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Morality in War: A Comparison Between Bhīma from the Mahābhārata and Achilles from the Iliad

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Morality in War:
A Comparison Between Bhīma from the Mahābhārata and Achilles from the Iliad
by
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A THESIS
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Abstract

This thesis is an analysis of morality in war in the Mahābhārata and the Iliad by a comparison of the main warriors, Bhīma and Achilles, in their respective Indo-European epics. Specifically, this thesis shows how outside influences (mortal or immortal) placed upon each warrior ultimately determine the warriors' actions, especially those towards their enemies. As the treatment of these warriors in their respective epics remains unbalanced, this analysis will account for how Achilles is able to get away so much more than Bhīma, yet not be criticized similarly. Overall, the assessment of these two warriors provides an overarching understanding of the view of morality within war from the perspective of these epics.
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For my Amit
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Introduction

Comparisons between the *Iliad* and the *Mahābhārata* exist in academic literature and, generally, the comparisons center on the main protagonists of the epic: Achilles and Arjuna. However, virtually no attention has been paid to comparing Achilles and Bhīma (Arjuna’s older brother), even though Bhīma is more akin to Achilles. That both Achilles and Bhīma are the best warriors in their respective epics is unattested. Yet, despite this, both characters are treated differently, which suggests that the role of the ultimate warrior varies between epics. This variation is indicative of morality in war as both heroes behave similarly; however, one is center stage while the other is in the background. Achilles is the main fighter of a war he hardly participates in, yet is often glorified and praised, however, Bhīma who is the best fighter in his epic, is overshadowed by Arjuna as the main character. The difference in treatment indicates that in the *Iliad* war and warriors are good and reverenced. In the *Mahābhārata*, however, the emphasis on Arjuna demonstrates the opposite and that this epic about a war is *not* an epic about war; rather, it is about something more than just fighting. Furthermore, it indicates that war is less moral for those in the *Mahābhārata* than it is for those in the *Iliad*.

In addition, their morality does not simply hinge on who they kill or how they kill. In the epics, these warriors are influenced by a number of outside sources. They are partially influenced by the gods, who commit certain actions and suggest certain actions, as if to say all is fair in war, so long as you are victorious. As warriors, they have a code they are supposed to adhere to as they fight which guides them through the war in the most moral way possible. However, it is important to note that these warriors are also human and have very real human emotions. One of the most prominent emotions they experience and act from is love. Both warriors feel an obligation to protect their loved ones. When they fail to protect them, they are
driven by their own rage to seek revenge on the offenders. This thesis will explore these assorted forces which act upon the warriors causing them to conduct themselves in various, occasionally, immoral ways and demonstrates that these forces ultimately shaped these characters and led them, rightfully or wrongfully, to commit questionable acts of war in war.

**Epic Introduction**

The *Iliad* is an 8th century BCE work written by Homer. It details only a small portion of the ten-year siege against Troy. The war against Troy, between the Akhaians and the Trojans, is for the Akhaians to ‘rescue’ Helen, the wife of Menelaos of Sparta, who was kidnapped by Trojan Prince, Paris. Achilles, the best Akhaian fighter, had retired from war after being insulted by the general of the Akhaian army, Agamemnon. The gods are very much a part of this epic: helping heroes and even being present on the battlefield themselves. Despite Achilles being retired for most of the epic, the climax of the story is his return to seek vengeance upon Hektor, a Trojan prince, for his slaying of Patroklos, his dearest friend. With the help of Athena, Achilles slays Hektor and after much turmoil has afflicted Achilles and Hektor’s father, Priam, who wishes to see his son’s body returned to him, the epic ends with Achilles returning the Trojan prince’s body.

The *Mahābhārata* is much more extensive than the *Iliad*. The dating and authorship is not as precise as it is suspected to have been written over a long period of time and have numerous authors. It is often considered the fifth *Veda* (the holy books of Hinduism) which

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1 The Akhaians are not yet considered “Greeks.”
2 The word rescue is in quotation marks because throughout the *Iliad*, and in the retelling of the Trojan horse story in the *Odyssey*, she does not seem like she has any interest in being rescued.
makes it more than just an epic. The epic details the lives of five brothers (Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma, Arjuna, Nakula, and Sahadeva) from their births to their deaths. The war itself is between the Pāṇḍava brothers and their cousins, the Kauravas, over the kingdom which the Kauravas won unfairly in a game of dice early on in the epic. Within the epic are various digressions meant to be teachable moments for the reader. Although the epic does have entertainment value like the Iliad, the primary focus of this epic is to teach its readers, particularly about dharma (right action, or duty). Its most important section, the Bhagavad Gītā, can be found in every Hindu’s home as it provides the best guidance, from God himself, on how to perform proper dharma. As the epic ends, the specific deaths of the brothers outlines further teachings on proper living.

Methodology & Morality

When thinking of morality of war, Just War Theory is commonly thought of and is usually used as the methodological framework. Just War Theory looks into the justification of going to war and whether it is moral to do so. Both wars are seemingly justifiable in their own right. In the Mahābhārata, the Pāṇḍavas are just taking back the kingdom they lost. The Iliad is all about restoring lost “property”. King Menelaos’ wife, Helen, was stolen from him, kidnapped. Going to war over a kidnapping seems relatively justified, especially in an honour driven society. Menelaos must have lost much of his honour when Paris kidnapped his wife from, essentially, under his nose, as Helen was taken from Menelaos’ home. Not only did Paris

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3 Arguably they lost the game fair and square, but in the Bhagavad Gītā it is mentioned that battle and killing do not generate karma associated with these acts when they are performed in righteous battle (Mahābhārata 6.25). Therefore, one can conclude that the battle of the Mahābhārata is indeed a just war. It should also be noted that some believe the Bhagavad Gītā was a later addition to the Mahābhārata and if this is the case, the author could have been attempting to justify the war so the Pāṇḍavas appear as the true heroes whose morality cannot be questioned.
dishonour Menelaos, but he also did not follow proper guest-friendship protocol. Guest friendship, *xenia*, is a custom monitored by Zeus. Within this custom it is required that a host treat their guest respectfully, providing them with food and drink before inquiring about anything.² It is also important for the guest to exhibit respect towards his host.⁵ Although the justification of each war is not perfect, it does provide a reasonable enough justification for the time period in which the war took place.⁶

Morality of war in this thesis has little to do with the actions of *going* to war, rather it deals with the actions *in* war. In addition, this thesis will take into account the fact that morality has many meanings, and, under certain circumstances, is difficult to assess. Morality of war is a well-researched field that provides many different analyses. Michael Walzer suggests that “war itself..., or some particular war, can be called just or unjust. But apparently nothing whatsoever can be said about morality *in* war, about justice or injustice in the midst of strife, because the "logic of war" imposes brutality equally on all participants.”⁷ In Walzer’s view of war there can be no morality applied to it; when war is upon us the normal parameters of morality have no bearing. He suggests that it is not about using morality to assess actions in war, but that it is simply an impossibility.⁸ Walzer’s analysis of morality in war works *generally* speaking; particularly in terms of the act of killing one’s enemy. However, there are certain brutal acts

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² The *Odyssey* depicts numerous examples of this: Two sources are positive examples of how one should behave when treating a guest: the Phakaians [Bk 7] and the farmer [Bk 14]. Two other examples show poor *xenia* practices: Polyphemus [Bk 9] and the suitors [Bk 17]. Things do not end well for either host. Polyphemus ends up blind and the suitors dead.

⁵ It can be noted also in the *Odyssey* that Odysseus does not behave in the proper manner when it comes to *xenia* with Polyphemus. In the end, Polyphemus does curse Odysseus and extends the hero’s seemingly endless sea voyage. Part of Odysseus being cursed was attributed to his *hubris*, thinking he had outwitted Polyphemus he revealed his name so that the cyclops knew exactly who to curse.

⁶ Just War Theory was mainly developed to analyze war in relatively recent history and present day.


⁸ Ibid., 60.
displayed in the epics that this thesis analyzes which goes beyond Walzer’s idea that war is inherently violent and cannot be assessed from a moral point of view.

In his analysis of morality, W.G. De Burgh deems that “the rightness is relative…”\textsuperscript{9} For De Burgh, morality is based on reasoning and intention. What is right in one situation cannot be deemed right in another. Further to this idea is the intention of what one is doing. De Burgh provides the following example from Dr. Samuel Johnson: “‘The morality of an action depends on the motive from which we act. If I fling half-a-crown to a beggar with the intention… to break his head, and he picks it up and buys victual with it, the physical effect is good; but, with respect to me, the action is very wrong.’”\textsuperscript{10} This brings up an interesting concept. Both warriors in question have the main intention to avenge their loved ones – victory for their side is secondary. This is presumably a noble intention, even if it is a bit selfish. However, in doing so the actions they take are offensive, but the results they obtain are ultimately good (victory for their side, the ‘good’ side). I have manipulated Johnson’s principle as the intention of the warriors is positive, and the effect is (mostly) positive,\textsuperscript{11} but the action is entirely negative. De Burgh does not feel as though morality is as simple as good intentions: “to act at all we must have some awareness of what we are doing; to act morally we must have some awareness of what we \textit{ought} to do” (emphasis added).\textsuperscript{12} In order to act morally, a person needs to understand what they should do in certain situations, whether they perform the ‘right’ act seems irrelevant.

\textsuperscript{9} W.G. De Burgh, \textit{From Morality to Religion: Being the Gifford Lectures, delivered at the University of St. Andrews.} (London: Kennikat Press, 1938), 9.
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 10.
\textsuperscript{11} Achilles’ turmoil after the death of Hektor does not indicate that his action resulted in something positive.
\textsuperscript{12} De Burgh, \textit{From Morality to Religion}, 15.
Furthermore, William F. Felice acknowledges that “morality is determined by outcomes and not by means.”

Felice’s point of view would exonerate both the warriors from their heinous acts. As demonstrated in chapter four, the behaviour of the gods aligns itself with this mentality. It also coincides with Walzer’s point of view that morality is not applicable in war times. Felice is effectively suggesting the same thing in that one cannot determine morality until the war is over and the dust has settled. Furthermore, Felice suggests that “the well-being of the state is much more important than the well-being of the individual. From this perspective, immoral actions… are permitted in the pursuit of a society’s basic interest.”

For both heroes, Felice’s point can assist their morality because, in the case of Achilles, it does not matter that he relentlessly slaughters fleeing Trojans, what matters is that the Akhaians won in the end.

Ultimately, morality in regards to war should not only be applied before battle or after battle as Walzer and Felice suggest; it needs to also be applied to the actions within battle. Of course, there are certain actions in battle that need not be judged because they are to be expected, for example, killing. However, there are certain actions that the epic warrior does that go beyond the allowable action of killing. These are the actions that the characters will be judged by, morally. With the above discussions of morality in war in mind, I will be reading

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14 Felice, *How Do I Save My Honour?*, 45.
15 As Richard A. Gabriel suggests when speaking of the military: “Military ethics, then, deals specifically with those values and rules of expected behaviour that are appropriate to actions taken within the military environment” (Richard A. Gabriel, *The Warriors Way – A Treatise on Military Ethics*. (Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing, 2007), 9).
16 Noteworthy on this is Gabriel’s suggestion that ethics relate to the character of a person, however, according to Gabriel “Character addresses what the individual is or is not… Character says nothing, however, about what the person does, and ethics is always about what a person does or fails to do to another person.” (Gabriel, *The Warriors Way*, 17). So even though both these warriors commit acts deemed immoral, it does not reflect their overall character. Bhīma and Achilles are not evil men; they are still worthy of the status of heroes, but the just commit questionable acts.
through the literature in order to assess morality in all its various situations. I will be selective of my examples and choose ones that are near-mirror images between the epics.

Chapter Outline

The first and second chapters introduce the characters of Bhīma and Achilles, respectively, including their history, and personality traits. These characters exhibit traits that come across as demon-like, or anti-heroic which are the most prominent traits presented in the epics. Chapter two ends with an extended conclusion reflecting the comparability of these two characters.

Chapter three analyzes the obligations of these warriors. They went to war because they had to and are merely performing their duties as per their social class. In addition to their duties, they also have an obligation to their hearts. On many occasions, Bhīma feels obligated to avenge his wife, Draupadī, who experiences tremendous abuse at the hands of the Kauravas. Achilles feels a similar commitment to his friend, Patroklos. In both cases, Bhīma and Achilles do whatever they can to fulfil their obligation, regardless of the consequences.

The fourth chapter demonstrates the role of the gods within the epics. The gods are influential in the actions of the heroes, particularly in the Mahābhārata. Kṛṣṇa guides the Pāṇḍavas to complete many of their actions, as well as their victories. The gods of the Iliad are more physical in their interactions in the war. They helped their favoured heroes by employing deceitful tactics against the enemy.

The final chapter examines specific moments in the epics and the responses to them. The final duels in the epic provide a good commentary on morality. Bhīma battles Duryodhana and
defeats him only by cheating. He also steps on the head of his defeated enemy. Achilles defeats Hektor in a normal fashion, but plans great misdeeds for his body. The commentary within the epics on these enemies shows what is acceptable and what is not acceptable for a warrior.
Chapter 1: Bhīma

In the *Mahābhārata*, Bhīma’s greatest attribute is his intense physical strength, demonstrated through his unparalleled ferocity. The frenzied destruction of his enemies makes it easy to characterize him as a demon, but there are two sides to his nature: a strong human side and a ferocious demon. Bhīma’s human side is exemplary of his strength; Bhīma and strength become synonymous. His demon side becomes more apparent with his interactions. The offspring produced from his relationship with the demoness, Hiḍimbā, brings into question Bhīma’s genetic makeup. Bhīma’s interaction with Duḥśāsana shows his demon side excessively. During some of Bhīma’s most gruesome acts, he is compared to Śiva, a god who meanders between divinity and demon-hood. There is no switch where Bhīma becomes his demon, or human side. Although, his demon side is triggered by revenge, he is not a wholly different person; there is some fluidity between Bhīma the human and Bhīma the demon. In general, it is natural to ascribe immorality to demons and also assume Bhīma is immoral. However, morality cannot be ascribed wholly to a character. This character sketch of Bhīma will show a man who moves between two realms of behaviour and drunkenly walks the line of morality.

Bhīma as Human: Physical Strength

The very first description of Bhīma, son of the wind god, Vayu, and second son in the Pāṇḍu line is about strength:

तस्माज्जेस भावावहीं भीमपराक्रमः

17 The term “demonic” will be avoided when describing Bhīma’s demon side as demonic carries the heavy connotation of evil.
‘Bhīma, the terrible one,’ a strong-armed hero of terrible valour, when he was born, strong to excess, invincible, the voice spoke once more, O heir of Bharata: ‘This new born child will be the best of all the mighty’

Considering the adjective ‘strong’ is used twice in the above quote, it is clear Bhīma is inseparable from his strength. Furthermore, Bhīma is a gentle giant who does not understand his own strength, or feels as though his siblings and cousins should be able to match him. The Kauravas were often upset with Bhīma for beating them in play fighting, even though it was not his intention to harm them. Bhīma’s strength, alone, deems him the best of the mighty, but he is not better than Arjuna or Yudhiṣṭhira. This is evident when Pāṇḍu queried how to get the best son after Bhīma’s birth. Pāṇḍu’s inquiry indicated that superiority in strength and might were not ideal characteristics for an excellent son and Pāṇḍu expected more from his progeny. Third born Arjuna, son of Indra, king of the gods, provided Pāṇḍu with an ideal son. The lead up to Arjuna’s birth is the only time Pāṇḍu himself performed any austerities to obtain a god’s help. For Bhīma’s conception (and the other three brothers), Pāṇḍu told his wife, Kuntī, to ask the gods for a son with a specific trait; however, in the case of Arjuna, Pāṇḍu put the responsibility on himself:

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19 Smith, John D. Translated by. The Mahābhārata. (London: Penguin Classics, 2009), Mbh, 47, 1.114. All translations provided from Smith unless otherwise stated. Translations provided by Smith from the abridged version will have the corresponding page numbers prior to specific line references.
20 Smith, Mbh, 52; 1.119.
21 Ibid., Mbh, 47-48; 1.114.
I shall win [Indra’s] favour with austerities to obtain from him a very mighty son. The son that Indra gives me will be the most excellent, therefore I shall perform great austerities through deeds, thought and works.23

Even before his birth, Arjuna was the best. He was fathered by the king of the gods and his own mortal father participated in the petition for the god’s attention. Bhīma’s might was all he had, but Arjuna was going to bring peace and he would bring joy to his family through his spectacular deeds. Even the devotion in the epic itself is more substantial regarding Arjuna’s birth than Bhīma’s (approximately forty lines versus seven lines). This indicates Bhīma is not as outstanding as Arjuna; the quality Bhīma represents (might) pales in comparison to the qualities Arjuna represents (valour, courage, might, authority, and good leadership). The bracketed qualities are descriptive words used in the Mahābhārata about these two men and Arjuna is clearly superior. While dharma is not mentioned during his birth, throughout the epic, Arjuna proves himself to be the most dharmically inclined and, as such, is the exemplar of proper dharma. This indicates clearly that strength is not sufficient to be deemed the best; this explains why Bhīma is considered a less significant character while Arjuna takes the lead.

