desires and limitations, a theme that often surfaced was the dream of a natural world on which its creatures were not dependent. Remaining on the unstable border of life is to have at one’s disposal that scarce nature that men cultivate and adjust to their own needs. Scarcity is, as Plato says in *The Republic* (369b), the origin of the city and, consequently, the origin of history. A limitation but also impulse, dynamism, creation. The Cyclopes, which Ulysses encounters upon escaping the land of the Lotus Eaters, “who eat a flowery food” (*Odyssey*, IX, 84), are “overweening and lawless folk, who, trusting in the immortal gods, plant nothing with their hands nor plough; but all these things spring up for them without sowing or ploughing, wheat, and barley, and vines, which bear the rich clusters of wine, and the rain of Zeus gives them increase. Neither assemblies for council have they, nor appointed laws, but they dwell on the peaks of lofty mountains in hollow caves, and each one is lawgiver to his children and his wives, and they reckon nothing one of another.” (*Odyssey*, IX, 106-115) But they are not men. In order to be so, they require the constraint of this journey of the rhythm of days, the sheer chance of seasons and fruits, and also the freedom that essentially implies the possibility of law, of “craft” (*téchne*), of knowledge and of history.

According to Plato, the indigent nature (*endeés*) of man forces him to seek the resources necessary to reunite with the natural world that surrounds him, that constitutes him, and is alien to him, and of course, also to reunite with other humans. This ideal, expressed by Aristotle at the beginning of *Politics* (man is a “political” animal, a “social” animal, and an “animal that possesses speech”, 1253a)<sup>6</sup> marks the birth of culture. But human beings’ indigent nature leads to a relentless tension in which what often emerges is the complicated paradigm in which his existence is realized. Where there is no justice (*díke*), this tension is expressed in war (*pólemos*). During the very emergence of philosophical thought and during a period not very distant from the one during which Homeric poetry was written, Heracles had expressed in a famous text, that foundation of violence on which, despite everything, culture will slowly emerge. “Pólemos, war is the

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<sup>4</sup>English translator’s note: Each citation of the *Iliad* in English refers to: the English translation by A.T. Murray, Ph.D. in two volumes. Cambridge, MA., Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann, Ltd. 1924. This translation may also be found in digital form among the remarkable translations graciously and expertly provided by Perseus Virtual Library, Tufts University: [www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/)

<sup>5</sup>English translator’s note: Each citation of the *Odyssey* in English refers to: the English translation by A.T. Murray, Ph.D. in two volumes. Cambridge, MA., Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann, Ltd. 1919. See at: [www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/)

<sup>6</sup> English translator’s note: Each citation of *Politics* in English refers to Aristotle. Aristotle in 23 Volumes, Vol. 21, translated by H. Rackham. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1944. See at: [www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/)

father of all things and the king of all, some he presents as gods and others as men, some he makes slaves and others free.” ( B53) This fragment has, in Heracles himself, an interesting interpretation: “It is necessary to understand that war is something that links all beings, and that justice is discord, and that everything is engendered precisely through discord and need.” (B 80)

The Homeric poems, particularly the *Iliad*, are probably a long commentary on the intuition of the philosopher Ephesus. But the war that Homer is talking about is somewhat more profound than the bitter reality of war that the Greeks had to suffer for centuries. This war is a “written” war, the narration of feats that only existed in the mouths of their narrators. Here we find another constituent element of epic culture: *lógos*, language. This nature and this war come to us as words. Its being is *to be said*, and saying is interpreting, weaving in the thread of language the perspectives in which men of a bygone era may reach ours. Only language allows the construction of this bridge by which humanity, already relegated to the oblivion of time and distance, circulates. In this way, the violence that so often and in such an un-beautiful manner embattles human bodies, becomes transformed into an ideal territory. Because in the mouths of storytellers, those heroic feats, rise up bloodless, against oblivion, against the immediate ephemeral temporality that consumes everything, and they reach the sphere of experience and memory.

