

Chapter **5****Ancient Greece**THE *ODYSSEY* OF HOMER

◆ Section I (pages 103–108)

The *Odyssey*, the second of Homer's epics, tells the story of Odysseus' ten-year journey home from the Trojan war. (Much of the *Odyssey* is a flashback, that is, it recounts adventures that have already taken place.) The tale begins on Mount Olympus at a council of the gods. Athena, goddess of wisdom and war, has come to the council to plead with Zeus to release Odysseus from the spell of the sea nymph Calypso, who has kept the hero captive on her island for seven long years. The following selection reveals much about the role of the gods in influencing human affairs.



The goddess Athena

Book One

A Goddess Intervenes

In the bright hall of Zeus upon Olympus the other gods were all at home, and Zeus, the father of gods and men, made conversation. For he had meditated on Aigisthos, dead by the hand of Agamemnon's son, Orestes, and spoke his thought aloud before them all:

"My word, how mortals take the gods to task! All their afflictions come from us, we hear. And what of their own failings? Greed and folly double the suffering in the lot of man. See how Aigisthos, for his double portion, stole Agamemnon's wife and killed the soldier on his homecoming day. And yet Aigisthos knew that his own doom lay in this. We gods had warned him, sent down Hermes Argeiphontes, our most observant courier, to say: 'Don't kill the man, don't touch his wife, or face a reckoning with Orestes the day he comes of age and wants his patrimony.' Friendly advice—but would Aigisthos take it? Now he has paid the reckoning in full."

The grey-eyed goddess Athena replied to Zeus:

"O Majesty, O Father of us all, that man is in the dust indeed, and justly. So perish all who do what he had done. But my own heart is broken for Odysseus, the master mind of war, so long a castaway upon an island in the running sea, a wooded island, in the sea's middle, and there's a goddess in the place, the daughter of one whose baleful mind knows all the deeps of the blue sea—Atlas, who holds the columns that bear from land the great thrust of the sky. His daughter will not let Odysseus go, poor mournful man, she keeps on coaxing him with her beguiling talk, to turn his mind from Ithaca. But such desire is in him merely to see the hearthsmoke leaping upward from his own island, that he

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longs to die. Are you not moved by this, Lord of Olympus? Had you no pleasure from Odysseus' offerings beside the Argive ships, on Troy's wide seaboard? O Zeus, what do you hold against him now?"

To this the summoner of cloud replied:

"My child, what strange remarks you let escape you. Could I forget that kingly man, Odysseus? There is no mortal half so wise; no mortal gave so much to the lords of open sky. Only the god

who laps the land in water, Poseidon, bears the fighter an old grudge since he poked out the eye of Polyphemos [Poseidon's son], brawniest of the Cyclopes [a race of one-eyed giants]. . . . Naturally, the god, after the blinding—mind you, he does not kill the man; he only buffets him away from home. But come now, we are all at leisure here, let us take up this matter of his return. How should he sail? Poseidon must relent, for being quarrelsome will get him nowhere, one god, flouting the will of all the gods."

1. Find the words in the passage that support each of the following statements.

(a) Zeus was king of the gods.

(b) Poseidon was god of the sea.

(c) Hermes was messenger of the gods.

2. (a) Homer speaks of Aigisthos' double crime ("Aigisthos, for his double portion"). What had Aigisthos done?

(b) How did Aigisthos die in turn?

3. What indication does Zeus give that he does not have absolute power over human destiny?

4. Why does Poseidon bear Odysseus a grudge?

5. What indication does Zeus give that he does not have absolute power over other gods?

SPARTAN TRAINING

The following selection was written by Xenophon, a Greek soldier and historian who was born in Athens around 434 B.C. In the following selection, Xenophon expresses his admiration for Lycurgus, who gave Sparta its code of laws.

I recall the astonishment with which I first noted the unique position of Sparta among the states of Hellas [Greece], the relatively sparse population, and at the same time the extraordinary power and prestige of the community. I was puzzled to account for the fact. It was only when I came to consider the peculiar institutions of the Spartans that my wonderment ceased. Or rather, it is transferred to the legislator who gave them those laws, obedience to which has been the secret of their prosperity. This legislator, Lycurgus, I admire, and hold him to have been one of the wisest of mankind. . . .

Take for example—and it is well to begin at the beginning—the whole topic of the . . . rearing of children. Throughout the rest of the world, the young girl who will one day become a mother (and I speak of those who may be held to be well brought up) is nurtured on the plainest food attainable, with the scantiest addition of meat or other condiments; . . . And . . . we, the rest of the Hellenes, are content that our girls should sit quietly and work wools. That is all we demand of them. But how are we to expect that women nurtured in this fashion should produce a splendid offspring?

Lycurgus pursued a different path. . . . He insisted on the training of the body as incumbent no less on the female than the male, and in pursuit of the same idea instituted rival contests in running and feats of strength for women as for men. His belief was that where both parents were strong, their progeny [children] would be found to be more vigorous. . . .

Young Spartan girl



1. What unique position does Sparta occupy in the Greek world?

2. What has been the secret of Sparta's prosperity?

3. How do other city-states raise young women who will one day be mothers?

4. How does Sparta train its young women?

5. What does this selection reveal about the value of women in the ancient Greek world?

THE APOLOGY OF PLATO

Plato, Greek philosopher and writer, lived in Athens during its golden age. Much of Plato's work takes the form of a dialogue or conversation between two or more people. The following selection is from *The Apology*. In it, Plato presents Socrates' response to his own death sentence.