David Gitomer, in his essay ‘Rākṣasa Bhīma’, proposes that “…in a Dumezilian analysis Bhīma gets to be the ferocious side of a warrior as Arjuna is the chivalrous, but Bhīma’s actions go beyond mere ferocity.”24 A warrior contains both a chivalrous side and a ferocious side. All

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23 Smith, Mbh, 48, 1.114.18.
24 Gitomer, David L. “Rākṣasa Bhīma: Wolfbelly among Ogres and Brahmins in the Sanskrit Mahābhārata and the Venīṣamhāra.” In Essays of the Mahābhārata, ed. Arvind Sharma. (Delhi Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 1991), 301. This concept could be applied to Hektor and Achilles, too; in recent scholarship Hektor is replacing Achilles as the main hero.
warriors require some sort of ferocity in order to take another’s life and they need courage in order to face the one trying to take theirs. Arjuna represents the chivalry side, the knight in shining armour, the one who valiantly fought the dragon to rescue the princess. The previous adjectives used to describe Arjuna (valiant, courageous, mighty, and authoritative) are wrapped up in the idea of chivalry. Bhīma represents ferocity which, according to Merriam Webster, is defined as “…unrestrained violence and brutality [or] extremely intense.” Most warriors’ ferocity dwells in the second definition while Bhīma’s is firmly entrenched in the first definition. Bhīma takes his ferocity into the realm of unrestrained violence and brutality, as will be expounded in the section describing demon Bhīma. As will be seen later in the chapter, the way Bhīma interacts with Duḥśāsana and Kīcaka is not just intense, it is very violent - more so than is expected in this war and certainly more than Arjuna ever commits. Bhīma’s excessive ferocity is a result of his excessive strength, a raw power that Arjuna cannot match because it is unnecessary for Arjuna’s purpose. Bhīma was born to be the best of the mighty, which he shows through his excessive ferocity; Arjuna was born to be so much more than that which he shows through his chivalry. Generally speaking, the chivalrous hero or warrior is the ‘good’ guy in every sense of the word and he is more often than not depicted as human. Ferocity, on the other hand, is associated with beasts, monsters, and evil. Of course, a hero can become ferocious, but as Gitomer mentions, Bhīma’s ferocity goes beyond the accepted level of ferocity for a hero/warrior. This is the reason that Bhīma is neglected: he is not the hero people want. As the main character, Arjuna reacted within reasonable boundaries as a hero, and this accounts for

26 Achilles will be shown to also behave in a similar way to this definition of ferocious.
27 The dichotomy between human and beast is important in many stories. Human qualities (not necessarily flaws) are good qualities to have, while animal qualities are often seen as bad. Bestial qualities are saved for the fallen (from grace) hero or antagonist.
why he overshadows Bhīma. As will be shown in this thesis, Bhīma’s behaviour towards his enemies, particularly Duḥśāsana reveals a warrior who goes beyond killing with necessary ferocity. Arjuna, on the other hand, does not go beyond what is required of him in battle.

Bhīma’s strength is not limited to the Mahābhārata; the Venīsamhāra, a drama by Bhatta Nārāyana and based on the Mahābhārata, focuses on Bhīma’s demon nature and his relationship with Draupadī. Bhīma’s immense talent as a warrior in this drama is displayed in Gāndhārī’s query to her son, Duryodhana:

जात, तेनैव सुतशक्तकुतांतेन बृकोदरेण समं समरं मागे सेना 29

Boy, do you seek a duel with that Vṛkodara who sealed the doom of my hundred sons?30

In just one sentence it is clear that Bhīma (Vṛkodara) is not one to be trifled with. He vanquished the hundred sons of Kaurava, presumably singlehanded; it was Bhīma who won the war. Gāndhārī is also condescendingly telling her son that to take on Bhīma would amount to nothing. If Bhīma took on one hundred sons single handed, then Duryodhana, as a single man, would have no chance.

Even Bhīma’s name indicates terror, as J.P. Sinha notes in the Udyogaparvam 51.1:31

“The word “bhīma” in this verse suggests a man, who, like the incarnation of death, would destroy all the two armies… Therefore, [Dhṛtarāṣṭra] cannot help but to recall him with that name [Bhīma] which is suggestive enough his fierce physique and dreadful activities… Every

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28 This drama is more explicit in depicting Bhīma as Draupadi’s main love interest.
30 Ibid.
31 Sarva ete mahātsāha ya tvaya parikīrtitāḥ/ Ekatastveva te sarva sametā bhīma ekataḥ.

All these named by thee are, indeed, endued with great courage, but all of them together are equal to Bhīma singly. (Romanization provided by Sinha; Sanskrit provided by myself based on Sinha; translation from Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa. “The Mahābhārata” translated by Kisari Mohan Ganguli. Published between 1883-1896. http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/maha/index.htm, Mbh 5.51.1).
now and then he is reminded of the terror which has been created by Bhīma and he admits to Sanjaya, in very plain terms, what the mere idea of Bhīma means to him.”  

Just hearing Bhīma’s name is enough to cause fear in Dhrtrarāṣṭra; he knows the power of Bhīma and what it means to have Bhīma as an opponent. Once again, Bhīma’s strength is the central aspect of his character. Dhrtrarāṣṭra does not fear Bhīma because of his tactical skill or how courageous he is. Further, Dhrtrarāṣṭra acknowledges that Bhīma is as powerful as all of the Kaurava allies combined. It should be noted that the Kauravas are very well versed in war and the fact that he is as powerful as all of them combined further exemplifies Bhīma’s strength.

Coincidentally enough, some definitions of the Sanskrit word bhīma are “terrible” or “awful”, which coincides with Sinha’s first analysis that Bhīma is like an incarnation of death who would destroy both sides. Bhīma’s strength goes beyond being impressive and enters the realm of a god (or a demon). Sinha states further in his essay that “Bhīma is a warrior of immense power and matchless courage. He has terrified his foes with this strength and this is why even Dhrtrarāṣṭra is aware of his dreadful activities” (emphasis added). Sinha is referring to Dhrtrarāṣṭra’s blindness. Were someone to tell Dhrtrarāṣṭra that Bhīma killed one of his sons, it may not create a vivid image; however, were someone to tell the king that Bhīma ripped open the chest of Duḥśasana it would create a very different image. Although hyperbole is often used by the losing side – how could he possibly win, his opponent was as big as a house – the descriptions of Bhīma seem fairly accurate. It is also to be assumed that Sanjaya, the one who is relaying information to Dhrtrarāṣṭra, is telling the story accurately and not making the Pāṇḍavas out to be magnificent so as to reduce the potential shame of losing to a feeble opponent. The fact

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that Dhrtrashtra is fearful of Bhima shows that the Pāṇḍava warrior’s ferocity is unimaginable; just describing the way he kills is enough to strike fear in his opponents.

Bhima’s description as an incarnation of death is further demonstrated in his main epithet, “wolf-bellied” (Sanskrit vrkodara). According to Monier-Williams translation of this word, in the singular it relates to an insatiable appetite and in the plural vrkodara refers to a class of demons that served Śiva, and both definitions are descriptions of Bhima. Basically, the first definition relates to his insatiable appetite. On a more esoteric level, the definition relates to his carnivorous appetite. There are many accounts of Bhima’s appetite in the Mahābhārata. In one instance, Bhima was given half of the food available to the family of six, while the remaining members had to share the remaining portion,35 with no complaints; indicating the family knew Bhima needed the most food to maintain his abnormal strength. At the end of the epic while the Pāṇḍavas are on a pilgrimage, everyone dies because of their specific shortcomings. Bhima’s shortcoming related to his appetite:

अतिभुक्तं च भवता प्राणेन च विक्रह्यते
अनवेक्ष्य परं पार्थ तेनासि पतितः कश्चित्तः36

You ate too much, son of Kunti… and you boasted of your strength while overlooking others. Therefore you have fallen to the ground.37

Bhima believed no one could stand up to him and his death was a result of his hubris; his death was a result of his gluttony and pride. His epithet, wolf-bellied, indicates an appetite for battle. From a literary standpoint, Bhima, the wolf-bellied, could have a desire for flesh because the wolf, a carnivorous creature, craves flesh. Not so much in the sense of eating flesh, which would be unacceptable and thrust Bhima fully into the demonic, but certainly in the vein of blood lust,

35 Smith, Mbh, 63; 1.144.
36 Mbh: Critical Edition 17.2.25ac.
37 Smith, Mbh, 775, 17.2.25.
or the desire to see flesh rendered from bone. In addition, Bhīma is often described as dripping in blood and covered in fat.\(^{38}\) This alludes to his desire for flesh, his wolf belly.

**Bhīma as Demon: Carnivorous**

In this section outlining demon Bhīma, this carnivorous side of vṛkodara will be much more apparent. Again, Bhīma is seen to be a mix of human and demon. As the human, he eats an abnormal amount of food presumably so he has the strength to take on any foe. As the demon, he eats flesh for its sustenance. In a way, it also highlights the civilized human, and uncivilized demon nature within Bhīma.\(^{39}\)

The second definition of vṛkodara, that is a class of demons that serve Śiva, is interesting and, with a deeper understand of Bhīma, both meanings *could* be applied to the Pāṇḍava warrior\(^{40}\). There are a number of instances where Bhīma is more like a demon (Sanskrit rākṣasa) than a human: the physical appearance of his son, Ghaṭotkaca, his killing of Duḥśāsana, and his overwhelming need for revenge. It should be noted that ‘demon’ in this case does not necessarily mean ‘evil’; a ‘demon’ in this case is more closely related to ‘uncivilized’.\(^{41}\)

One of the first exposures of Bhīma’s demon qualities is his union with Hiḍimbā. Hiḍimbā is a demoness who, like all demons, is able to change her form. Bhīma’s copulation with the demoness is not what makes his demon qualities apparent; rather, it is the offspring of


\(^{39}\) The civilized (human) has access to fire, thus cooked food; the uncivilized (demon) cannot (will not) cook his food.

\(^{40}\) It is understood that grammatically speaking this would not be possible since the singular Bhīma cannot take on the definition of the plural demons.

\(^{41}\) The dichotomy being that the Pāṇḍavas, upholders of dharma and not cannibals are an example of civilized while anything that is not under these categories is uncivilized.
their union, Ghaṭotkaca, which highlights the demon inside the hero. Ghaṭotkaca, is described as more demon-like than human:

\[
\text{विरूपाक्षं महावकं शाक्तकर्णं विभीषणं}
\text{भीमरूपं सुताघ्रं तीक्षणं महाबलम्}
\text{महेष्वरं महावीरं महासत्तं महाभूजं}
\text{महाजनं महाकायं महामायरिदम्}
\text{अमानुषं मानुषं भीमवेगं महाबलम्}
\text{ये पितथानतीवाचान् भूवाति स मानुषान्}
\]

His eyes were frightful, his mouth huge, his ears sharp-pointed; he was fearsome and strong, terrible to behold with his copper-coloured lips and his sharp teeth... child of a human, but not a human... he surpassed Piśācas and other Rākṣasas, as well as human beings.  

Bhīma’s courtship with Hiḍimbā produced a creature that at first glance is not human and could barely be classified as half-human. Ghaṭotkaca’s physical description corresponds to the description of a rākṣasa, though his personality traits are more anthropomorphic. As summarized by Kendra Marks, in Bharata’s The Nāṭyaśāstra, “…the physical traits of a character is important for the audience’s recognition of the character’s identity.” Generally speaking this is accurate; a character wearing blue is perceived to be better than the character wearing red. However, in the case of Ghaṭotkaca and his father that idea is reversed. Ghaṭotkaca looks like a demon, but behaves more like a human would.  

Bhīma, on the other hand, looks like a human, but, as will be analyzed later, behaves more similarly to a demon. Ghaṭotkaca has a sense of duty to his father, which he fulfilled by coming to the Pāṇḍavas’ aid during the battle. During his short time in this epic he does not exhibit many personality traits of a demon. It is

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45 This assumption is only based on what the reader sees of him during battle. One can only speculate how he behaves “off screen.”
also noted that Ghaṭotkaca surpassed other rākṣasas, like his father does, as well as humans. Ghaṭotkaca is also considered to be the best of the rākṣasas, again, like his father (best of the mighty). Unless the “demon gene,” if there is such a thing, is dominant and all demon/human relations produced demons, it indicates that Bhīma is more of a rākṣasa than a human; he passed on his rākṣasa traits to his son.

It is not just Bhīma’s offspring that indicate his demon quality, but also his actions express how he could be paralleled with a demon. Much of Bhīma’s persona is demon-esque, as Gitomer, who is the only one who has pointed this out, writes: “For the image of the middle Pāṇḍava ripping out the guts of a warrior (Duḥśāsana) and drinking his blood replicates the standard description of the rākṣasa feasting on battle carnage.”\(^\text{46}\) Rākṣasas are much like carrion birds.\(^\text{47}\) In fairness to Bhīma, he did not do this for every enemy he faced; he simply vowed to do this for Duḥśāsana’s mistreatment of Draupadi.\(^\text{48}\) It seems that one rākṣasa deed is enough to make one a rākṣasa. However, the decision of the author to have Bhīma vow more than just killing Duḥśāsana is significant in indicating that Bhīma is much more of a demon than a human. Even though Bhīma is similar to demons, he is not so akin to them that he will not kill them should they threaten him or his family. Gitomer points out that “The killings of the various rākṣasas prefigure Bhīma’s decisive role in the destruction of the Kauravas headed by Duḥśāsana, and prepare us for the ugly, unchivalric and gory manner of his human killings. It seems as if Bhīma must, through his encounters and killings of rākṣasas, the enemies of dharma, … in order to commit the deed he has vowed on Duḥśāsana, an adharmic deed unthinkable for the other Pāṇḍavas…” (emphasis added).\(^\text{49}\) Bhīma’s decision to kill Duḥśāsana in such a manner

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\(^\text{46}\) Gitomer, “Rākṣasa Bhīma,” 301.
\(^\text{47}\) See Rodrigues and Bhattacharyya.
\(^\text{48}\) Smith, \textit{Mbh}, 147-48; 2.61.
\(^\text{49}\) Gitomer, “Rākṣasa Bhīma,” 304.
is clearly an unacceptable method and even Bhīma must prepare himself to commit this act. Further Bhīma may be interested in killing the rākṣasa to prove he is not an enemy of dharma and does not adhere to rākṣasa mentality. Of great interest is the description of this manner of killing as ugly, uncivilic, and gory. Within the Mahābhārata’s graphic description of battle, Duḥśāsana’s death is easily the goriest death in the entire epic. It is also significant that in Kīcaka’s death Bhīma leaves him as a ball of flesh. Although leaving a body in a mass of flesh is gory, Bhīma opening Duḥśāsana’s chest with his bare hands and actively drinking the blood from the cavity creates a more intimately battle scene wherein Duḥśāsana is not dead yet. Bhīma mangling Kīcaka could have been blind rage and he just attacked until there was nothing left to attack, but with Duḥśāsana Bhīma’s actions were calculated and, unnervingly calm.

Bhīma’s killing of Duḥśāsana is grisly in two ways: first it is physically brutal to witness. A man is dying on the battlefield while the other is towering over him, dripping with blood and other graphic by-products of war; the victor then feasts on the blood of his enemy much like a predator its prey. It is also morally, dharmically ugly. There are two reasons Bhīma committed to his vow: satya (truthfulness; explained in chapter 3), or his own demon desires. He wanted to taste Duḥśāsana’s blood, thus, the vow became irrelevant. As Gitomer sees it, Bhīma must take on the characteristics of a demon in order to behave so maliciously; no human could kill someone or desecrate a body like Bhīma; therefore, he cannot be human – or at least not completely human. Again, the term chivalry comes up in regards to Bhīma. It is also worth noting Gitomer mentions that the ugly, unchivalric and gory manner of killing is for humans; Bhīma does not kill the demons of the Mahābhārata in such a gruesome manner. However, this could indicate that these adjectives would not be used to describe Bhīma’s killing a demon because a demon does not deserve a dignified death. It would not matter if Bhīma had
slaughtered and mangled all of the demons he faced because he was ridding the world of the enemies of dharma.