III. The language that transmits the epic feats represents a singular place in human discourse. Its truth does not merely consist of the reference to a supposed reality with which it could be contrasted. The creation of an inner world that gets narrated in the mind of man, whose truth is its manifestation: the juicy conglomerate of “inner” news items, of “ideas” and “desires,” of areas of sensitivity and intelligence, which initiates discourse through which the common and identical endeavor of constructing humanity and designing an alternative life in the monotonous and uniform evolution of nature is filtered. This invention of life happened as language. Outside of language, living is a mechanical exercise: the functioning of an organism—in this case, the human animal—that flows through the same channels through which the natural world, the life of other animals, flows. This flow, this sameness of man with the natural world that surrounds him, would strip him of his true singularity. Thus, language, according to Aristotle’s well-known text, definitively separates us from the animal context: “And why man is a political animal in a greater measure than any bee or any gregarious animal is clear. For nature, as we declare, does nothing without purpose; and man alone of the animals possesses speech. The mere voice, it is true, can indicate pain and pleasure, and therefore is possessed by the other animals as well (for their nature has been developed so far as to have sensations of what is painful and pleasant and to indicate those sensations to one another, but speech is designed to indicate the advantageous and the harmful, and therefore also the right and the wrong; for it is the special property of man in distinction from the other animals that he alone has perception of good and bad and right and wrong and the other moral qualities, and it is partnership in these things that makes a household and a city-state.” (*Politics* 1253a 11-18)



We must approach the language of *Epos*, and all language, from this perspective. It is in this “semantic air” (Aristotle, *Del alma*, 420b 32-33) that nurtures culture, that which human beings have interpreted from their own existence. This interpretation always implies enrichment. All language that is not immediately conditioned by a reference to the real, and whose meaning does not consist merely of the concrete verifiability of this act of reference, creates a new space, a territory in which its truth is that of the created linguistic universe, that of the world that raises words beyond the closed range of fleeting references. Precisely this space is the space of culture, the territory that delineates what is human.

IV. Among the numerous themes that display the rich language of the *Iliad* are those expressions referring to life and death. These two extremes, that form and delineate existence, now separate themselves from nature to incorporate into history, into the interpretation in which human experiences are elaborated and transmitted. These experiences become distilled in *lógos*, in language. The scope of ideas and values, along with the particular intellectual perspective, that define each historical period coalesce in language. An inner world of a group of humans that reflects, speculates and eternalizes in words the vision it directs at things.

The author or authors who speak in the *Iliad*, in the mouths of its heroes and gods, are conscious of this cycle that confines the course of nature, which also includes the lives of men. This common destiny is well framed in an essential passage in the text. In the dialogue between Diomedes and Glaucus, the son of Tydeus asks the son of Hippolochus about his lineage. The enemy he has before him is not simply a warrior; in his individual history he contains an entire collective history. Every hero is his own biography, in the same way that as we’ll see, every wound, every death is individualized, personalized, in the language in which they are described to us. But Glaucus’ answer alludes to an immense cycle that, regardless of history, will subsume existence into the void of its merciless expiration: “Great-souled son of Tydeus, wherefore inquirest thou of my lineage? Even as are the generations of leaves, such are those also of men. As for the leaves, the wind scattereth some upon the earth, but the forest, as it bourgeons, putteth forth others when the season of spring is come; even so of men one generation springeth up and another passeth away.”(VI: 145-149) History, culture, language, and human ideas constitute the motor with which the ring of fate is broken. No one can escape – except the Immortals – from the hazy territory in which all of our endeavors vanish. But on this side of that last frontier is space and air that, thanks to language, the “animals that possess words” breathe.

Thus, the experience of *phýsis* creates a peculiar way of life. Language assimilates and reflects the vision and interpretation of nature. Living is “being in the light” and, persistently in the *Iliad*, dying is a return to darkness. For this reason, one of the first testimonies in which one can find the Greeks’ curiosity, their passion for looking and knowing, is contained in the Histories of Herodotus, “[T]o see the

world, Solon set out upon his travels, in the course of which he went to Egypt to the court of Amasis, and also came on a visit to Croesus at Sardis. Croesus received him as his guest, and lodged him in the royal palace. On the third or fourth day after, he bade his servants tour Solon among his treasures, and show him all their greatness and magnificence. When he had seen them all, and, so far as time allowed, inspected them, Croesus addressed this question to him. "Stranger of Athens, we have heard much of thy wisdom and of thy travels through many lands, from love of knowledge and a wish to see the world.' (*theoríes eíneken*)" (I, 30) The expression that Herodotus uses is *theoríes eíneken*, "to see." "Theory" still does not have the meaning it will later acquire. The very etymology of the word alludes to the act of contemplating something, of observing. Perceiving something under the light that the eyes combine.<sup>7</sup> The distance to the light will become the distance to culture. Vision represents the universe of humans, characterizes and defines its objects, and symbolizes intellectual thought.

It is known that the term "speculative" has had a long history in philosophical thought and has served to represent the microcosm of the mind and its particular way of "being all things." "Speculative" is related, etymologically, to *speculum*, mirror. It is a curious paradox that the word that expresses inner citizenship, consciousness, the complex world of abstraction, would have its origin in something that is merely a passive reproduction of whatever light conveys. But this history of abstract thought was developed in the concrete domain in which man became conscious of his place in the world. The world was a reflection of his mind, and at the same time, the world was possibility.