1

Not much time will be gained, O Athenians, in return for the evil name which you will get from the detractors of the city, who will say that you killed Socrates, a wise man; for they will call me wise, even although I am not wise, when they want to reproach you. If you had waited a little while, your desire would have been fulfilled in the course of nature. For I am far advanced in years, as you may perceive, and not far from death. I am speaking now not to all of you but only to those who have condemned me to death. And I have another thing to say to them: You think that I was convicted because I have no words of the sort which would have procured my acquittal—I mean, if I had thought fit to leave nothing undone or unsaid. Not so, the deficiency which led to my conviction was not of words—certainly not. But I had not the boldness or impudence or inclination to address you as you would have liked me to do, weeping and wailing and lamenting, and saying and doing many things which you have been accustomed to hear from others, and which, as I maintain, are unworthy of me. I thought at the time that I ought not to do anything common or mean when in danger: nor do I now repent of the style of my defence; I would rather die having spoken after my manner, than speak in your manner and live. For neither in war nor yet at law ought I or any man to use every way of escaping death. Often in battle there can be no doubt that if a man will throw away his arms, and fall on his knees before his pursuers, he may escape death; and in other dangers there are other ways of escaping death, if a man is willing to say and do anything. The difficulty, my friends, is not to avoid death, but to avoid unrighteousness; for that runs faster than death

2

Friends, who would have acquitted me, I would like also to talk with you about the thing which has come to pass, while the magistrates are busy, and before I go to the place at which I must die. . . . O my judges—for you I may truly call judges—I should like to tell you of a wonderful circumstance. Hitherto the divine faculty of which the internal oracle is the source has constantly been in the habit of opposing me

even about trifles, if I was going to make a slip or error in any matter; and now as you see there has come upon me that which may be thought, and is generally believed to be, the last and worst evil. But the oracle made no sign of opposition, either when I was leaving my house in the morning, or when I was on my way to the court, or while I was speaking, at anything which I was going to say; and yet I have often been stopped in the middle of a speech, but now in nothing I either said or did touching the matter in hand has the oracle opposed me. What do I take to be the explanation of this silence? I will tell you. It is an intimation that what has happened to me is a good, and that those of us who think that death is an evil are in error. For the customary sign would surely have opposed me had I been going to evil and not to good.

3

Let us reflect in another way, and we shall see that there is a great reason to hope that death is a good; for one of two things—either death is a state of nothingness and utter unconsciousness, or, as men say, there is a change and migration of the soul from this world to another. Now if you suppose that there is no consciousness, but a sleep like the sleep of him who is undisturbed even by dreams, death will be an unspeakable gain. . . . for eternity is then only a single night. But if death is the journey to another place, and there, as men say, all the dead abide, what good, O my friends and judges, can be greater than this? . . . What would not a man give, O judges, to be able to examine the leader of the great Trojan expedition; or Odysseus or Sisyphus, or numberless others, men and women too! . . . In another world they do not put a man to death for asking questions: assuredly not. . . .

Wherefore, O judges, be of good cheer about death, and know of a certainty, that no evil can happen to a good man, either in life or after death. . . . I am not angry with my condemners, or with my accusers; they have done me no harm, although they did not mean to do me any good; and for this I may gently blame them. . . . The hour of departure has arrived, and we go our ways—I to die, and you to live. Which is better God only knows.

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1. To whom does Socrates address the remarks in the first part of the selection?

2. Why does Socrates not address his accusers as they would have liked him to, "weeping and wailing and lamenting"?

3. To what group of people does Socrates address the remarks in the second part of the selection?

4. In ancient Greece, an oracle was a priestess through whom the gods spoke. In the second part of the selection, Socrates refers to an inner oracle. What does he mean?

5. What comfort does Socrates get from his inner oracle during this time?

6. In the third part of the selection, Socrates discusses two ways in which death might be considered a gain. What are those ways?

7. In a later work, *The Republic*, Plato wrote about an ideal community ruled by a person with the highest intellect and greatest insight. How might Socrates' fate have differed in such a community?

THE ELEMENTS OF EUCLID

Euclid wrote the *Elements* around 300 B.C. His system of geometry begins on the foundation of *definitions*. From the definitions he moves on to *axioms*, ideas that are assumed to be true about the definitions. Based on the axioms, Euclid moves up the logical ladder to *theorems*, ideas whose truth he proposes to examine. *Proofs* are the final step in the logical ladder. In the following excerpt from Book I, the notes in brackets refer to definitions, axioms, or theorems already shown.

Proposition 15. THEOREM

If two straight lines cut one another, the vertical, or opposite, angles shall be equal.

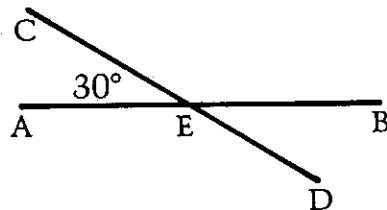
Let the two straight lines AB , CD cut one another at the point E : the angle AEC shall be equal to the angle DEB , and the angle CEB to the angle AED .

Because the straight line AE makes with the straight line CD the angles CEA , AED , these angles are together equal to two right angles (a right angle equals 90°) [Book I, Theorem 13]. Again, because the straight line DE makes with the straight line AB the angles AED , DEB , these also are together equal to two right angles [Book I, Theorem 13]. . . .

Therefore the angles CEA , AED are equal to the angles AED , DEB . From each of these equals take away the common angle AED , and the remaining angle CEA is equal to the remaining angle DEB [Axiom 3]. In the same manner it may be shown that the angle CEB is equal to the angle AED .

Wherefore, *if two straight lines cut one another, the vertical, or opposite, angles shall be equal.*

1. Use the proof above to measure each of the following angles.



- (a) $\angle BED$ _____ (b) $\angle AED$ _____ (c) $\angle CEB$ _____

2. On a separate sheet of paper, compare and contrast Euclid's logical ladder with Aristotle's syllogism (textbook page 122).