Demons seem to express an overwhelming need for revenge, as noted by Madhubanti Banerjee as he recounts Rāvaṇa’s abduction of Sītā in the Rāmāyaṇa and suggests “…his sole reason for abducting Sītā is to avenge the humiliation of his sister, Śūrpanākhā, at the hand of Lakṣmaṇa…” 50 Bhīma, like Rāvaṇa, does his best to protect and avenge the honour of the one he loves. N.N. Bhattacharyya acknowledges this as well: “…the Rākṣasas were protectors of what they valued in their distinct culture…” 51 Bhīma is the protector of his family, something he valued greatly. When Bhīma could not protect Draupadī, he sought revenge, like Rāvaṇa did. It supports the idea that even though Bhīma can be seen as part demon, that does not make him purely evil. 52

Bhīma’s decision to kill Duḥśāsana in the manner he did was entirely motivated by revenge and although The Mahābhārata does not suggest that Bhīma drank Duḥśāsana’s blood while he was still alive, the Venīsamhāra does. In the Venīsamhāra there is a conversation between a demon and a demoness about how they seek flesh and blood and they enjoy the tastes. 53 This relates to Bhīma’s name vrkodara. I had earlier explained how the epithet wolf-belly could indicate a carnivorous desire for flesh. It is unclear whether demon Bhīma enjoyed the taste of Duḥśāsana’s blood, but it is undeniable he enjoyed the act of slaying him, ripping open his chest and drinking his blood. While Bhīma may not be similar to the demons in that he

51 N.N. Bhattacharyya, Indian Demonology: The Inverted Pantheon. (Delhi: Manohar, 2000), 111.
52 Hillary P. Rodrigues provides examples of demons who are ‘good’. See “Asura’s and Daityas” pg 471.
53 Nārāyana, Venīsamhāra, 63-67.
physically enjoys the tastes, he enjoys it symbolically. In the same drama, Bhīma describes the
death of Duḥśāsana:

पीतं तस्य मयाघ पाण्डववधूकेशाम्बराकरणिः
कोष्ठं जीवत कव तीक्ष्णकरज्ञक्षणादस्मवक्षसः.54

…the warm blood of him that dragged the hair and cloth of the Pāṇḍavas’ wife has been
drunk by me to-day from his heart pierced by my sharp nails even as he was alive.55

Again, this shows his demon qualities; he used his own nails to get the blood while his enemy
was still alive. Also, to use his own nails instead of a dagger or other civilized weapon shows
how displaced from humanity he is. The use of fists or hands in a war where everyone has a
weapon – club, sword, spear, etc. – seems backwards. Using a weapon can separate the
humanity from the one doing the killing and the one being killed. When Arjuna slays someone
with his arrows it is less him doing the deed of killing and more the arrow’s; however, the
intention is Arjuna’s. However, with Bhīma using his hands to maul Duḥśāsana’s body the
entire onus of killing is on Bhīma. His hands are physically stained with the blood of his
enemies, not metaphorically as the case of Arjuna. Furthermore, the carrion-esque demons
would no doubt use their nails (claws) and teeth to rip apart the bodies as they consumed, which
parallels Bhīma with a demon even more so. The image created of Bhīma piercing Duḥśāsana’s
heart with his nails is nothing short of a monster. The likeness of werewolves and other beasts
are what use their claws to rip and pierce the skin. If it were not Bhīma describing himself,
another might be tempted to refer to his nails as claws.

54 Nārāyana, Venīśamhāra, 108.
55 Ibid.
Bhīma as Śiva: The Demon King

In reference to the second definition of *vrkodara* – a class of demons that served Śiva – there are some references to Śiva’s behaviour being very demon-like, much like Bhīma’s. Bhīma and Śiva are similar in a number of ways and often Bhīma is likened to the god, but most apparent is their ties to demon nature. Oroon Ghosh acknowledges “the name “Shiva” means “benevolent”, “favourable.” But Shiva was at one time, it seems, principally a destructive god. He was, however, favourable and benevolent to his devotees. Otherwise he was terrible and to be feared…” This is much like Bhīma: while Bhīma does not have devotees, he does have many allies and family who he cares for. To his ‘devotees’ he is kind and exemplifies many other positive attributes but to his enemies he struck fear into their hearts. Further to this frightening Śiva is the idea of demon Śiva, or Rudra. According to Hillary Rodrigues: “In one instance (RV.5.42.11), Rudra is actually called both an *asura* and *deva* in the same verse.” This indicates that, like Bhīma, Śiva/Rudra can also be “bad” and “good” (for lack of better terms) at the same time; Śiva/Rudra meanders between these two classifications as Bhīma meanders through being a human and demon. *Asuras*, which are much like titans in Greek mythology, were deities that existed in the pre-Vedic period and some gods came from the *asuras*. As noted by Stella Kramrisch, “Śiva frequently acts more like a demon than a god. He retained his Asurahood in creation, when other gods had left being Asuras and other Asuras had

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56 Smith, *Mbh* 266-67; 4.21, 379; 6.59.
58 It should be noted that while the other characters may feel disgusted over how Bhīma had killed some of his opponents, he was not actively scolded, ignored, or otherwise isolated. His allies looked beyond that, for the most part.
59 A similar case can be made for Achilles.
become demons.”61 Śiva has managed to do both; Śiva managed to keep his *asurahood* without becoming a full-fledged demon, again, like Bhīma. Bhīma never becomes a full-fledged demon, even when he drinks Duḥśāsana’s blood. Śiva, much like Bhīma, portrays a demon side, more so than his divine side. Once again, like Bhīma, these two seemingly opposite qualities, the divine and the demon, did not represent a dichotomy between good and evil.62 Both were an essential part of Śiva’s personality and his demon qualities did not make him an evil god.

Bhīma can also be classified to have this *asurahood* himself. As Marks points out: “The *asuric* character type is *strong*, valourous, *angry*, *arrogant*, *disrespectful*, and impolite; the *asuras* are remarkably powerful and destructive in battle…” (emphasis added).63 The italicized traits are the ones that Bhīma has shown to have. His strength and his anger are obvious. His arrogance is what led to his death and he is extremely disrespectful to his enemies, particularly Duḥśāsana and Duryodhana.64 Marks suggests that “the *Mahābhārata* conceives of its primary characters as partial incarnations of either *devas* or *asuras* and the *asuric* humans are described as the ones who assault Draupadī…”65 The suggestion being that the Pāṇḍavas represent *deva* incarnations and the Kauravas represent *asura* incarnations, which is an accurate analysis except in the case of Bhīma, who has proven himself more *asuric* than not. Furthermore, Marks acknowledges “the *asuras* are extremely angry, while the devas present calmness and order…”66 In the gambling match episode where Draupadī is brought out after being won, it is only Bhīma

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62 Ibid., 394.
63 Marks, “Goddesses, Monsters and Monstrous Goddesses,” 138.
64 See chapter 5 for analysis on Duryodhana.
66 Ibid., 139.
who acts out and voices his anger. He cannot contain his rage like his brothers, who remain calm in this situation. This further indicates Bhīma, who is not on the Kaurava side, is more an asura.

It is likely that demons followed Śiva because he truly is a demon king. Based on context in the Vedas, Rodrigues believes asura likely meant leader as opposed to demon or god, however, he acknowledged that “…an āsura (sic) is frequently used to signify a leader of the rākṣasas.” This invites the question as to how one can lead a group of rākṣasa without being, even to a small extent, one of them or like them? Even though Rodrigues believes that asura does not mean demon, it is unlikely that one could lead a group without adhering to some of the group’s values. In the Venīsamhāra, Bhīma is married to Hiḍimbā, the Queen of demons and Bhīma is often referred to as the prince in the drama. In concordance with my analysis of Rodrigues’ assertion, the fact that Bhīma is referred to as prince further expresses Bhīma’s demon nature as it would seem odd that demons would consider a non-demon their king. In fact, demons are not necessarily friendly with human in this drama. There are times when the demons tell lies to cause despair in the humans. In would make more sense that the leader of the rākṣasa was like-minded to a rākṣasa as well; therefore, in a way both Śiva and Bhīma can be seen as demon kings.

The Mahābhārata has some allusions to Śiva and his behaviour when Bhīma commits an act, usually a heinous one. A direct comparison occurs when Bhīma is mangling Kīcaka:

काये प्रवेशयामास पशोऽरव िपनाकधृक ्

68 Ibid., 471.
He [Bhīma] squeezed all his limbs, his hands, feet, head and neck, inside his body, as Śiva, the bearer of the Pināka weapon, did to the sacrificial beast.\textsuperscript{70}

Another instance in the \textit{Mahābhārata} is where Śiva calls forth his followers and they are described as having the heads and faces of animals. This coincides with Bhīma’s feral behaviour. Śiva’s followers are further described as

\begin{center}
पातारोऽसृसा\सानां मांसान्तृकभोजनाः\textsuperscript{71}
\end{center}

…drinkers of blood and fat and other animal matter, they subsisted on the flesh and entrails of animals.\textsuperscript{72}

The \textit{Venīsamhāra} acknowledges demons need for blood as sustenance and this concept is reminiscent of the demon readers saw drinking the blood of Duḥśāsana. It is not a great distance between drinking the blood of an enemy and eating his heart. Further, strength is an important description of these servants; they are considered

\begin{center}
हन्तारो द्रिष्टां शूराः प्रसद्धासाह्विक्रमाः\textsuperscript{73}
\end{center}

…capable of forcibly slaying all foes [and] … irresistible in prowess.\textsuperscript{74}

This, again, is like Bhīma who seems to be matchless on the battlefield and constantly has his strength referenced. In these ways Bhīma, \textit{vrkodara}, falls into rank with Śiva’s servants.

Despite the fact that both Bhīma and Śiva are generally viewed as being battle orientated (Bhīma more so than Śiva), both at one point in the \textit{Mahābhārata} urge for peace and do not want

\textsuperscript{70} Smith, \textit{Mbh} 266-67, 4.21.59. The sacrifice it is referring to can be found in \textit{Mbh} 10.17-18.

\textsuperscript{71} \textit{Mbh}: Critical Edition, 10.7.36a.

\textsuperscript{72} Vyasa. \textit{“The Mahābhārata”} (trans. Ganguli), 10.7.

\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Mbh}: Critical Edition, 10.7.35c.

\textsuperscript{74} Vyasa. \textit{“The Mahābhārata”} (trans. Ganguli), 10.7.
destruction. In a story in the *Mahābhārata*, Śiva attempts to convince Brahmā to spare the people who are putting a burden on the earth. Śiva tells Brahmā:

नं प्रसीदं क्रुध्दे 75

Do not give way to wrath, O lord of the deities, with respect to this matter about destruction of living creatures.76

Bhīma also experiences a moment of passiveness: after he has vowed the destruction of the Kauravas, it is Kṛṣṇa’s turn to become enraged and threaten the annihilation of the Kauravas. Bhīma calmly tells Kṛṣṇa:

यथा यथैव शांतिः स्मालकूरूणां … 77

… you should speak to them in whatever way may lead to peace among the Kauravas.78

Both are seen as men (gods) of war who take pleasure in battle and let their fury fly, but they do have a glimmer of a necessity for peace.

Śiva’s emotions made his demon persona more apparent. Kramrisch tells of a time when Śiva’s consort, Satī, lay dead in his arms and it caused a frenzy in him: “… Śiva danced with demonic frenzy as he carried the dead body of Satī, whom he had loved exceedingly. The excessiveness of his grief – as well as his elation – was an outburst in which Śiva’s demon revealed himself.”79 This is all too reminiscent of Bhīma’s behaviour over Draupadī, whom he also loved exceedingly. Every time Draupadī was insulted or abused, Bhīma’s anger quickly

76 Vyasa, “*The Mahābhārata*” (trans. Ganguli), 12.257. A challenge does arise with characterizing Śiva based on a retelling of a moment in time. Since Śiva is called many names (in this particular retelling he is Sthanu) throughout history, it is no surprise he exhibits traits which seem bipolar. The war mongering, destructive Śiva could be of one time and the level headed, peace-keeping Śiva could be of another time. The *Mahābhārata* is speculated to have been added to over many years so caution needs to be taken when describing a god or even a character in the epic.
78 Smith, *Mbh* 306, 5.72.1. Like Śiva’s peace keeping efforts, there is a possibility this is an interpolation used to reflect the times and make Bhīma seem more level headed and desirous of peace.
rises and his behaviour becomes nothing short of a demon.\textsuperscript{80} Given Bhīma’s relationship with Draupadī, it would be simple to imagine were Draupadī to die, Bhīma would perform the same frenzied dance and we would see a demon unlike any other.

**Conclusion**

Based on previous analysis, Bhīma’s personality can be divided into two parts: human and demon. They are not synonymous with good and evil, respectively; however, they represent how Bhīma behaves in this epic. Human Bhīma is robust and really the basis of his character is strength. He is known for being strong, kind and for his voracious appetite. His strength and power in battle extend far beyond the knowledge of his allies; Dhṛtarāṣṭra is proof of that. As the blind king he simply hears of Bhīma’s actions and finds himself terrified. Bhīma’s success in battle is attributed to his strength; no number of foes can take him down.

Another aspect of his success arises from his demon side. His epithet of *vrkodara* takes him from being a human with a large appetite to a demon with an appetite for flesh (hence wolf). Bhīma’s demon nature seems to dominate his character. Ghaṭotkaca is more *rākṣasa* than human indicating that the genetic material of Bhīma was more demon. His treatment of Duḥśāsana is a very important example of his demon nature; he acts animalistic when he kills Duḥśāsana which slightly skews his morality. The fact there was no commentary from other characters after Bhīma drank Duḥśāsana’s blood, implies there was no issue with what Bhīma did – there was also no commentary when he made the vow. However, it is clear that it was a disturbing and

\textsuperscript{80} Refer back to the mangling of Kīcaka and the slaying of Duḥśāsana.
frightening act even for when the vow was made everyone’s hair stood on end and everyone who witness the act all ran scared.  

Given this dichotomy, it would be simple to say when Bhīma behaves as a human he is moral, but when he behaves as a demon he is immoral, especially considering that demons commit adharmic acts which are similar to morality, but not quite the same. Bhīma could be seen as both immoral and moral. Demons are typically viewed as adharmic which really could be a correlation of immoral. They are not doing the right thing. Human Bhīma does all he can to be moral. The challenge with determining Bhīma’s morality based off this analysis alone, which is effectively a character sketch, is that to deem him moral or immoral now begs the question: are people’s morality determined by their character, or determined by their actions? Bhīma has more to consider in this war than just killing. As this thesis will demonstrate, Bhīma’s actions cannot simply be classified as moral or immoral; the obligation he must uphold as a warrior, his love for his wife, the power of the gods, as well as the intense emotion of vengeance and rage, all of which contribute to his behaviour.