The space opened by light is the space of knowledge. Light settles on the vision where the eyes, the consciousness, establish the distance of an interpretation, of a purpose, of a meaning. The "mortals of articulated voice" (*Iliad*, II, 285; XVIII, 490) –if we accept the controversial translation of *merópessi brotoísín* – express, in that articulation, the "other world" that the mind gathers and reflects. Therefore, light is necessary. The old cliché about Greek culture being the culture of light stems not only from their philosophical dominion: "Idea" is, at its core, "what can be seen"; what the eyes of the body can see, what is seen with light.

The goddess Thetis, Achilles' mother, cognizant of the little time that fate has granted her son, complains to Hephaestus: "[I]s there now any goddess, of all those that are in Olympus, that hath endured so many grievous woes in her heart as are the sorrows that Zeus, son of Kronos, hath given me beyond all others? Of all the daughters of the sea he subdued me alone to a mortal, even to Peleus, son of Aeacus, and I endured the bed of a mortal albeit sore against my will. And lo, he lieth in his halls fordone with grievous old age, but now other griefs are mine. A son he gave me to bear and to rear, pre-eminent among warriors, and he shot

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<sup>7</sup> Abundant references to the importance of sight are found throughout Greek philosophy; for example: Heraclitus, B 101a; Xenophon, B 34; Plato, *Banquet*, 219a; *Republic*, 342a, 508c 533d; *Theaetetus*, 164a; *Sophist*, 254a; Aristotle, *Meteorology*, 353a 8; 371a 30; *The Reproduction of Animals*, 753b 17, *On the Parts of Animals*, 680a 1-4; *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1171b 29-30.

up like a sapling; then when I had reared him as a tree in a rich orchard plot, I sent him forth in the beaked ships to Ilios to war with the Trojans; but never again shall I welcome him back to his home, to the house of Peleus. And while yet he liveth, and beholdeth the light of the sun, he hath sorrow, nor can I any wise help him, though I go to him.” (*Iliad*, XVIII, 430-443). The theme of old age, irrespective of the wisdom that comes with age (III, 109-110), is repeated as something sad throughout the Homeric poems: “old age binds him hand and foot” (*Odyssey*, XI, 497). Faced with old age, Achilles’ life, rooted like a tree in nature and imbued with the vigor of youth, also like nature, like a tree, is in the light. But perhaps the most interesting passage is Great Telamonian Ajax’s protest about darkness making battle difficult: “Father Zeus, deliver thou from the darkness the sons of the Achaeans, and make clear sky, and grant us to see with our eyes. In the light do thou e’en slay us, seeing such is thy good pleasure.” (*Iliad*, XVII, 645-647). Living is seeing, being in the light, and even though heroes’ deaths initiate the journey of darkness, at least the last act of life is seeing, being able to see.

Thus, there are horrific descriptions in the *Iliad* of warriors wounded in the eyes: “Peisander verily smote Menelaus upon the horn of his helmet with crest of horse-hair—on the topmost part beneath the very plume; but Menelaus smote him as he came against him, on the forehead above the base of the nose; and the bones crashed loudly, and the two eyeballs, all bloody, fell before his feet in the dust, and he bowed and fell” (XIII, 614-616). Another eye injury is found in the Patroclus battles, shortly before his death: “Patroclus over against him leapt from his chariot to the ground with a spear in his left hand, while with the other he grasped a stone, shining and jagged, that his hand compassed about. Firmly he planted himself, and hurled it, neither had he long awe of his foe, nor sped he his missile in vain, but smote the charioteer of Hector, even Cebriones, a bastard son of glorious Priam, upon the forehead with the sharp stone, as he was holding the reins of the horses. And both his brows did the stone dash together, and the bone held not, but the eyes fell to the ground in the dust even there, before his feet. And like a diver he fell from the well-wrought car, and his spirit left his bones.” (XVI, 733-743) Lastly, another text in which, adorned with the biography of the victim, we discover a detailed and harsh description: Howbeit Peneleos thrust and smote Ilioneus, son of Phorbos, rich in herds, whom Hermes loved above all the Trojans and gave him wealth; and to him the mother bare Ilioneus, an only child. Him then did Peneleos smite beneath the brow at the roots of the eyes, and drove out the eyeball, and the shaft went clean through the eye and through the nape of the neck, and he sank down stretching out both his hands. But Peneleos drawing his sharp sword let drive full upon his neck, and smote off to the ground the head with the helmet, and still the mighty spear stood in the eye; and holding it on high like a poppy-head he shewed it to the Trojans, and spake a word exultingly.” (XIV, 489-500).