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81 Presumably there were allies fighting nearby who also became frightened of Bhīma at the time.
Chapter 2: Achilles

Achilles is in the prime of his life during the Trojan War and, unlike Bhīma in the *Mahābhārata*, there is no backstory presented in the *Iliad*. The *Iliad* is telling a story only spanning only a few days; it is a snap shot of the climax of the war while the *Mahābhārata* is a lifetime. Achilles’ demise is not addressed until the *Odyssey*, a later Homeric epic. Achilles is the main hero of the *Iliad*, despite only participating in the battle for approximately a third of the epic; in fact, he does not become a major player until Book 16. He is also the best fighter in the *Iliad*; often his epithet is “best of the Akhaiaians.” Achilles is similar to Bhīma in that there are two parts to him: a heroic side and an anti-heroic side. Again, like Bhīma, these two sides do not simply represent good and evil; Achilles the anti-hero is not a villain in the literary sense of the word. However, unlike Bhīma, there is a shift in the *Iliad* when each part of Achilles becomes more prominent. In the epic, Achilles’ heroic side is overshadowed by his anti-heroic side as he does not participate much in the battle prior to book 19, but the reader knows that he was participating in battle before the narration started; it is clear by the way the characters speak of Achilles that he is an active and important member of the war. The Achilles that is depicted more in the last few books of this epic is the anti-hero. His actions in the latter parts are so ferocious they become uncivilized and brutal. Achilles the anti-hero, like Bhīma the demon, makes some decisions that could be deemed immoral. However, like Bhīma, his morality is highly influenced by other factors such as love, the influence of the gods, and revenge. Achilles demonstrates himself to be a man almost fully in the realm of the immoral with just his heel keeping him moral.
Achilles the Hero: Immeasurable Strength

Achilles is considered to be a demi-god; his mother is Thetis, a river goddess, and his father Peleus, a mortal man who can trace his lineage back to Zeus. Originally Zeus and Thetis were to copulate; however, Zeus feared the divine son (Achilles) to be born of this union would rise to power and eventually overthrow him. Achilles is characterized primarily by his strength, but is also known to be stubborn, have a short temper, and is arrogant, especially in his relationship with the gods. According to other character’ discussions of Achilles, it is clear that he is the main fighter in the Trojan War and the best. There is also mention of people being afraid of Achilles, presumably because he cannot be defeated. Achilles’ retreat from battle is good news for the Trojans and bad news for the Akhaians: the Akhaians cannot slow the Trojan advance, let alone defeat them, without Achilles’ help. The Trojans make it as close as the Akhaian ships before Achilles makes any sort of move. In fact, Book 16 is titled “A Ship Fired, a Tide Turned,” indicating that after this book the favour returns to the Akhaians. When Achilles does rejoin the battle there is a notable shift in morale. Achilles could not physically venture out onto the battlefield to retrieve Patroklos’ corpse as he had given his armour to Patroklos and it would be too dangerous for him to venture into battle without it, so, with a little help from Athena, he scared the Trojans away with a battle cry:

\[
\text{στή δ’ ἐπὶ τάφρον ἰὸν ἀπὸ τεῖχος, οὐδ’ ἐς Ἀχαιοὺς μίσγετο· μητρὸς γὰρ πυκνὴν ὠπίζετ’ ἐφετμήν. ἐνθὰ στὰς ἤυσ’, ἀπάτερθε δὲ Παλλὰς Ἀθήνη φθέγξατ’· άταρ Τρώεσσιν ἐν ἄσπετον ὦρσε κυδοιμόν. ὡς δ’ ἵτ’ ἀριζήλη φωνῆ, ὅτε τ’ ἰαχε σάλπιγξ άστυ περιπλομένων δῆιων ὑπο θυμοραϊστέων, ὡς τότ’ ἀριζήλη φωνῆ γένετ’ Αἰακίδαο.}
\]

82 Homer, *The Iliad*. Translated by Robert Fitzgerald. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 380-381; 16.77-129. All *Iliad* translations provided by Fitzgerald unless otherwise stated. Translations provided will have corresponding page numbers provided before specific line reference.
83 Achilles does not officially join the battle until book 19, but this is where his mentality and the battle change.
οἱ δ᾿ ὡς οὖν ἂιων ὄπα χάλκεον Αἰακίδαο,

τρὶς μὲν ὑπὲρ τάφρου μεγάλ᾽ ἱαχὲ δίος Ἀχιλλεύς,
τρὶς δὲ κυκήθησαν Τρῶες κλειτοὶ τ᾿ ἐπίκουροι.

Moving from parapet
to moat; without a nod from the Akhaians,
keeping clear, in deference to his mother,
he halted and gave tongue. Not far from him
Athena shrieked. The great sound shocked the Trojans
into tumult, as a trumpet blown
by a savage foe shocks an encircled town,
so harsh was Akhilleus’ cry.
The hearts of man quelled, hearing that brazen voice…
Three great cries
he gave above the moat. Three times they shuddered,
whirling backward, Trojan and allies….
Now the Akhaians leapt at the chance
to bear Patroclous’ body out of range.  

While Achilles did have Athena’s help at the very beginning and her cries resonated with
Achilles’, it is clear that the Trojans were scared off merely when Achilles’ presence was
vocalized. Much like the howl of a wolf or the growl of a bear, these things do not need to be
seen in order to instill fear; they just need to vocalize their presence because their ferocity does
not need to be seen to be understood.

Despite his absence, Achilles’ importance in the war is apparent in how characters
reference him. Nestor, a character often providing guidance to the Akhaians, likens Achilles to

... ὃς μέγα πᾶσιν
ἐρκος Αχαιοΐσιν πέλεται πολέμοιο κακοίο.  

86 Ibid., *Iliad*, Loeb, 1.283-84.
Achilles protected the Akhaians from war which indicates his importance to the Akhaians. The appreciation for Achilles in battle is not only observed by mortals, but Poseidon also acknowledges Achilles’ absence on the battlefield:

\[ ...οὐ ποτ’ ἐγὼ γε τελευτήσεσθαι ἔφασκον, Τρώας ἐφ’ ἡμετέρας ἱέναι νέας... \]

I never/dreamed the war would come to this: our own beachhead raided by Trojans!89

With Achilles on the battlefield even Poseidon was certain the Trojans could not advance so close to the Akhaian camp. Hera, Queen of the gods, also speaks highly of Achilles in his absence:

\[ αἰδώς, Ἀργεῖοι, κάκ’ ἐλέγχεα, εἴδος ἀγητοῖ· δόφρα µὲν ἐς πόλεμον πολέσκετο δίος Αχιλλεύς, οὐδὲ ποτὲ Τρῶες πρὸ πυλῶν Δαρδανίων οἰχνεσκον· κείνου γὰρ ἐδείδισαν ὄβριμον ἔγχος· νῦν δὲ ἐκάς πόλιος κοίλῃς ἐπὶ νηυσὶ μάχονται. \]

While Prince Akhilleus roamed the field the Trojans never showed their face in a sorte respecting his great spear too much – but now they fight far from the city, near the ships!91

An assortment of characters understood Achilles’ worth; even Achilles’ himself was not ignorant of it:

\[ δόφρα δ’ ἐγὼ µετ’ Αχαιοῖσιν πολέµιζον οὐκ ἐθέλεσκε µάχην ἀπὸ τείχος ὄρνυμεν Ἔκτωρ,… \]

87 Homer, *Iliad*, 21, 1.283-84.
90 Ibid., *Iliad*, Loeb 5.787-791.
As long as I was in battle Hektor never cared for a fight far from the walls;…

These instances indicate that Achilles was an integral part to the Akhaian success.\(^94\)

Achilles’s strength is his most important feature and is the reason he is such a formidable force in battle. Other warriors, in an effort to articulate another’s strength, would use Achilles as a comparison. In an effort to dissuade Menelaos from fighting Hektor, Agamemnon tells him:

\[
καὶ \quad δ᾿ \quad Αχιλλεύς \quad τούτῳ \quad γε \quad μάχη \quad ἕνι \quad κυδιανείρῃ \quad έρριγ᾿ \quad ἀντιβολῆσαι, \quad ὅ \quad περ \quad σέο \quad πολλὸν \quad ἁμείνων.\]

Even Akhilleus shivered when for glory he met [Hektor] in combat – and he had more driving power than you by far.\(^96\)

By comparing Achilles to Hektor, it elevates Achilles to a level no man (except maybe Hektor) can hope to match. Further, Agamemnon outright states that Achilles is stronger than Menelaos. This line indicates Achilles is the strongest Akhaian and *even* he was fearful of Hektor. Even Zeus recognized Achilles’ vigour:

\[
eἰ \quad γὰρ \quad Αχιλλεύς \quad οἶος \quad ἐπὶ \quad Τρώεσσι \quad μαχεῖται, \quad οὐδὲ \quad μίνυνθ᾿ \quad ἔξουσι \quad ποδώκεα \quad Πηλεύνα. \quad καὶ \quad δὲ \quad τί \quad μιν \quad καὶ \quad πρόσθεν \quad ύποτρομέεσκον \quad όρωντες· \quad νῦν \quad δ᾿ \quad ὅτε \quad δὴ \quad καὶ \quad θυμὸν \quad ἑταίρου \quad χῶεται \quad αἰνῶς, \quad δείδω \quad μὴ \quad καὶ \quad τείχος \quad ύπέρ \quad μόρον \quad ἐξαλαπάξῃ.\]

Suppose Akhilleus takes the Trojans on alone: not for a minute will they hold him. In times past they used to shake to see him, and now he’s mad with rage for his friend’s death,

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\(^{94}\) Of course there are other heroes that can contend with and beat the Trojans, but none so miraculously as Achilles. Odysseys says to Achilles to persuade him to join the war again: ἐν δοιῇ δὲ σαωσέμεν ἡ ἀπολέσθαι / νῆας ἐνοσσέλμους, εἰ μὴ σὺ γε δύσεαι ἀλκήν (Homer, *Iliad*, Loeb, 9.230-231).  
“By a blade’s turn, our good ships are saved or lost, unless you arm your valor.” (Homer, *Iliad*, 211; 9.230-231)  
\(^{95}\) Homer, *Iliad*, Loeb, 7.113-114.  
\(^{96}\) Ibid., *Iliad*, 165; 7.113-114.  
I fear he’ll break the wall down, sack the town,
before the time has come for it.  

That is, Achilles was a sight to behold and fear before Patroklos’ death, but since the death of his friend he is far more powerful and destructive. Zeus fears that Achilles may supersede fate by taking Troy before its time has come. At this point, and at the command of Zeus, Achilles can only be deterred by the gods themselves; no mortal will keep Achilles from the gate, from his revenge. Nearing the conclusion of Achilles’ time in battle Hektor exclaims and curses Achilles in battle:

καὶ κεν ἐλαφρότερος πόλεμος Τρώεσσι γένοιτο
σεῖο καταφθιμένοιο· σὺ γάρ σφισι πῆμα μέγιστον

War for the Trojans would be eased
if you were blotted out, bane that you are!  

Again, Hektor is referencing Achilles’ strength. Hektor is not suggesting the Trojans would win this war, but Achilles is the main obstacle for the Trojans.

Even though, according to Agamemnon, Achilles shook in the presence of the Trojan Prince, Hektor, best of the Trojans, cautions his men against approaching:

ὄφρα μὲν οὗτος Ἀγαμέμνονι μήνιε δίῳ,
tόφρα δὲ ῥήτεροι πολεμίζειν ἦσαν Ἀχαιοί·
χαίρεσκον γὰρ ἐγὼ γε θοῆς ἐπὶ νησίν ἰαύων
ἐλπόμενοι νῆας αἱρησέμεν ἀμφιελίσσας.
νῦν δ’ αἰνῶς δείδοικα ποδώκεα Πηλεΐωνα
οὐκ ἐθελήσει
μὴν εν πεδίῳ, ὅθι περ Τρῶες καὶ Ἀχαιοὶ
ἐν μέσῳ ἀμφότεροι μένος Ἄρης δατέοται.

99 Troy was always meant to fall, but it was to fall at a certain point, not before nor after.
As long as that man [Achilles] raged at royal Agamemnon, we could fight the Akhaians with advantage. I was happy to spend last night so near the beach and think of capturing ships today. Now, though, I fear the son of Peleus to my marrow!

He will not be contained by the flat ground where Trojans and Akhaians share between them raging war... 103

Hektor continues to say how Achilles will eventually seize the city and how he cannot be stopped. As Achilles has rejoined, the Trojans could only retreat. Clearly Hektor is fearful of Achilles’ strength and acknowledges that his men are no match for him. Trojan victory would be assured if naught for one man: Achilles. With Hektor’s warning, it is clear that knowledge of Achilles’ prowess in war goes beyond his allies. The recollection of Achilles’ terror on the battlefield from the last ten years is all the Trojans need for fear to be inevitable; chances are most of them had not faced Achilles personally, else they would likely not be alive. 104 In this way it is much like Bhīma whose reputation did, in fact, precede him. People need only hear tales of Achilles’ deeds to formulate an opinion (a fear) of him.

Achilles, unlike Bhīma, has other prominent features besides his strength. One of the first personality traits readers experience with Achilles is his stubbornness and childishness. Agamemnon, general of the Akhaian army, takes away Achilles’ main prize, Bresis105; as a result of this indignation, Achilles withdraws from the war, but he does not leave Troy. Achilles refuses to return to battle for most of the epic. Effectively, Achilles sits at his camp and pouts until he gets his way. He is showing the Akhaians that they cannot – they will not – survive

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103 Homer, *Iliad*, 443; 18.257-261; 18.262-264
104 Even demi-gods and mortals assisted by gods struggle against Achilles. It would be highly unlikely for a mortal with no divine help to stand toe to toe with Achilles, let alone defeat him.
105 Prizes are always linked to honour. This concept is discussed in chapter 3.
without him. This is a childish and selfish way to behave. Not only does Achilles withdraw but he keeps his men from battle as well. The Akhaian have lost a superior captain and fighter as well as an entire battalion of soldiers. Achilles would rather see people he has fought alongside with for ten years die than let this seemingly small injustice against him go. After countless deaths, Achilles rejoins the battle when his closest ally and friend has been killed; only after his heart was broken. Achilles cares nothing for those who have already perished before Patroklos. Before Patroklos is sent out to the battlefield, Patroklos comes to Achilles upset over the devastation of the Akhaian army. He speaks to Achilles with tears in his eyes:

ὦ Ἀχιλεῦ, Πηλῆος υἱέ, μέγα φέρτατ᾿ Ἀχαιών, μὴ νεμέσα· τοῖον γὰρ ἄχος βεβίηκεν Ἀχαιούς. οἱ μὲν γὰρ δὴ πάντες, ὅσοι πάρος ἦσαν ἄριστοι, ἐν νηυσὶν κέαται βεβλημένοι οὐτάμενοι τε.106

Akhilleus, prince and greatest of Akhaians, be forebearing. They are badly hurt, all who were best fights are now lying among the ships with spear or arrow wounds.107

Yet, Achilles’ retort to the plea is selfish:

ἀλλὰ τόδ᾿ αἰνὸν ἄχος κραδίην καὶ θυμὸν ἱκάνει, ὅπποτε δὴ τὸν ὁμοίον ἀνὴρ ἐθέλῃσιν ἀμέρσαι καὶ γέρας ἂψ ἀφελέσθαι, ὅ τε κράτεϊ προβεβήκη.108

Only this bitterness eats at my heart when one man would deprive and shame his equal, taking back his prize by abuse of power.109

This shows Achilles’ selfishness: he was wronged, not the Akhaian who are dying.

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108 Ibid., *Iliad*, Loeb 16.52-54.
109 Ibid., *Iliad*, 379; 16.52-54.
Alongside Achilles’ stubbornness and selfishness is his short temper. His short temper is witnessed early on when Agamemnon takes his prize and insults him; Achilles contemplates drawing his

\[ \text{ἥ ὁ γε φάσγανον ὀξὺ ἐρυσσάμενος παρὰ μηροῦ τοὺς μὲν ἀναστήσειεν, ὁ δ᾽ Ἀτρείδην ἐναρίζοι}, \]

…longsword from hip, stand off the rest, and kill in single combat the great son of Atreus…

Achilles has begun to draw his sword when Athena grabbed his hair and told him to stay his hand. She mentioned to him that he would later be rewarded very handsomely. It took a goddess to stop Achilles from killing the leader of the Akhaian army. Were Athena not there to stop Achilles, he likely would have allowed his rage to take over and have killed Agamemnon. This shows Achilles’ strength; he cannot be stopped by a mere mortal. Achilles also lacks self-control and foresight. It is unclear what sort of chaos the insubordination would have created at the Akhaian camp. Despite Achilles willingly choosing not to fight, much to the chagrin of his comrades, he was upset; Achilles

\[ \text{...φθινύθεσκε φίλον κῆρ \n       αὖθι μένων, ποθέεσκε δ᾽ ἀυτήν τε πτόλεμόν τε.} \]

…felt his valour staling in his breast with idleness, and missed the cries of battle.

Achilles felt so wronged by Agamemnon that he would deny himself what he enjoys most: battle. Achilles did not just have to go to battle, he wanted to go. Achilles was a warrior to his core; he enjoyed all aspects of battle, perhaps because he was so good at it and it provided him

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111 Ibid., *Iliad*, 18; 1.190-91.
112 Ibid., *Iliad*, Loeb, 1.491-92.
113 Ibid., *Iliad*, 1.491-92.
Achilles the Hero: Divine Intervention

There are numerous instances where the gods advance Achilles’ success. The first time Achilles gained the help of the gods was just after Agamemnon had scorned him: he asked his mother to

τὸν νῦν μὲν μνήσασα παρέξεω καὶ λαβὲ γούνων,
 αἰ κέν ποις ἐθέλησιν ἐπὶ Τρώεσσιν ἀρῆξαι,
 τοὺς δὲ κατὰ πρύμνας τε καὶ ἀμφ᾽ ἄλα ἔλσαι Αχαιοὺς
 κτεινομένους.\textsuperscript{114}

…cling to [Zeus’] knees and tell him your good pleasure
if he will take the Trojan side
and roll the Akhaians back to the water’s edge,
back on the ships with slaughter.\textsuperscript{115}

Thetis relayed the request to Zeus who obliges. He invites the following retort: was Zeus complying with Achilles because he favoured Achilles, because he favours Thetis, or because Zeus knew that if the Akhaians are not slowed Troy will be taken before it is time? Later in the epic, Achilles mentions this previously answered prayer:

ἡμὲν δὴ ποτ’ ἐμὸν ἔπος ἐκλύεις εὐξαμένοι,
τίμησας μὲν ἐμὲ, μέγα δ᾿ ἔλασι Αχαιῶν,
ηδ’ ἔτι καὶ νῦν μοι τὸ δ’ ἐπικρήηνον ἐξέλεις.\textsuperscript{116}

My lord, you heard me
praying before this, and honoured me
by punishing the Akhaian army. Now,
again, accomplish what I most desire.\textsuperscript{117}

\textsuperscript{114} Homer, \textit{Iliad}, Loeb, 1.407-10.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., \textit{Iliad}; 24-25; 1.407-10.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., \textit{Iliad}, Loeb 16.236-38.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., \textit{Iliad}, 384-285; 16.236-38.
It seems as though Achilles expects the gods to do what he requests since he continues to ask the gods for favours. During Achilles’ rampage, he needs rescuing from a river god and it is Athena and Poseidon who intervene to rescue him.\textsuperscript{118} Aineias, a demi-god himself, is one of the first heroes Achilles must face upon his return to the battle and suggests that the war would not have favoured the Akhaians as much if the gods had not helped Achilles:

\textit{εἰ δὲ θεός}
\textit{περ ἵσον τείνειν πολέμου τέλος, οὔ κε μάλα ρέα}
\textit{νικήσεi, οὔδ᾿ εἰ παγχάλκεος εὔχεται εἰναι.}\textsuperscript{119}

Would the gods only bring
under equal strain both parties to the fight
Akhilleus would not win so easily,
ot though the man is bronze from head to toe.\textsuperscript{120}

Fortunately for the Trojans, they have the gods on their side as well.\textsuperscript{121} This expectation for help from the gods expresses Achilles’ arrogance and as Seth Benardete points out, particularly towards the gods: “He treated the gods as if they were under his thumb and were as obedient to his whims as he had hoped Agamemnon would be. Achilles, who thought himself the master, becomes the slave to the gods. He cannot live without them. He must live miraculously.”\textsuperscript{122} The gods aided Achilles in all parts of his vengeance,\textsuperscript{123} so Achilles had thought the gods were doing \textit{his} bidding, but, in reality, it was the gods who controlled him.

The help Achilles receives from the gods does not go unnoticed by his opponents:

\textit{τῶ οὔκ ἔστ᾿ Ἀχιλῆος ἐναντίον ἄνδρα μάχεσθαι·}
\textit{αἰεὶ γὰρ πάρα εἰς γε θεῶν, οὔς λοιγὸν ἀμύνει.}\textsuperscript{124}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[118] Homer, \textit{Iliad}, 508-12.
\item[119] Ibid., \textit{Iliad}, Loeb, 20.100-202.
\item[120] Ibid., \textit{Iliad}, 476; 20.100-202.
\item[121] In a ways it seems as though heroes in general are quite ungrateful to the immortal helpers.
\item[122] Seth Bernadete, \textit{Achilles and Hector: The Homeric Hero}. (South Bend: St. Augustine’s Press, 2005), 111
\item[123] In reality, it was mostly his mother’s doing and the gods own will.
\item[124] Homer, \textit{Iliad}, Loeb, 20.97-98.
\end{footnotes}
This is the point: no man can fight Akhilleus. In every battle, one of the gods is there to save him from destruction.\textsuperscript{125}

However, Achilles does not notice the help he was offered by the gods. During the fight with Hektor when the Trojan prince throws his spear at Achilles, Athena had protected Achilles from it:

\begin{quote}
"\textit{(Handle, and throw your spear, and then} Athena blew a puff of wind, and turned the spearhead away from Akhilleus in his glory...}"
\end{quote}

Achilles tried to attack Hektor in the same way and the Trojan prince was saved by Apollo.

Achilles shows his ungratefulness towards the gods after this instance:

\begin{quote}
"\textit{You got away from death, you dog! The evil hour came near you, but Apollo saved you again... Even so, I’ll kill you later, on sight, if I too have a god beside me.}"
\end{quote}

Achilles fails to realize that Hektor’s poor aim was the result of a god (Athena), not a lack of skill. Is it ignorance or is it blatant disregard for the gods? It is disregard for the gods\textsuperscript{130} because

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{125} Homer, \textit{Iliad}, 476; 20.97-98.
\item \textsuperscript{126} Ibid., \textit{Iliad}, Loeb, 20.438-40.
\item \textsuperscript{127} Ibid., \textit{Iliad}, 487; 20.438-40.
\item \textsuperscript{128} Ibid., \textit{Iliad}, 20.449-450; 20.452-53.
\item \textsuperscript{129} Ibid., \textit{Iliad}, 487 20.449-450; 20.452-53.
\item \textsuperscript{130} It also shows a disregard for Hektor’s skill as a warrior. Achilles does not think that Hektor has a chance against him without a god, but Achilles feels he needs no such assistance.
\end{itemize}
both Achilles and Hektor are saved by gods in similar ways, but Achilles’ only acknowledges Apollo’s action. Without the gods, it is debatable whether Achilles would have defeated Hektor at all. When Achilles is chasing down Hektor around the Trojan walls it is Athena’s trickery that allows Achilles to catch up to Hektor and kill him. Where would Achilles be without the gods? Where would the Trojans be without them also?

Seth L. Schein acknowledges that the constant care for Achilles actually diminishes his greatness and lessens his triumph, for the care provided extends beyond other mortals.\(^{131}\) Achilles, the mighty hero of the *Iliad*, would be nothing without the gods’ help. This idea does parallel Benardete’s point that Achilles cannot live without the gods.

Furthermore, Achilles’ desire for glory is so strong that he ensures that the glory of others is incomparable to his. In regards to Achilles sending off Patroklos when Achilles himself refused to fight, Benardete notes that Achilles “…had not told Patrocles to avoid Hector. He did forbid him to attack Troy, lest Apollo might rout him, but he now omits the baser motive which had dictated his concern – his fear that Patrocles might achieve more glory and honour than himself – and substitutes the pretense that he warned him about Hector.”\(^{132}\) Benardete is referring to Achilles’ back peddling after Patroklos death at the hands of Hektor. Before Patroklos headed into battle, Achilles says to Patroklos:

\[
\begin{align*}
ei\ δε\ κεν\ αυ\ τοι \\
dω\ η\ κυδος\ αρεσθαι\ εριγδουπος\ ποσις\ Ήρης, \\
mη\ συ\ γ’\ ανευθεν\ εμνε\ λυλαιεσθαι\ πολεμιζει \\
τρωσι\ φιλοπτολεμουσιν\ άτιμότερον\ δε\ με\ θησεις
\end{align*}
\]

If Hera’s lord
… grant you the day’s honor

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\(^{132}\) Benardete, *Achilles and Hector*, 111.

\(^{133}\) Homer, *Iliad*, Loeb, 16.87-90.
covet no further combat far from me
with Trojan soldiers. That way you’d deny me
recompense of honor…”  

Achilles fears that Patroklos’ honour will overshadow his own; this is the true reason he wished for him to not engage with Hektor. Han Van Wees outlines Alvin Gouldner’s stance: “…the competition for honour “approaches a zero-sum game, in that someone can win only if someone else loses.” (1967:49).” It is almost as if there is a finite amount of honour in the war, and it cannot be split or shared amongst allies. Even though he is not a part of the war, Achilles holds the honour. Were Patroklos to kill Hektor, the leader of the Trojans and source of their moral, he would take the honour from Achilles. Achilles would become “Achilles who?” and Homer would have asked the muses to tell of Patroklos, not Achilles. Yet, Achilles, being the quintessential hero, cannot allow anyone to take away his glory he worked so hard for. James A. Arieti suggests that for Achilles to order “… Patroclus to withdraw in the midst of success required more than the nature a soldier could allow.” Achilles would not have been the only warrior to strive for glory. In the heat of battle a warrior would continue until they could not. Achilles should have known that it would be against Patroklos’ nature to stop at the peak of his glory. He also should have known that Patroklos could not stop fighting unless he was physically unable to.

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Achilles the Anti-Hero: Unforgivable Ferocity

This section describes Achilles after the death of Patroklos, highlighting a noticeable shift from hero to anti-hero in Achilles and the implications of it. The reason for this detailed discussion of Achilles as an anti-hero is based off an observation by Schein: “… Achilles, after he learns of Patroklos’ death at the beginning of Book 18, becomes the constant focus of attention and is portrayed by Homer in the final seven books as qualitatively different from what he had been earlier in the poem” (emphasis added).\textsuperscript{137} Previously, the *Iliad* outlined a man who was excellent at fighting, but refused to do so. Achilles’ new exploits take place in four books in which he ends up killing eleven other heroes.\textsuperscript{138} The death of Patroklos shifts the direction of Achilles’ rage and thus the actions associated with his rage. Initially, Achilles sought to punish Agamemnon and the Akhaians by refusing to participate in battle which likely resulted in more Akhaian deaths and the extension of an already long drawn out war. While Achilles did not act to harm his allies, his inaction did end up harming them; in a way, Achilles was helping the Trojans. After Patroklos’ death Achilles’ anger shifted from the Akhaians to Hektor and the Trojans. Where inaction hurt the Akhaians, action hurt the Trojans.

Moreover, Arieti acknowledges the change in Achilles: “When Achilles returns to battle, he fights with a brutality which we see nowhere else in Homer.”\textsuperscript{139} Achilles did not just return to battle and do a soldier’s duty; he returned to battle with a new focus. Previously Achilles had fought to win the war, moderately unattached, but now Achilles fought to punish; his actions were completely driven by emotions. There is a sense of joy experienced by Achilles when he rejoins battle. This is understandable to an extent as he does enjoy battle, but now he appears to

\textsuperscript{137} Schein, *The Mortal Hero*, 89.
\textsuperscript{138} These men are all given names which indicates that they are more than just the average foot soldier.
\textsuperscript{139} Arieti, “Achilles’ Guilt,” 201.
enjoy the death of his enemies as made evident by Homer’s description of Achilles singing about the death of a soldier:

“κεῖσαι, Ὀτρυντεΐδη, πάντων ἐκπαγλότατ’ ἀνδρῶν·
ἐνθάδε τοι θάνατος, γενεή δὲ τοί ἐστ’ ἐπὶ λίμνη
Γυγαίη, δόθι τοι τέμενος πατρώιόν ἐστιν,
'Τῆλε ἐπ’ ἰχθυόεντι καὶ Ἐρμὼ δινήεντι.”140

“Terror of all soldiers, there you lie!
Here is your place of death! So far away
your birthplace, near Gygaie lake and there
your father’s royal parkland on the trout-stream
Hyllos and the eddying Hermos river!”141

Achilles is absolutely jubilant to be back on the battlefield killing anyone who stands before him. Even while the troops rest for the evening, Achilles is eager to fight, refusing the need for sleep or sustenance:

τὸ μοι οὐ τι μετὰ φρεσὶ ταῦτα μέμηλεν,
ἄλλα φόνος τε καὶ αἷμα καὶ ἀργαλέος στόνος ἀνδρῶν.142

Your concerns are none of mine.
Slaughter and blood are what I crave, and groans
of anguished men!143

Achilles is taking the joy of battle to an entirely new level. Achilles yearns for battle to soothe his soul and his heart. He wanted to hear the painful cries of his enemy just as he cried in anguish over the death of his comrade; he wants people to suffer as he has suffered. It is as if the death cries and bloodied bodies sustain Achilles’ life force at this time.

In an attempt to make people suffer, Achilles becomes less of a civilized man and more of a wild beast. There are three instances where the adjective of “wild” is used in relation to

Achilles: once in Book 20, where the adjective is used to describe his cries (wild, blood chilling) and another in Book 20 describing him as

\[\text{ὣς ὅ γε πάντῃ θόνε σὺν ἔγχει δαίμονι ἱσος, κτεινομένους ἐφέπων· ρέε δ’ αἵματι γαία μέλαινα.}\]

...a wild god, trampling the men he killed.\(^{145}\)

The third instance is in Book 21 where he is described as a wild god that

\[\text{ὀ δ’ ἔσθορε δαίμονι ἱσος, φάσγανον οἶον ἐχον, κακὰ δὲ φρεσὶ μήδετο ἔργα,}\]

...leapt in savagely for bloody work...\(^{147}\)

Two instances of his wild god description were accompanied by him attacking left and right.

This portrays him as a frenzied or madman; Homer even states later that

\[\text{ὀ δὲ σφεδανὸν ἐφεπ’ ἔγχει, λύσσα δὲ οἱ κῆρ αἰὲν ἔχε κρατερή, μενέαινε δὲ κῦδος ἀρέσθαι.}\]

Achilles [was]/ wrought to a frenzy...\(^{149}\)

He is quickly dispatching his enemies and were an ally to be in the midst of the flurry of iron he, too, would have been struck down.\(^{150}\) Homer is sure to point out that in book 21.1-12 Achilles’ enemies are fleeing and he is still attacking which makes his frenzied behaviour a little worse.

The enemy was retreating, the battle won, but Achilles did not want to stop there; spoken in an iron voice, Achilles states:

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\(^{144}\) Homer, *Iliad*, Loeb, 20.493-94.
\(^{145}\) Ibid., *Iliad*, 488; 20.493-94.
\(^{146}\) Ibid., *Iliad*, Loeb, 21.18-19.
\(^{147}\) Ibid., *Iliad*, 494; 21.18-19.
\(^{149}\) Ibid., *Iliad*, 510; 21.542-43.
\(^{150}\) Very reminiscent of the Hindu story of Kālī who killed her husband Śiva in a frenzied attack, not realizing the man before her was him.
νῦν δ᾿ οὐκ ἔσθ᾿ ὃς τις θάνατον φύγῃ, ὃν κε θεός γε Ἰλίου προπάροιθεν ἐμῇς ἐν χερσὶ βάλησι, 151

...no man that heaven
puts in my hands will get away from death... 152

Clearly, Achilles would not allow any Trojan to escape whether he begs for mercy or promises Hektor’s demise.

Perhaps more disturbing is when Achilles throws Lykaon’s dead body in the river so that Lykaon’s family could not give him a proper burial. As Susan French notes: “warriors should not desecrate the corpses of their enemies but should, whenever possible, allow them to be buried by their own people and according to their own cultural tractions.” 153 Achilles’ disregard for Lykaon’s dignity is extremely egregious and probably deliberate. Achilles knows what is right to do, but turns his back on propriety. During the entire Iliad, both sides in the end are permitted to collect their dead for burial – even Achilles is able, with difficulty, to collect Patroklos (though his burial does not take place until Hektor is dead). In a fit of rage, Achilles denies his enemies this basic respect, reflecting his anti-heroic side and by extension, his lack of morality.