The main character at the center of these descriptions is the human body. The harshness of the detail, even the possible cruelty of this language, is but a way of thinking and describing the structure of nature in words. The sword, the rock and the lance are the instruments of this primitive surgery. Not only do they injure

the body but also the poet's word analyzes where exactly the instrument enters to cause the death of the hero. The aim of this language is to accompany the object doing the injuring, in the space of the body, and to name this body and describe the acts of this aggression. And it is also in the hero's lost eyes, where the eyes of Homer observe from the perspective of language and illuminate a new way of understanding reality.

Thus, it should come as no surprise that compared to these poems, later epic poems such as the *Nibelungs*, the *Cid*, the *Chanson de Roland*, are found wanting, lacking that linguistic substance provided by the vision that for the first time begins to focus on nature and to give name to it in a quest to know it. And alongside this language of the human body is the language of poetry. In the symbol of life that is light, Ilioneus' head, skewered with the lance brandished by his enemy, appears to the poet like a poppy, like an emblem of sleep and of darkness. Likewise, Cebriones, Hector's charioteer, blinded by Patroclus' vicious aggression, falls dead from the chariot as if he were diving into a dark sea.

V. The heroes' wounds, which open the silent territory of the human body, broaden the anatomical horizon toward other territories. Every warrior carries the baggage of personal history. The very wound that injures the body and that the eyes of the poet describe, becomes incorporated into the world of life through a language that reconstructs this intimate history of sons, wives, and fathers, whose horizon we see vanish through a portent of imminent death. "Then Telamonian Aias smote Anthemion's son, the lusty youth Simoeisus, whom on a time his mother had born beside the banks of Simois, as she journeyed down from Ida, whither she had followed with her parents to see their flocks. For this cause they called him Simoeisus; yet paid he not back to his dear parents the recompense of his upbringing, and but brief was the span of his life, for that he was laid low by the spear of great-souled Aias. For, as he strode amid the foremost, he was smitten on the right breast beside the nipple; and clean through his shoulder went the spear of bronze, and he fell to the ground in the dust like a poplar tree that hath grown up in the bottom land of a great marsh, smooth of stem, but from the top thereof branches grow: this hath some wainwright felled with the gleaming iron that he might bend him a fellow for a beauteous chariot, and it lieth drying by a river's banks. (IV, 473-487) His ancestors and nature surround the warrior's death. But nature also expresses the break with life. The dry trunk, in its concise poignancy, symbolically receives the lifeless body and identifies with it.

Also concise is the description of Imbrius' death; Homer hardly mentions the wound on the body that lies blanketed in beautiful nature that fraternally embraces it. Nature itself is also victim of the violent gash that impedes its flowering. Homer only says that Telamonian Teucer wounded him "beneath the ear with a thrust of his long spear, and again drew forth the spear; and he fell like an ash-tree that, on the summit of a mountain that is seen from afar on every side, is cut down by the bronze, and bringeth its tender leafage to the ground" (XIII, 177-180). His death is also accompanied by a family portrait: "Imbrius, the

son of Mentor, rich in horses. He dwelt in Pedaeum before the sons of the Achaeans came, and had to wife a daughter of Priam that was born out of wedlock, even Medesicaste; but when the curved ships of the Danaans came he returned back to Ilios and was pre-eminent among the Trojans, and he dwelt in the house of Priam, who held him in like honor with his own children.” (XIII, 171-176)

In the hexameters in which Alcahous’ death is described, the homicidal weapon experiences a curious transformation. The brief biography that precedes Idomeneus’ mortal blow will outline the impressive image: “Then the dear son of Aesyetes, fostered of Zeus, the warrior Alcahous —son by marriage was he to Anchises, and had married the eldest of his daughters, Hippodameia, whom her father and queenly mother heartily loved in their hall, for that she excelled all maidens of her years in comeliness, and in handiwork, and in wisdom; wherefore the best man in wide Troy had taken her to wife— this Alcahous did Poseidon subdue beneath Idomeneus, for he cast a spell upon his bright eyes and ensnared his glorious limbs that he might nowise flee backwards nor avoid the spear; but as he stood fixed, even as a pillar or a tree, high and leafy, the warrior Idomeneus smote him with a thrust of his spear full upon the breast, and clave his coat of bronze round about him, that aforetime ever warded death from his body, but now it rang harshly as it was cloven about the spear. And he fell with a thud, and the spear was fixed in his heart, that still beating made the butt thereof to quiver; howbeit, there at length did mighty Ares stay its fury.” (XIII, 428-444)

Most likely the realism of the spear quivering with the beat of the heart is a literary realism, that is, an “ideal realism”; but in a language capable of gathering, with such sensitivity, this powerful and surprising image, it predates the treatises of the Hippocratic physicians. This language is learning to look at the world and at the human beings who inhabit it, thus creating science and philosophy. For that reason the wounded hero becomes blinded; without vision Alcahous dissolves into nature, “he stood fixed, even as a pillar or a tree, high and leafy” but the spear, also made from a trunk “drying by a river’s bank” returns to life, sprouting from his heart.