Further to Achilles’ savage, frenzied fighting is an analogy at the end of book 20, which I wish to focus on:

ὁς δ’ ὅτε τις ζεῦξῃ βόας ἄρσενας εὐρυμετώπους
tribέμεναι κρι λευκόν έυκτιμένη ἐν ἀλωῇ,
ῥίμφα τε λέπτ᾽ ἐγένοντο βοῶν ὑπὸ πόσσ᾽ ἐριμύκων,
ὡς ὑπ᾽ Ἀχιλλῆος μεγαθύμου μιόνυχες ὑπ’ ουν

151 Homer, Iliad, Loeb 21.103-04.
152 Ibid., Iliad, 496; 21.103-04.
στεῖβον ὁμοῦ νέκυας τε καὶ ἀσπίδας· αἵματι δ᾿ ἄξων νέρθεν ἅπας πεπάλακτο καὶ

As when a countryman
yokes oxen with broad brows to tread out barley
on a well-bedded threshing floor, and quickly
the grain is husked under the bellowing beasts:
the sharp-hooved horses of Akhilleus just so
crushed dead men and shields. His axle-tree
was splashed with blood…

While Homer does state after the analogy that the horses did crush the men, he omitted part of
the explanation that has serious implications. This is presumably a straight analogy, just as oxen
flatten out the ground with their hooves, so do the horses of Achilles. The idea of husking in this
context is unsettling because husking removes the outside of a seed; surely Homer intended for
the audience to take the next step in this vivid analogy: that the husk (skin) of the humans were
being torn from their seed (bone). While it is not Achilles rending the flesh from bone it still
represents the frenzied and graphic nature of Achilles’ attack. Had he the power and the time,
Achilles likely would have taken the time to desecrate every corpse by “husking” them. In short,
this grisly metaphor describes a man who cannot and will not be stopped.

Further to Achilles attack on the Trojans, Homer uses some interesting language to
describe Achilles during his assault. Homer describes Achilles as having

 fldgι υπεί κάμε χειρας ἐναιρον, 156
“arm-weared by butchery…”157

Generally, the term butchery is saved for deplorable massacres. Ordinarily, only those who are
completely against war would refer to the act of killing during a war as butchery. Clearly,

154 Homer, Iliad, Loeb, 20.495-500.
155 Homer, Iliad, 489; 20.495-500.
Achilles has taken his act of killing past a point of social acceptability and into some new territory that constitutes him as murderer. Homer uses his language in an interesting way to describe Achilles and his actions. After Achilles had killed Hektor, Homer suggests that Achilles’ actions are “shameless” and “abusive.” Presumably, the muses are describing Achilles’ actions and this line is a commentary provided by Homer. Even the man reiterating the story does not agree with Achilles’ decision and he feels as though the action of desecrating and dishonouring Hektor’s body is shameful.

Homer describes Achilles’ actions as savage-like:

Αὐτὰρ ὁ διογενὴς δόρυ μὲν λίπεν αὐτοῦ ἐπ᾿ ὀχθῇ κεκλιμένον μυρίκῃσιν, ὁ δ᾿ ἔσθορε δαίμονι ἰσος, φάσγανον οἶον ἔχων, κακὰ δὲ φρεσὶ μὴδέτο ἔργα.

“He left his spear propped on a tamarisk by the riverbank, then like a wild god leapt in savagely for bloody work with sword in hand…”

Savagely, as defined by Merriam Webster, is one of four options:

1a. not domesticated or under human control;
1b. lacking restraints normal to civilized human beings;
2. Wild and uncultivated;
3a. boorish, rude;
3b. malicious;
4. Lacking complex or advanced culture.

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158 Apollo condemns Achilles’ action by referring to him as “murderous Achilles” (Iliad, 586; 24.39). All’s not fair in war.
159 Homer, Iliad, 536; 23.24.
160 More about this will be discussed in chapter 5.
162 Ibid., Iliad, 494; 21.17-19.
None of these definitions shines a positive light on Achilles and all four of these definitions are applicable to him during his rampage after his friend’s death. Achilles at this moment, again, dons his bestial, uncivilized guise and wreaks havoc on the Trojans.

Achilles’ spear, his weapon that no one else can use, as it attempts to hit Lykaon is described as

\[ \text{ιεμένη χρυσός ἀμεναι ἀνδρομέοι.} \]

…starved, for blood and raw manflesh…

This is a metaphor for Achilles himself. The spear itself has no real motive or desires, rather, it is acting on the will of Achilles; it is Achilles who is starved for blood and raw man flesh. It would not be out of the realm of possibility that Achilles has blurred the boundary between man and animal which is why it is man flesh and not just flesh – beasts eat the flesh of man. Achilles is in such disarray after the death of Patroklos that he only has destruction on his mind. He told Odysseus previously he only craved slaughter and blood, so it is unlikely his appetite had been sated at this point; and it likely would not be until Hektor was dead.

However, Achilles’ animalistic qualities are not just related to consuming flesh, but his ability to track in the form of a hound is also mentioned:

\[ \text{"Εκτορα δ’ ἀσπερχές κλονέων ἔφεπ’ ὡκύς Ἀχιλλεύς.} \]
\[ \text{ός δ’ ὅτε νεβρόν δρεσφι κόων ἐλάφου δίηται,} \]
\[ \text{όρσας ἓ εύνης, δία τ’ ἥγα καὶ διὰ βήσσας;} \]
\[ \text{τὸν δ’ εἰ πέρ τε λάθησι καταπτήξας υπὸ θάμνω,} \]
\[ \text{ἀλλὰ τ’ ἀνιχνεύων θέει ἑμπεδον, ὅφρα κεν εὐρή;} \]
\[ \text{ὡς Ἐκτορ οὐ λήθε ποδόκεα Πηλεώνα."} \]

“Great Akhilleus, hard on Hektor’s heels, kept after him, the way a hound will harry

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164 Homer, Iliad, Loeb, 21.70.
165 Ibid., Iliad, 495; 21.70.
166 Ibid., Iliad, Loeb, 22.188-193.
a deer’s fawn he has startled from its bed
to chase though gorge and open glade, and when
the quarry goes to earth under a bush
he holds the scent and quarters till he finds it,
so with Hektor: he could not shake off
the great runner; Akhilleus.”167

Again, Achilles is likened to an animal. Admittedly, the hound does not seem as ferocious as the other beasts Achilles had been compared to, but is a beast none-the-less. Further, a hound will never stop tracking its prey which makes it terrifying in its own way. Achilles, like a hound, is relentless in his pursuit of the Trojan commander. Achilles is a hunter, a predator, who will not stop until his prey is in his jaws.

Conclusion & Comparison

Ultimately, unlike Bhīma who was a homogenous mix of demon and human, Achilles embodies traits of a man with two distinct personalities that range from heroic to anti-heroic. Achilles the hero is a strong and fair fighter, but he is arrogant and selfish. None of these traits could be considered immoral. Achilles the anti-hero is completely different from his heroic counterpart; he no longer fights fairly or even humanely – as far as killing can be humane. After Patroklos’ death, Achilles is no longer fuelled by duty or joy in battle; he is now fuelled by bloodlust and revenge. He is likened to a wild animal, which genuinely represents his uncivilized nature, especially as it demonstrates his brutality in killing.168 He kills those who beg for mercy; he discards bodies so they cannot be buried properly. Achilles’ actions become unjustifiably immoral. However, similar to Bhīma and morality, it seems as though assigning

167 Ibid., Iliad, 521; 22.188-193.
168 One can assume that Achilles fought and killed much like the other heroes did in this epic.
morality to his character would be too simple: both heroes display characteristics – beastlike, savage actions – that seem to parallel an idea of immorality. They both exhibit human traits of strength and courage, but they also display a more demon or antihero models. Their negative aspects allow them to do things that they might not otherwise do. However, there is more to be consider before judging Achilles to be moral or immoral. On the outset, he made some immoral decisions, but as the rest of this thesis shows, there is more to their decisions than morality.

Despite the normal scholarly comparison of Arjuna and Achilles, and based on the previous two character sketches, it seems as though Bhīma and Achilles are more comparable characters. Both Achilles and Bhīma represent the best warrior in their respective epics. Bhīma, upon his birth, is considered the best of the mighty, indicating his unmatched strength in battle. Achilles is similarly unmatched in battle and the success or failure of the Akhaians hinges on him. They both are the keys to victory in battle and without them success would not have come – or at least it would not have come as easily. They are often described as being terrifying in battle, and even the mere idea of these warriors fighting was enough to scare the enemy. Their strength helped win the wars by defeating the captains of the opposing army.169

However, their strength leads them into a different realm. Both have a different side to their character, a side that takes battle more seriously than the typical warrior would. They behave in ways that are questionable and attack enemies with such ferocity it is almost animalistic. The reasons behind their frenzied fighting is love. Despite being considered a demon (Bhīma) or an anti-hero (Achilles), they are emotional beings. Once their loved ones have been dishonoured, both warriors behave in a darker manner.170 Bhīma, who was once a

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169 It is unlikely that only Bhīma could have killed Duryodhana. Arjuna is skilled fighter in his own right, and Bhīma only won by cheating. Perhaps Arjuna would not have been able to cheat in the duel like Bhīma did.
170 The idea of love being a motivation for these two warriors will be explored in chapter 3.
human, inherits the traits of a demon, while Achilles completely denies the behaviour of a hero and becomes the anti-hero. Both men attack viciously and without mercy. Bhīma displays bestial qualities, particularly when he kills Duḥśāsana. Achilles attacks with a wild frenzy, slaughtering anyone who gets in his way. They are driven by a desire to see their enemies suffer; they want them to suffer for the insults against their loved ones, Patroklos and Draupadī. The difference between the changes of the heroes’ is that Bhīma becomes a mix of human and demon, but Achilles becomes an entirely different person. Bhīma only kills in a demonic way when he has to, but Achilles will kill anyone in his way in an anti-heroic way; he attacks viciously without reservation. The character sketches show a dichotomy within these two heroes; on the one side, the hero, the ‘good’ guy, and on the other side is the demon, the ‘bad’ guy. Although, the light and dark aspects of Bhīma’s personality are slightly less contrasted than Achilles’, both epics described the latter personality in great detail. While descriptions such as “hero” and “good guy” are applied mainly to describe the warriors and their fighting style, terms such as “demon” and “bad guy” best characterize their actions throughout the epic as they seek revenge for their loved ones. The latter descriptions are how they are generally perceived.

Coincidentally, for the Iliad, Achilles’ strength makes him good enough to warrant being the main character. Bhīma, despite having the same strength as his Akhaian counterpart, is still overshadowed by Arjuna, who, although a great fighter in his own right, is not recognized by his strength. The similarities between Bhīma and Achilles and their difference in stature in the epics expresses an issue with the best warrior, with strength as an important feature. This is odd since the Mahābhārata is about war, yet it shudders to think of itself as a war epic.

War and the warrior class are the prime focus of the Iliad; this is made evident by the placement of Achilles in the forefront. There is no Iliad without Achilles. The Mahābhārata, on
the other hand, while being about the warrior caste (*kṣatriya*), war itself is not what matters. Bhīma’s presence in the background makes this evident. Arjuna, a skilled fighter (but perhaps not as engaged in war as Bhīma) is central to the very important theme of correct and unattached *dharma*. The epic could continue on without Bhīma because the importance of a strong warrior like Bhīma pales in comparison to the importance of a *dharma*-focused Arjuna.
Chapter 3: Obligation

Heroes are bound to do what they do in war because of duty, a sense of obligation. In some instances, this obligation is to themselves; in other instances, it is to society. The latter could be viewed more as a duty. Achilles and Bhīma must follow certain codes of conduct being in the warrior class. Specifically, Achilles should follow a heroic code that outlines the behaviour of a warrior in battle, while Bhīma should follow the dharma of a kṣatriya, the class he was born into. Being that they are men of passion and susceptible to human emotions they also feel they have an obligation to the ones they love. Achilles creates for himself an obligation to Patroklos\textsuperscript{171} to avenge his death and re-join battle, which is really what Patroklos wanted in the first place, and Bhīma feels he must do all he can to protect and avenge his wife, Draupadī. Almost all of Bhīma’s actions are motivated by her. The most questionable acts from these two heroes comes after a request from a loved one, or in the case of Achilles, the burden he placed on himself. Are Achilles and Bhīma acting the way they are in accordance with their code, their dharma? Or are they acting out of love, a blood stained, malicious love? Are they doing both simultaneously? Can they do both? The idea of obligation manipulates morality for if one was to act out of obligation, societal or personal, can it still be immoral? Can it still be judged from a moral point of view? Bhīma and Achilles manage to commit themselves to both their code and their loved ones; however, Achilles is so blinded by rage that he does not fully adhere to his code. There are instances where their obligations to their loved ones slightly overshadows their obligation to their code. Morality, when viewed through the lens of an obligation, particularly to a love one, is not as clear – as much as morality can be clear – because doing something

\textsuperscript{171}In reality this obligation is entirely in Achilles’ head as Patroklos’ body is not burned – not prepared for descent into the Underworld – until after Hector’s death. Achilles will not let his friend rest until he has completed this self-imposed obligation.
(seemingly in the case of Achilles) selfless does not appear immoral.

_Iliad: For Honour_

The heroic code for the Akhaians is most closely linked to honour, specifically individual honour. Mark W. Edwards summarizes the heroic code as: “Always be the best, and superior to others”\(^{172}\) This is similar to Gouldner’s idea that honour is a ‘zero-sum game’ wherein there is only one winner, and only one person may hold the finite amount of honour and it is not to be distributed or shared.\(^{173}\) It is important for the hero to be the best and be honoured by his peers. Agamemnon, the general of all the Akhaian army, views himself as the best warrior: he has taken Achilles’

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αὐτὸς ἵων κλισήνδε, τὸ σὸν γέρας, ὅφρ’ ἐὼ εἰδῆς,
δὸςον φέρτερός εἰμι σέθεν, στυγή δὲ και ἄλλος
 ἰσον ἐμοι φάσθαι και ὀμοιωθήμεναι ἄντην.\(^{174}\)
\]

…prize,

to show [Achilles] here and now who is the stronger and make the next man sick at heart – if any think of claiming equal place with [Agamemnon].\(^{175}\)

The leader of the Akhaian army is taking Achilles’ prize, the best girl, because he believes himself to be superior to all; therefore, he should be awarded the best prize. Achilles disagrees, stating,

\[
ἀλλὰ τὸ μὲν πλεῖον πολυάικος πολέμοι
χείρες ἐμαὶ δίεπουσ’ ἀτάρ ἢν ποτε δασμός ἱκηταί,
σοὶ τὸ γέρας πολὺ μεῖζον…\(^{176}\)
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\(^{173}\) Gouldner, Alvin, 1967: 49 in Van Wees, _Status Warriors_, 64.

\(^{174}\) Homer, _Iliad_, Loeb, 1.185-87.

\(^{175}\) Ibid., _Iliad_, 17: 1.185-87.

\(^{176}\) Ibid., _Iliad_, Loeb, 1.165-167.
I have seen more action/ hand to hand in those assaults than you have, but when the time for sharing comes, the greater share is always yours.177

Achilles claims to do all the work while Agamemnon reaps the benefits and glory.

Although honour, theoretically, cannot be divvied up amongst allies, its physical representation can be. Each hero, after a successful raid, is awarded booty and “a hero’s honor was concretely represented by the quality of his booty – tripods, horses, pots and pans, gold, bronze, and women.”178 Edwards also acknowledges the physical representation of honour in the form of booty and adds that the objects are a “… public acknowledgement of [the hero’s] superiority.”179 The physical representation of Achilles’ honour for a previous raid was Briseis. When Agamemnon took her it was as if he took Achilles’ honour. Before Agamemnon took Briseis he proclaimed to the Akhaians:

αὐτὰρ ἐμοὶ γέρας αὐτιχ’ ἑτοιμάσατ’, ὃφρα μὴ οἶος Ἀργείων ἀγέραστος ἐω, ἐπεὶ οὐδὲ ἐοίκε·180

You must prepare, however, a prize of honor for me, and at once, that I may be left without my portion.181

Again, Agamemnon requires recompense in the form of the most excellent prize. In a way, Briseis represents ultimate glory and honour – previously it was Chryseis182 – so when Agamemnon was without his honour, he needed to get it back. Agamemnon had to take the best honour, so he took Achilles’ honour leaving him with none. Naoko Yagamata points out “heroes

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177 Homer, *Iliad*, 17; 1.165-167.
181 Ibid., *Iliad*, 17; 1.118-119.
182 Chryseis was the daughter of a priest of Apollo. Chryses asked Agamemnon for her back but when Agamemnon refused Apollo sent a plague of arrows upon the Akhaians which would only subside when Chryseis was returned.
need heroic honor, and if it is not given, there will be heroic retaliation." This accounts for the majority of the characters’ reactions in the *Iliad*. The war was initially started over Menelaos’ loss of honour when Paris took Helen; Menelaos needed to retaliate for he was not to receive more honour to replace this lost honour. Achilles’ wrath begins with Agamemnon taking Achilles’ honour. Achilles instantly wished to kill Agamemnon, but was restrained by Athena. Of course, unlike Menelaos’ situation, Achilles could have easily regained his honour by defeating Hektor and taking Troy, but Achilles was too selfish for that. The tarnishing of his personal honour needed to be represented with the tarnishing, that is death, of the Akhaian army. In an attempt to placate Achilles’ anger the Akhaians offered him plentiful gifts so that he did not get to the point of absolute destruction:

{oǐ σε θεὸν ὣς
tίσουσ’· ἦ γάρ κέ σφι μάλα μέγα κῦδος ἄροιο.}

These will honour you as gods are honoured!
and ah, for these, what glory may you win!