The absence of anatomical descriptions is compensated, at many points, by the family portrait with which death regains life. Thus, Diomedes sets out to face Abas and Polyidus, “sons of the old man Eurydamas, the reader of dreams; howbeit they came not back for the old man to interpret dreams for them, but mighty Diomedes slew them. Then went he on after Xanthus and Thoön, sons twain of Phaenops, and both well beloved; and their father was fordone with grievous old age, and begat no other son to leave in charge of his possessions. There Diomedes slew them, and bereft them of dear life, both the twain; but for the father he left lamentation and grievous sorrow, seeing they lived not for him to welcome them on their return; and the next of kin divided his goods.” (V, 148-158)

We find the same “sociological” gash in another of Diomedes’ feats “And Diomedes, good at the war-cry, slew Axylus, Teuthras’ son, that dwelt in well-built Arisbe, a man rich in substance, that was beloved of all men; for he dwelt in a home by the high-road and was wont to give entertainment to all. Howbeit of all these was there not one on this day to meet the foe before his face, and ward from him woeful destruction” (VI, 12-18).

VI. Nevertheless, there are abundant examples of passages in which the main character is the wound itself. “And Meriones slew Phereclus, son of Tecton, Harmon’s son, whose hands were skilled to fashion all manner of curious work; for Pallas Athene loved him above all men. He it was that had also built for Alexander the shapely ships, source of ills, that were made the bane of all the Trojans and of his own self, seeing he knew not in any wise the oracles of the gods. After him Meriones pursued, and when he had come up with him, smote him in the right buttock, and the spear-point passed clean through even to the bladder beneath the bone; and he fell to his knees with a groan, and death enfolded him. And Pedaeus, Antenor’s son, was slain of Meges; he was in truth a bastard, howbeit goodly Theano had reared him carefully even as her own children, to do pleasure to her husband. To him Phyleus’ son, famed for his spear, drew nigh and smote him with a cast of his sharp spear on the sinew of the head; and straight through amid the teeth the bronze shore away the tongue at its base. So he fell in the dust, and bit the cold bronze with his teeth.” (V, 59-75)

In these passages, the poet lingers on descriptions. The individual, who faces the lance, still brings with him his own family territory, his art and his lineage and the vision that observes, parallel to the myth, is already breaking with the mythic dominion in order to approach the world with another vision and say it another way. Every detail that describes the body emerges from the same impulse that will be the catalyst for sculpture, science, and philosophy. Words, the names for things, are the only thing that comes between what is real—in this case, the human body as an object of observation—and the mind that detaches and reflects. The act of naming is nothing more than learning to look, to contemplate what is real in order to touch it, to use it if necessary, but especially to understand it.

The narrative outline, which has numerous variants, uses language to describe what vision perceives and intelligence interprets. The lance, by piercing skin, takes on the quality of a cumbersome but accurate scalpel. The long experience of having observed the world is useful for following the bloody trajectory. The lance that enters at the nape of the neck slices the tongue and exits “framed by teeth” which at other times will be useful for seizing words; “what a word hath escaped the barrier of thy teeth!” (IV, 350) Cold bronze is the only thing that remains in the mouth of that mortal so often defined as an animal of “articulated voice.”

The battle between Eneas and Pandaro on the one hand and Diomedes on the other (V, 277) adds, to the descriptions, the very interpretation of the protagonists who appear to have expertise in anatomy: “Thou art smitten clean

through the belly, and not for long, methinks, shalt thou endure” (V, 287) shouts Lycaon’s son. “Thou hast missed and not hit” answered Diomedes. “So spake he and hurled; and Athene guided the spear upon his nose beside the eye, and it pierced through his white teeth. So the stubborn bronze shore off his tongue at its root, and the spear-point came out by the base of the chin.” (V, 291-294) The bronze that thus punishes the hero’s mouth appears to penalize also the boastfulness of the words. The scene that follows insists on this conscious analysis of anatomy.

Language becomes an object in and of itself. It does not flow in the river of discourse, objectifying only what it names, but rather it distances itself from the natural course of words to become terminology: “But Aeneas leapt down with shield and long spear, seized with fear lest perchance the Achaeans might drag from him the dead man. Over him he strode like a lion confident in his strength, and before him he held his spear and his shield that was well balanced on every side, eager to slay the man whosoever should come to seize the corpse, and crying a terrible cry. But the son of Tydeus grasped in his hand a stone—a mighty deed—one that not two men could bear, such as mortals now are; yet lightly did he wield it even alone. Therewith he smote Aeneas on the hip, where the thigh turns in the hip joint, —the cup, men call it— and crushed the cup-bone, and broke furthermore both sinews, and the jagged stone tore the skin away. Then the warrior fell upon his knees, and thus abode, and with his stout hand leaned he upon the earth; and dark night enfolded his eyes. And now would the king of men, Aeneas, have perished, had not the daughter of Zeus, Aphrodite, been quick to mark, even his mother, that conceived him to Anchises as he tended his kine.” (V, 297-312)

It doesn’t matter that the myth of the hero, son of a goddess, imposes that magic of a garment that protects him, until he is later saved in the arms of Phoebus Apollo “lest any of the Danaans with swift horses might hurl a spear of bronze into his breast and take away his life” (V, 316-317). Rising up from the mist of myth in Homer’s narration is the decisive term *cup-bone*, which, like so many other expressions, is announcing the name of things with a vision that strives especially to see and to know.

In Book VIII, in the episode in which Telamonian Teucer battles Hector, the arrow that was shot missed the target: “And himself Hector leapt to the ground from his gleaming car crying a terrible cry, and seizing a stone in his hand made right at Teucer, and his heart bade him smite him. Now Teucer had drawn forth from the quiver a bitter arrow, and laid it upon the string, but even as he was drawing it back Hector of the flashing helm smote him beside the shoulder where the collar-bone parts the neck and the breast, where is the deadliest spot; even there as he aimed eagerly against him he smote him with the jagged stone, and he brake the bow-string; but his hand grew numb at the wrist, and he sank upon his knees and thus abode, and the bow fell from his hand. Howbeit Aias was not unmindful of his brother’s fall, but ran and bestrode him and flung before him his shield as a cover. Then two trusty comrades stooped beneath him, even

Mecisteus, son of Echius, and goodly Alastor, and bare him, groaning heavily, to the hollow ships.” (VIII, 320-334)

The brief anatomy lesson not only highlights the place (*ômon*) where the stone lands but it also delineates the specific area, the collarbone (*kleís*), where the neck (*auchén*) detaches from the breast (*stêthós*). The poet physician also says something that goes beyond a mere description of anatomy. He also points out that the wounds are accurate (*kaírios*) “good” wounds, that is, mortal ones. A sinew is torn (*réxe dé oi neurên*), thereby hindering the movement of the archer’s arm; the arrow must perforce fall from the useless hand. One may conclude that Teucer’s deep sighs are the result of the dyspnea caused by the blow.

Patroclus’ death will be set amidst other scenery. This time it is a god that delivers the blow. “But when for the fourth time he rushed on, like a god, then for thee, Patroclus, did the end of life appear; for Phoebus met thee in the fierce conflict, an awful god. And Patroclus marked him not as he passed through the turmoil, for enfolded in thick mist did he meet him; and Apollo took his stand behind him, and smote his back and broad shoulders with the flat of his hand, and his eyes were made to whirl. And from his head Phoebus Apollo smote the helmet, that rang as it rolled beneath the feet of the horses—the crested helm; and the plumes were befouled with blood and dust. Not until that hour had the gods suffered that helm with plume of horse-hair to be befouled with dust, but ever did it guard the head and comely brow of a godlike man, even of Achilles; but then Zeus vouchsafed it to Hector, to wear upon his head, yet was destruction near at hand for him. And in the hands of Patroclus the far-shadowing spear was wholly broken, the spear, heavy, and huge, and strong, and tipped with bronze; and from his shoulders the tasselled shield with its baldric fell to the ground, and his corselet did Apollo loose —the prince, the son of Zeus. Then blindness seized his mind, and his glorious limbs were loosed beneath him, and he stood in a daze; and from behind him from close at hand a Dardanian smote him upon the back between the shoulders with a cast of his sharp spear, even Panthous’ son, Euphorbus” (XVI, 786-808). Pheobus Apollo’s blow leaves Patroclus in a kind of stupor (*áte*), astonished, as he faces such extraordinary circumstances, which paralyze him. The wounds on his body delivered by Euphorbus and Hector are simply a consequence of this bizarre wound to the spirit.