Achilles denies the physical representation of glory, even though it would put him on the same level of power as the gods, presumably the highest, but instead Achilles opted to let the Akhaians suffer so they would realize their mistake in taking his honour.

While booty is a large motivation for a warrior to act, shame is also a vital portion of honour. Hektor’s death is a direct result of his shame; he knows he cannot defeat Achilles, but he faces him outside the walls because death is better than shame from the Trojan people. The

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184 In fact, it was embarrassing and shameful for Menelaos that he allowed his wife to be taken from his home. It does not show his desirability as a husband or his strength to keep Paris off of his wife. Of course, what Paris did, which was not abiding by the rules of guest friendship, a relationship that is protected by Zeus, was more shameful, but not in the same way; Paris defied the gods.
Trojans would have mocked Hektor for staying in the walls, even if it preserved his life. Near the end of the war, Hektor struggles with personal shame himself:

“ὤ μοι ἐγών, εἰ μέν κε πύλας καὶ τείχεα δύω, Πουλυδάμας μοι πρῶτος ἐλεγχείην ἀναθήσει, ὃς μ᾿ ἐκέλευε Τρωσὶ ποτὶ πτόλιν ἡγήσασθαι νύσθ’ ὑπὸ τῆν ὀλοῆν, ὅτε τ᾿ ὤρετο δίος Ἀχιλλεύς. ἀλλ᾿ ἐγὼ οὐ πιθόμην· ἦ τ᾿ ἂν πολὺ κέρδιον ἦεν. νῦν δ᾿ ἔπει ὀλέσα λαὸν ἀτασθαλίησιν ἐμῆσιν, αἰδέομαι Τρῶας καὶ Τρῳάδας ἑλκεσιπέπλους, μὴ ποτὲ τις εἴπῃσι κακώτερος ἄλλος ἐμεῖο· Ἐκτωρ ἦρι βίηφι πιθήσασ ὀλέσει λαόν.’ ὃς ἔρεουσιν ἔμοι δὲ τότ᾿ ἂν πολὺ κέρδιον εἴη ἀντιν ἂ Ἀχιλῆα κατακτείναντα νέεσθαι, ἴν κεν αὐτῷ ὀλέσθαι εὐκλειῶς πρὸ πόληος.”

Here I am badly caught. If I take cover, Slipping inside the gate and wall, the first To accuse me for it will be Poulydamas, He who told me I should lead the Trojans Back to the city on that cursed night Akhilleus joined the battle. No, I would not, Would not, wiser though it would have been. Now troops have perished for my foolish pride, I am ashamed to face townsmen and women. Someone inferior to me may say: ‘He kept his pride and lose his men, this Hektor!’ So it will go. Better, when that time comes, That I appear as he who killed Akhilleus Man to man, or else that I went down Before him honorably for the city’s sake

Hektor wants to stay inside the walls where it is safe, but he also does not want to be shamed by his people. Hektor is an able-bodied fighter; therefore, he ought to fight to protect those who cannot. Even before Hektor battles Achilles, the Trojans and Hektor dealt with shame from Apollo who scorns them for retreating:

ἀλλ’ αὐτοὶ τρεῖ’ ἄσπετον οὐδὲ μάχεσθε.\textsuperscript{190}

Amazing,
the way you shrink from battle!\textsuperscript{191}

A member of the Trojan army, Aineis shouted at Hektor:

\begin{quote}
αἰδὼς μὲν νῦν ἥδε γ᾿ ἀρηφίλων ὑπ᾿ Ἀχαιῶν Ἐλιον εἰσαναβήναι ἀναλκείησι δαμέντας.\textsuperscript{192}
\end{quote}

what shame
to go back into Ilion, spent and beaten!\textsuperscript{193}

Both these shame inducing statements reinvigorated the Trojans because they could not bear the idea of being shamed by the gods or each other. Death was much preferred to shame for both the Trojans and the Akhaians, though Achilles did not seem to exhibit any shame as he retreated from war and allowed the Akhaians to die. Later in the epic, he does become ashamed of himself for failing to protect Patroklos, but he was still not motivated by shame externally.

\textit{Iliad: Without Shame}

Apart from glory and shame being key motivators for a warrior to fight, it is often believed that it is far better to die young on the battlefield in a blaze of glory than to die of old age at home. A warrior will be remembered better if he succumbed to his death on the battlefield.\textsuperscript{194} This is something Hektor has in the back of his mind as he faced Achilles: better

\textsuperscript{190} Homer, \textit{Iliad}, Loeb, 17.332.
\textsuperscript{191} Ibid., \textit{Iliad}, 417; 17.332.
\textsuperscript{192} Ibid., \textit{Iliad}, Loeb, 17.336-7.
\textsuperscript{193} Ibid., \textit{Iliad} 418; 17.336-7.
\textsuperscript{194} This really only applies to warriors. If a man is not part of war or it is not wartime, there is no shame in dying of old age. Warriors are not always warriors. Odysseus, the one who comes up with the Trojan horse, likely dies at home because there is no war, but he still maintains his glory from the Trojan War.
to die a hero with honour than die a coward without it.\textsuperscript{195} W. Thomas MacCary states: “The hallmark of the heroic society is the code demanding death in battle when the warrior is at his best.”\textsuperscript{196} As far as MacCary is concerned a hero must die at his prime and to stick with the code is to expect death and to an extent accept it. A warrior must accept death if he intends to fight without fear. Achilles muses about whether he should be in battle and what it would mean for him and he presents the dilemma most men at war face:

\begin{center}
e\imath\;\mu\epsilon\n\;\kappa^{\prime}\;\alpha\upsilon\upsilon\theta\iota\mu\varphi\iota\mu\;\mu\acute{e}\nu\nu\iota\;\tau\rho\omega\omega\nu\;\pi\omicron\lambda\iota\nu\;\acute{\alpha}m\phi\iota\mu\acute{a}\chi\omega\mu\nu\iota,
\end{center}

\begin{center}
o\acute{\omega}λ\epsilon\omicron\;\mu\acute{e}\nu\;\mu\omicron\;\nu\acute{o}\sigma\tau\omicron\nu\iota,
\end{center}

\begin{center}
\acute{\alpha}\tau\acute{a}\varrho\;\kappa\acute{\lambda}e\omicron\varphi\iota\theta\iota\omicron\nu\;\acute{\epsilon}\sigma\tau\upsilon\acute{\iota}\nu\iota\;
\end{center}

\begin{center}
e\iota\;\delta\acute{e}\;\kappa\acute{e}n\;\omicron\iota\kappa\acute{a}d\acute{e}\;\acute{\iota}k\omega\omicron\;\phi\i\lambda\iota\nu\;\acute{e}\zeta\;\pi\acute{a}t\acute{r}i\omicron\acute{a}\;\gamma\acute{a}i\acute{a}n,
\end{center}

\begin{center}
o\acute{\omega}λ\epsilon\omicron\;\mu\omicron\;\kappa\acute{\lambda}e\omicron\acute{e}\;\acute{s}\sigma\theta\omicron\nu\omicron,
\end{center}

\begin{center}
\acute{\epsilon}i\;\acute{e}i\;\acute{\delta}\epsilon\;\mu\omicron\;\acute{o}i\i\delta\omicron\;\acute{e}\;\mu\omicron\;\acute{o}i\;\omicron\iota\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicrontextsuperscript{197}

…if on one hand I remain to fight around Troy town, I lose all hope of home but gain unfading glory; on the other, if I sail back to my own land my glory fails – but a long life lies ahead for me.\textsuperscript{198}

Achilles presents the choices laid before a warrior: either stay, die young and gain glory, or go home and have a full life with no glory. Every warrior faces this dilemma and, generally, they all leap for glory, despite knowing it leads to death. Every warrior is coaxed into remaining on the battlefield by shame, as Akhaian Aias reminds readers:

\begin{center}
\phi\epsilon\nu\gamma\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicrontextsuperscript{199}

Those who run have nether fighting power nor any honor!\textsuperscript{200}

\textsuperscript{195} Paris, who ironically ends up being the one who kills Achilles, represents the latter. He lives a longer life than Hektor, but he does so behind the walls of Troy and without honour.
\textsuperscript{197} Homer, \textit{Iliad}, Loeb, 9.414-416.
\textsuperscript{198} Ibid., \textit{Iliad}, 216; 9.414-416.
\textsuperscript{199} Ibid., \textit{Iliad}, Loeb, 15.564.
\textsuperscript{200} Ibid., \textit{Iliad}, 367; 15.564.
Even Hektor, who battles with this, reprimands Paris, his brother, for not fighting:

αἵθ᾿ ὄφελς ἄγονός τ᾿ ἐμεναι ἄγαμός τ᾿ ἀπολέσθαι.
καὶ κε τὸ βουλοΐμην, καὶ κεν πολὺ κέρδιον ἦν
ἡ οὕτω λώβην τ᾿ ἐμεναι καὶ υπόψιον ἀλλον.
ἡ ποι καγχαλόσσι κάρη κομόωντες Αχαιοί,
φάντες ἀριστητα πρόμον ἐμεναι, οὐνεκα καλὸν
εἶδος ἐπ᾿ ἀλλ. οὐκ ἔστι βή φρεσίν οὐδὲ τις ἀλκή.201

You should have had no seed and died unmarried.
Would to god you had!
Better than living this way in dishonor,
in everyone’s contempt.
Now they can laugh, Akhaians
who thought you were a first-rate man, a champion,
going by looks – and no backbone, no staying
power is in you.202

Hektor’s chastisement worked: Paris did join the battle; however, it is rare that shame does not inspire a warrior to arms. Many men when they cannot find the strength to face their death are shamed into making the ‘right’203 decision. They are shamed into undying glory.

Alongside shame, the heroic code seems to explain why these men fight in the first place. Charles Rowan Beye suggests “Homeric society is ruthlessly competitive; every hero is utterly self-interested, if not truly narcissistic… a male lives for glory, for the honor extended him by the group, since it is the only way in which he is validated.”204 This is evident in Achilles unwavering decision not to fight. He only cares about his stolen glory and not the men dying all

203 Right in quotation marks because, although, generally, it is better for an Akhaian man to fight risking death than to not it is still a personal decision and what might be right for the group is not right for the individual and vice versa. Technically it could be argued that Achilles is completely in the right in an honour driven society. He lost his honour and therefore should wait until proper punishment has been distributed, or until he can get his honour back. This does not benefit the society as it leads to the deaths of many Akhaians who could have been spared had Achilles not withdrawn from battle. However, unlike most warriors, Achilles cannot be shamed (or bribed) back into battle.
around him. Achilles could have prevented the deaths of so many Akhaians, but he was too concerned with himself. Even Agamemnon has this problem; so many advised against his taking of Briseis, but he did anyway, as he was concerned only with himself. In fact, it took the plague from Apollo, the deaths of many Akhaians, and a lot of convincing from his fellow soldiers to return Chrysies.\footnote{Homer, \textit{Iliad}, 12-22; 1.17-311.} Achilles’ actions to fight and not fight are a result of the selfishness of the heroic code. Since there seems to be a finite amount of honour, a hero must do all he can to obtain it, even if it means taking it from an ally (in the case of Agamemnon). Achilles takes a different approach to honour by not fighting. Instead of trying to regain his glory by defeating Hektor and going down in history as the bravest, most masterful warrior, he chose to take away people’s chances at physical honour by, in the case of the Akhaians, allowing them to succumb to their deaths by not assisting them. Many Akhaians did not get to sail home as heroes because of Achilles’ selfishness, which is a direct result of the zero-sum game of the heroic code.

Achilles managed to obtain his hero’s glory, but came to realize it was not what he had truly wanted as a warrior. While it seems that Achilles during the \textit{Iliad} had, for the most part, accepted his fate as a hero and agreed to the condition of being an honoured hero, Achilles sings a very different tune in the underworld:

\begin{quote}
βουλοίμην κ’ ἐπάρουρος ἐὼν θητευέμεν ἄλλῳ,
ἀνδρὶ παρ’ ἄκληρῳ, ὃ μὴ βίοτος πολὺς εἴη,
\end{quote}

I would rather follow the plow as thrall to another man, one with no land allotted him and not much to live on, than be king over all the perished dead.\footnote{Homer. \textit{The Odyssey of Homer}. Translated by Richmond Lattimore. (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 180; 11.489-491.}
Now that Achilles is dead and fulfilled his side of the heroic contract, he regrets being a hero at all. He does not find the glory he earned while he was in battle enough to compensate for the early death and eternity in the Underworld.

_Iliad_: Blood-Stained Love

It is clear in the _Iliad_ that Achilles and Patroklos have a relationship; however, the epic makes the type of relationship between difficult to accurately label. Some suggest it is paedarastic\(^{208}\) in nature, others see it as more of a brotherhood. W.M. Clarke, in his article “Achilles and Patroclus in Love,” notes that Achilles and Patroklos “…are lovers from their heart.”\(^{209}\) On the one hand, this could be taken as a true same sex relationship – which deviates slightly from pederasty – wherein Achilles and Patroklos do love each other as Bhīma and Draupadī appear to, and on the other hand, it could be a commentary on their relationship as brothers in arms. Accepting Clarke’s interpretation, the latter reading seems more plausible. There is no question that Achilles holds Patroklos closest to his heart and vice versa. Their unique bond means Achilles can only be swayed by Patroklos; Patroklos begs Achilles to do something about the Trojan’s advance – after Achilles’ other comrades have asked the same of him with no result. While Achilles did nothing when his comrades asked, the same plea from Patroklos roused action from Achilles in the form of sending Patroklos to war. Patroklos scolds Achilles regarding his tough demeanour and asks the hero to send him out to protect the Akhaians and their ships in Achilles’ stead.\(^{210}\)

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\(^{208}\) In Classical Greece, the paedarastic relationship between an older man and younger boy was morally acceptable.


\(^{210}\) Homer, _Iliad_, 378-79; 16.20-65.
The depth of the relationship between Achilles and Patroklos is not fully seen until after Patroklos’ death. When Antilokhos tells Achilles of Patroklos’ death, he held

χεῖρας ἔχων Αχιλῆος· ὁ δ᾿ ἐστενε κυδάλιμον κῆρ·
δείδιε γὰρ μὴ λαιμὸν ἀποτμήξειε σιδήρῳ.211

…the hero’s hands when groaning shook his heart: he feared the man might use sharp iron to slash his throat.212

There was a concern that the pain of losing Patroklos, a loved one, might be too great for Achilles, and that he would kill himself. Achilles even says of Patroklos:

ἐπεὶ φίλος ὤλεθ᾿ οἱταῖρος, Πάτροκλος, τὸν ἐγὼ περὶ πάντων τίον έταύρον, ἵσον ἐμὴ κεφαλή· τὸν ἀπώλεσα…213

My greatest friend
is gone: Patroklos, comrade in arms, whom I held dear above all others – dear to myself – now gone, lost…214

Achilles clearly loved Patroklos; for at least the ten years of the Trojan War they were together, so it is not surprising they would form a comradery. A unique metaphor used to describe their relationship further demonstrates this deep bond between these two men:

tοῖσι δὲ Πηλείδης ἁδινοῦ ἐξῆρχε γόοιο,
χεῖρας ἐπ’ ἀνδροφόνους θέμενος στήθεσιν ἐταύρου,
πυκνά μάλα στενάχοιν ὃς τε λίς ἰῃγένειος,
ὁ ρά θ’ ὑπὸ σκύμνους ἐλαφηβόλος ἀρπάση ἀνήρ
ὔλης ἐκ πυκνηής· ὁ δὲ τ’ ἀχνυται ὑστερος ἐλθόν,
πολλὰ δὲ τ’ ἄγκε’ ἐπηλθε μετ’ ἀνέρος ἰῃγε’ ἐρευνῶν,
εἰ ποθεν ἐξεύροι· μάλα γὰρ δριμὺς χόλος αἰρετ.215

Akhilleus led them in their lamentation laying those hands deadly to enemies

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211 Homer, Iliad, Loeb, 18.33-34.
212 Ibid., Iliad, 436; 18.33-34.
213 Ibid., Iliad, Loeb, 18.80-82.
214 Ibid., Iliad, 438; 18.80-82.
215 Ibid., Iliad, Loeb, 18.316-322.
upon the breast of his old friend, with groans at every breath, bereft as a lioness whose whelps a hunter seized out of a thicket; late in returning, she will grieve, and roam through many meandering valleys on his track in hopes of finding him: heart-stinging anger carries her away.216

This metaphor likens Achilles and Patroklos’ relationship to that of a mother and child, one of the strongest human bonds. Achilles does behave like this lioness: his heart is broken and he is determined on avenging his loved one and he is driven by anger.