But the gods are capable not only of wounding, but also of being wounded. Palas Athena warns Diomedes not to battle the immortals, unless it is Aphrodite. “do not thou in any wise fight face to face with any other immortal gods, save only if Aphrodite, daughter of Zeus, shall enter the battle, her do thou smite with a thrust of the sharp bronze.” (V, 131-132) And, in effect, Diomedes sees her carrying the body of her mortally wounded son, Aeneas. “He the while had gone in pursuit of Cypris with his pitiless bronze, discerning that she was a weakling goddess, and not one of those that lord it in the battle of warriors, —no Athene she, nor Enyo, sacker of cities. But when he had come upon her as he pursued her through the great throng, then the son of great-souled Tydeus thrust with his sharp spear and leapt upon her, and wounded the surface of her delicate hand,



and forthwith through the ambrosial raiment that the Graces themselves had wrought for her the spear pierced the flesh upon the wrist above the palm and forth flowed the immortal blood of the goddess, the ichor, such as floweth in the blessed gods; for they eat not bread neither drink flaming wine, wherefore they are bloodless, and are called immortals. She then with a loud cry let fall her son, and Phoebus Apollo took him in his arms and saved him in a dark cloud, lest any of the Danaans with swift horses might hurl a spear of bronze into his breast and take away his life. But over her shouted aloud Diomedes good at the war-cry: 'Keep thee away, daughter of Zeus, from war and fighting. Sufficeth it not that thou beguilest weakling women? But if into battle thou wilt enter, verily methinks thou shalt shudder at the name thereof, if thou hearest it even from afar.' So spake he, and she departed frantic, and was sore distressed; and wind-footed Iris took her and led her forth from out the throng, racked with pain, and her fair flesh was darkened." (V, 330-354)

Perhaps the poet resists touching on heavenly anatomy; and not without a touch of humor does he let us witness the goddess' complaints seeking the protection of her brother Ares, god of war. Nevertheless, Homer uses the scratch on the palm of her hand to teach us about the gods' "blood," that admirable and immortal elixir (*ambrósios*) that liberates them from the need to eat bread and drink wine, from the punishment of being part of nature, from growing and aging. At any rate, the effects of the scratch are made apparent: the goddess suffers intense pain, and most surprisingly, instead of growing pale, she turns black.

Even Ares is a victim of the aggression of Diomedes, whom Athena helps. Ares tells Zeus his difficulty in escaping from the warrior who attacks him. The god of war fleeing demonstrates Homer's ironic touch. "Howbeit my swift feet bare me away; otherwise had I long suffered woes there amid the gruesome heaps of the dead, or else had lived strengthless by reason of the smitings of the spear." (V, 885-887) Homer's creative wit, allowing an "invalid" immortal to speak, illuminates a territory in which humans construct a religion capable of that exemplary humanization. From this strictly anthropological, anthropocentric perspective, it is not surprising that rationality, critical language, humanism and democracy would emerge.

VII. The warriors also know how to diagnose their wounds and heal them. Glaucus, with an arm pierced by Teucer's arrow, provides the first known example of a clinical case history: "For I have this grievous wound and mine arm on this side and on that is shot through with sharp pangs, nor can the blood be staunched; and my shoulder is made heavy with the wound, and I avail not to grasp my spear firmly [ . . . ] O king, heal me of this grievous wound, and lull my pains, and give me might, that I may call to my comrades, the Lycians, and urge them on to fight [ . . . ] Phoebus Apollo heard him. Forthwith he made his pains to cease, and staunched the black blood that flowed from his grievous wound, and put might into his heart." (XVI, 517-529)

In the battle between Sarpedon and Tlepolemus, the latter seizes an opportunity to thrust his lance into his rival's right thigh. His comrades, acting in great haste, manage to extract him from the battlefield. "Then his goodly comrades made godlike Sarpedon to sit beneath a beauteous oak of Zeus that beareth the aegis, and forth from his thigh valiant Pelagon, that was his dear comrade, thrust the spear of ash; and his spirit failed him, and down over his eyes a mist was shed. Howbeit he revived, and the breath of the North Wind as it blew upon him made him to live again after in grievous wise he had breathed forth his spirit." (V, 692-698)

In Book XI of the *Iliad* there are several examples of this familiarity with the body. Paris, whose arrow reaches Diomedes' instep, laughs boastfully, "would that I had smitten thee in the nethermost belly, and taken away thy life" . . . "But with no touch of fear mighty Diomedes spake to him: 'Bowman, reviler, proud of thy curling locks, thou ogler of girls! [. . .] whereas now having but grazed the flat of my foot thou boastest vainly. I reckon not thereof, any more than if a woman had struck me or a witless child, for blunt is the dart of one that is a weakling and a man of naught. Verily in other wise when sped by my hand, even though it do but touch, does the spear prove its edge, and forthwith layeth low its man [. . .]' Diomedes sat down behind him, and drew forth the sharp arrow from his foot, and a sore pang shot through his flesh." (XI, 381-398) Shortly afterward, when Socus' spear, with one shot, penetrates Odysseus' shield, "Odysseus knew that the spear had in no wise lighted on a fatal spot" (XI, 439).

But medical knowledge is found in the illustrious figure of Machaon in particular, whom, incidentally Paris wounds. Idomeneus asks Nestor to put him in the chariot and take him to the ships, "For a leech is of the worth of many other men for the cutting out of arrows and the spreading of soothing simples." (XI, 514-515) An example of these "soothing simples" or medicines is provided in the passage in which Nestor and Machaon arrive at the encampment, where Hecamede gives them: "an onion, a relish for their drink, and pale honey, and ground meal of sacred barley; [. . .] Therein the woman, like to the goddesses, mixed a potion for them with Pramnian wine, and on this she grated cheese of goat's milk with a brazen grater, and sprinkled thereover white barley meal; and she bade them drink, when she had made ready the potion." (XI, 631-642)

Eurypylos, with the arrow stuck in his thigh and returning from battle limping and "in streams down from his head and shoulders flowed the sweat, and from his grievous wound the black blood was gushing," (XI, 811) asks Patroclus to save him: "But me do thou succor, and lead me to my black ship, and cut the arrow from my thigh, and wash the black blood from it with warm water, and sprinkle thereon kindly simples of healing power, whereof men say that thou hast learned from Achilles, whom Cheiron taught, the most righteous of the Centaurs.' (827-834) [. . .] His squire when he saw them, strewed upon the ground hides of oxen. There Patroclus made him lie at length, and with a knife cut from his thigh the sharp-piercing arrow, and from the wound washed the black blood with warm water, and upon it cast a bitter root, when he had rubbed it between his hands, a

root that slayeth pain, which stayed all his pangs; and the wound waxed dry, and the blood ceased.” (844-848). When, further on in the story, Patroclus and Euryplyus reappear, Patroclus’ cure is presented in a different light: “And Patroclus, so long as the Achaeans and Trojans were fighting about the wall aloof from the swift ships, even so long sat in the hut of kindly Eurypylus, and was making him glad with talk, and on his grievous wound was spreading simples to assuage his dark pangs.” (XV, 391-394)

In Book IV, where we see in action Machaon, the physician called upon by the herald Talthybius at the request of Agamemnon to cure Menelaus who had been struck by Pandarus’ arrow: “roused the heart in his breast, and they went their way in the throng throughout the broad host of the Achaeans. And when they were come where was fair-haired Menelaus, wounded [. . .] [Machaon] straightway drew forth the arrow from the clasped belt; and as it was drawn forth the sharp barbs were broken backwards. [. . .] But when he saw the wound where the bitter arrow had lighted, he sucked out the blood, and with sure knowledge spread thereon soothing simples, which of old Cheiron had given to his father with kindly thought. (IV, 208-219)

A detailed analysis merits many more episodes; but finally, I cannot resist citing, without any commentary on my part, the passage in which Sarpedon is wounded: “Then again Sarpedon missed with his bright spear, and over the left shoulder of Patroclus went the point of the spear and smote him not. But Patroclus in turn rushed on with the bronze, and not in vain did the shaft speed from his hand, but smote his foe where the midriff is set close about the throbbing heart. And he fell as an oak falls, or a poplar, or a tall pine, that among the mountains shipwrights fell with whetted axes to be a ship's timber; even so before his horses and chariot he lay outstretched, moaning aloud and clutching at the bloody dust. [. . .] the end of death enfolded him, his eyes alike and his nostrils; and Patroclus, setting his foot upon his breast, drew the spear from out the flesh, and the midriff followed therewith; and at the one moment he drew forth the spear-point and the soul of Sarpedon.” (XVI, 477-505)

This dance around death is inspired by life, and full of hope. Beyond the simple facts, the words that speak of the world, of men, of the unfathomable vicissitudes of their bodies, were connected by a link that would be constant in Greek philosophy, science and art: *philia*, friendship. Like *lógos*, the word, —an intersubjective structure that unites us and communicates—, *philia*, friendship, would be nurtured on life, on reality, and lead to desiring and discovering it. It was a culture that was opposed to men’s great solitude, their sad anonymity, and, in addition to the words with which its members described the bodies’ wounds, they were also describing and initiating the long adventure of the quest for knowledge, and, paradoxically, the inexhaustible and bloodless achievement of love.