Achilles’ interactions with Hektor also indicates a deep hurt over Patroklos’ death:

"Ἕκτορ, ἀτάρ που ἔφης Πατροκλῆ᾿ ἐξεναρίζων σῶς ἔσσεσθ᾿, εἵμε δ᾿ οὐδὲν ὀπίζεο νόσφιν ἑόντα,217

Hektor, had you thought that you could kill Patroklos and be safe? Nothing to dread from me; I was not there.218

Their relationship is so strong that Hektor should have been aware that to kill Patroklos was to seal his own doom. Achilles, like Bhīma, wants to take the revenge further than mere killing:

αἲ γάρ ποις αὐτόν με μένος καὶ θυμός ἀνείη ὅμι˙ ἀποταμνόμενον κρέα ἔδμεναι, οἵ ἔοργας,219

Would god my passion drove me to slaughter you and eat you raw, you’ve caused such agony to me!220

217 Ibid., *Iliad*, Loeb, 18.331-32.
218 Ibid., *Iliad*, 526; 18.331-32.
220 Ibid., *Iliad*, 526; 22.346-47.
Achilles is in so much pain he wishes to enter the realm of the uncivilized and feast on the flesh of the enemy.\footnote{It is possible to read the emotion into this line. Achilles’ hurt is so potent that Homer need not tell the reader that Achilles’ voice was strained with anger, that his eyes were red from sadness, his beautiful face distorted in anguish. The reader can infer the emotion from understanding the relationship between Patroklos and Achilles.} After Achilles has killed Hektor and brought him back to the Akhaian camp, the anger subsides but the act of revenge can do nothing to subdue the sadness or repair a broken heart.

The affection of Achilles towards Patroklos is not unrequited; at one point Patroklos’ shade comes to Achilles to give him a request:

\[
\text{ἄλλο δὲ τοι ἐρέω καὶ ἐφήσομαι, αἵ κε πίθηαι
μὴ ἐμὰ σὼν ἀπάνευθε τιθήμεναι ὀστὲ’, Ἀχιλλεῦ,}
\]

\[
\text{ἁρφαξάμην τὸν τοι πόρε πότνια μήτηρ.}
\]

One more message, one behest, I leave thee: not to inter my bones apart from thine but close together, as we grew together, in thy family’s hall… So may the same urn hide our bones, the one of gold your gracious mother gave\footnote{Homer, \textit{Iliad}, Loeb, 23.82-84; 23.91-91.}\

Patroklos requests to be with Achilles even after his death, like a brother might be. Patroklos’ love of Achilles is so deep he wants his bones to be next to Achilles’, so that the ashes are forever, and completely inseparable. Regardless of the type of relationship Achilles and Patroklos had, it is clear that their affection for one another was strong.
**Mahābhārata: The Kṣatriya**

In India, there are four castes that men are categorized into: *brahmin* (priest), *kṣatriya* (ruler/warrior), *vaiśya* (merchant), and *śudra* (servant). The bracketed descriptions I provided are basic English equivalents to these words, but they are more complex, as are many Sanskrit terms. The *Mahābhārata* predominantly deals with the *kṣatriya* caste and their *dharma* – occasionally *brahmin* are present on the battlefield and little else is said regarding the other two castes. In fact, according to James Fitzgerald the *Mahābhārata* is about the killing of demonic *kṣatriya* as represented by the Kauravas.\(^{224}\) There are a few instances where the author of the *Mahābhārata* states the *adharmic/demonic* attitude of the Kauravas:

\[
\text{ततः समुदिते लोके मानुषे भरतर्षभ}
\text{असुरा जज्ञेरे क्षेत्रे राजां मनुजापुंगव}
\]

\[
\text{इह देवतमिच्छनर्मो मानुषेपु मनस्विनः}
\text{जज्ञेरे भूवते भूते भूतसुरा विभो}^{225}
\]

Then, when the human world has reached such heights, O Bull-like hero, demons were born in royal lineages… Desiring lordship, the proud demons were born among men…\(^{226}\) and

\[
\text{पौलस्या भ्रातर: सर्वे जज्ञेरे मनुजेष्विन}^{227}
\]

All [Duryodhana’s] brothers were Rākṣasas born here among men.\(^{228}\)

\(^{224}\) Fitzgerald, “The *Mahābhārata*,” 57.
\(^{225}\) Mbh: Critical Edition, 1.58.25ac; 27ac.
\(^{226}\) Smith, *Mbh*, 19; 1.58.25; 27ac.
\(^{227}\) Mbh: Critical Edition, 1.61.82a.
\(^{228}\) Smith, *Mbh*, 22; 1.61.82.
This is not an observation from the Pāṇḍavas, so it is not a difference of opinion; instead, as it is the omniscient authority in the voice of the author it can be taken as more factual. However, this is not to say that the characters do not scrutinize the Kauravas adharmic behaviour.

In *Mahābhārata* 5, Kṛṣṇa, Bhīṣma, Droṇa, and others were trying to convince Duryodhana to make peace with the Pāṇḍavas; Duryodhana is adamant he will not. Bhīṣma tells Duryodhana:

> धर्मविलितभिसंयज्ञ संसर्घं योजनुमन्यते
> हस्तिनि व्यसने तस्य दुहोमो नृविरादिव
> दुरास्तः राजपुत्रोऽयं धातःराौऽनुपायिवत्
> मिथ्याभिमानी राज्यस्य क्रोधलोभवशानुः

When a man abandons dharma and the proper making of wealth in favour of fury, his enemies soon laugh at his downfall. This wicked Dhartarāṣṭra prince is ignorant of right procedure; full of false pride of kingship, he is in thrall to anger and greed.

Bhīṣma is pointing to Duryodhana’s misconduct, his adharmic behaviour in relation to the Pāṇḍavas. Even Duryodhana’s mother judges his dharma:

> न हि राज्यमशिवेन शक्यं धर्मार्थालेपिना

Kingdoms cannot be governed by boors who violate dharma and the proper making of wealth.

Before the war starts, members of the Kaurava ‘army’ try to stop Duryodhana because for the Kauravas this battle is unjust, but Duryodhana would not listen. These kṣatriya do not obey their dharma correctly, thus they are considered demonic and must be destroyed.

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233 Army in quotes because Ghāndārī is not part of the army per se.
234 It ends up being just for the Pāṇḍavas because they lost their kingdom through cheating.
While the Kauravas are seen as poor kṣatriya, the Pāṇḍavas are seen as good ones. Bhīma could be viewed as one of the best as James Fitzgerald acknowledges: “Bhīma… represents the tremendous energy of physical force – he was a large, impulsive man with great appetites who embodied the sheer physical power and violence of the kṣatriya order of society. And Bhīma fulfilled most clearly the responsibility of kṣatriyas to be protectors as he was the Pāṇḍavas most solicitous of the comfort and safety of their wife Draupadī, and the one who was the champion of them all in situations of general danger.”235 Based on Fitzgerald’s description of a kṣatriya, Bhīma is the ideal.236 In the first chapter I discussed Bhīma’s tremendous power and it is clear that he does represent physical force and his violence is fairly unmatched.237 Later in this chapter, Bhīma’s protection of Draupadī is examined and Bhīma will do whatever he needs to in order to protect his family, in particular his wife.

Bhīma, being the ideal kṣatriya, has a few rules to he ought to uphold as it relates to his dharma. The overarching virtues of a kṣatriya, according to Pushpuendra Kumar Sharma, are “…generosity, vigor, courage, strength, power to rule, self-control, and the like”.238 Bhīma, for the most part, exhibits all these traits excellently, except, perhaps, his self-control. He is quick to anger and his anger leads to very irrational decisions and promises. His choices on how to kill some of his enemies (Kīcaka and Duḥśāsana, for example) clearly demonstrate a man who lacks self-control. Had he more self-control, like Arjuna and Yudhiṣṭhira who did not react as

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236 Arjuna, as seen by Fitzgerald, is ‘an image of a king who, … unites all the attributes of the three functions within himself and is ultimately responsible for all three of the others’ (Fitzgerald, “The Mahābhārata”, 157). Fitzgerald feels as though Arjuna embodies a brahmin, kṣatriya, and vaiśya. This is likely why Arjuna is seen as the ideal role model, he is all.
237 Not in the sense that he kills numerous people, but in the way he kills most people and, perhaps, his willingness to kill.
abrasively to the same situations, he likely could have avoided some objectionable positions he put himself in. Barbara Holdrege suggests “the Kṣatriya are invested with the force of kṣatra and exercise political and military power as kings and warriors whose duty is to protect the people and oversee the smooth functions of the government.”

According to Monier Williams kṣatra can be defined as “dominion, supremacy, power or/and might.” Bhīma still embodies these functions, less so on a political scale as Holdrege suggests of kṣatriyas, but the Mahābhārata from Bhīma’s point of view is not rife with political decisions. Political decisions are left to Yudhiṣṭhira, who, as eldest brother would take over the kingdom. Not only does Bhīma uphold/adhere to his dharma, he also demands it of his brothers: “Elsewhere, Bhīma reproves Arjuna by suggesting that he is speaking like a hermit who has gone to the forest and has abandoned use of force and then punningly declares that the kṣatriya is so called because he protects from destruction, though living by destruction, and quickly gains the earth, duty, glory, and prosperity.”

Bhīma dislikes that his brothers fail to act on numerous occasions, particularly towards Draupādi.

**Mahābhārata: For Glory**

Like the Greeks, glory in battle is important for a kṣatriya. As he is dying, Bhīṣma states:

क्षत्रियप्रशस्तां हि प्राप्तोक्सिसि परमां गतिम

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242 In most of these occasions Bhīma only acts because he is so quick to anger and does not really see the bigger picture as far as his actions are concerned. This is actually one of the reasons Arjuna and Yudhiṣṭhira are looked up to more favourably than Bhīma.

… I have attained the highest state known in the dharma of the kṣatriya.244

Presumably, the highest state would be death in battle, as expressed by Kṛṣṇa earlier:

śvargyornirnayo rajastvänyorinihataḥ
śvargyornisatapo yudṝ mārj: sūryabhāravān

“Heaven comes from victory, O King, heaven comes from the great fame, heaven comes from pain in battle.”246

While Bhīṣma did not obtain victory, he certainly achieved fame for fighting so well and so relentlessly, and he did obtain pain in battle.247 Karṇa explains the idea of fame for a kṣatriya:

हुल्वा शरीरे संग्रामे कृत्वा कर्म सुदुःकरम्
विजये वा पराजये यशः प्राप्त्यामि केवलम्

…by offering up my body in the sacrifice of battle, by doing a very difficult deed, and by conquering my enemies on the battlefield. I shall gain fame and nothing but fame.249

Again, this points to the necessity of battle for a kṣatriya and even the necessity of death, in a way. While Karṇa does acknowledge victory in battle, not everyone can be victorious, so failing to slay one’s opponent does not deny one heaven. So long as one sacrifices themselves to battle, they will likely attain heaven, as all of the warriors in the Mahābhārata do.250
Moreover, each caste had its own *dharma* to adhere to which the other castes were not supposed to comply with; however, all castes must adhere to the ultimate *dharma* of *satya*. According to Manorama Jauhari “*Satya* (truthfulness) is one of the fundamental essentials of moral life.” In the *Mahābhārata*, it is stated that

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	ext{नासिति सत्यालयो धर्मों न सत्याविद्यते परम्}
\text{ न हि तीव्रतरं किविदनृतादिह विद्यते}
\text{राजन्सत्यं परं ब्रह्म सत्यं च समयं: पर:}^{251}
\]

There is no virtue equal to Truth: there is nothing superior to Truth… Truth is the highest vow.\(^{252}\)

Promise keeping falls under the umbrella of truth; if someone promises to do something and they fail to do so it could be considered a lie, especially if it is in their capacity to uphold the promise. Bhīma had vowed to kill Duḥśāsana in a specific way. Whether he made the vow in a moment of rage, where he was not thinking straight, or his decision was not one he would regret later, the son of Pāṇḍu *had* to uphold his vow as it was upholding Truth. It would seem to counteract the lesson outlined in book one if Bhīma did not uphold the highest *dharma*. In a way, at the time, Bhīma was being completely *dharmic*; he just made the vow to do an *adharmic* deed. It leads to paradox and binds Bhīma’s hands. A similar paradox plagues Arjuna who vowed to kill anyone who insulted his bow, Gāṇḍīva. Yudhiṣṭhira had insulted the bow, so Arjuna was torn between committing fratricide and upholding his vow, or breaking his vow and sparing his bother. He committed to the latter option. Similarly to Arjuna’s vow, Bhīma is presented with a choice: kill Duḥśāsana in the way described by the vow and avenge Draupadī, or do not. Bhīma’s immense affection for Draupadī was the reason he committed to the former. While the *Mahābhārata* does

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\(^{252}\) Krishna-Dwaipayana, *Mbh* 1.74 (The English translations provided by the sacred texts website does not always line up with the Sanskrit).
not play up the relationship between these two, the *Venīsamhāra* does and close readings of Bhīma in the *Mahābhārata* also indicate his immense affection for Draupadī.

While a *kṣatriya* fights because it is his duty and thus his path to heaven with glory awaiting him, a sense of shame does seem to be injected into a desire to fight. Although most warriors are driven by shame, it was not apparent that Bhīma was motivated by shame – except maybe the shame of appearing weak – however, it may still have been a factor in his decision. Sarva Daman Singh notes this idea of shame: “Glory as dearer than life itself; victory was the root of right; and death was preferable to the *humiliation* of defeat” (emphasis added).253 Defeat, in this sense, likely meant fleeing from battle or not participating at all (i.e. surrender). Singh also points out that *kṣatriya’s* sense of shame is much like the Akhaians: “… if a warrior turns away from a fight for justice, he reaps only sin by renouncing his duty and glory. To die of disease at home is a sin for a *kṣatriya*; victory or death in battle is eternally ordained by the creator, and is the goal of the warrior.”254 A warrior would be turning his back on his *dharma* which is the opposite of what he should be doing.255 Bhīma is usually the voice of war because he wishes to uphold his *dharma*, the *dharma* that should be shared by his brothers as well and perhaps he is also considering shame and how people might view the mighty (cowardly) Pāṇḍavas. John Brockington agrees with the idea that a *kṣatriya* must fight because “… death in battle is to be applauded whereas to die in one’s bed is a disgrace.”256 Further to this, Arjuna mentions that

नैष पूवः स्मृतो धर्म: क्षत्रियस्य पलायनम्

255 The most well-known section of the *Mahābhārata*, the *Bhagavad Gītā*, has a central theme of the importance of maintaining one’s *dharma* above all else.
Our forefathers did not consider it to be the kṣatriya’s dharma to flee like this. Better for you to die in battle than to flee in terror.

For ages it has been better for a kṣatriya to die young on the battlefield than to flee and live a long life, very much like the Akhaian. Bhīma likely takes this into consideration, therefore, he does not back down from a fight. For him the just war involves killing the Kauravas, specifically the ones who have insulted his wife. Bhīma will not back down from a fight so long as a fight is imminent. For him, it seems, every fight was a just fight. While nevertheless bound by his dharma, he is unlike most kṣatriyas in that his love for Draupadī motivated him more than glory or shame.

Mahābhārata: Blood-Stained Love

It is often suggested that although Draupadī is married to all five Pāṇḍava brothers simultaneously, her heart belongs to Arjuna as is stated in the Mahābhārata:

पक्षपातो महानस्य विशेषेण धनजये

She had a particularly strong partiality for wealth winner Arjuna; this was the reason Draupadī died. However, based on close readings it is Bhīma who has Draupadī’s affections, the Venīsamhāra displays this relationship. The relationship becomes

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258 Smith, Mbh, 277; 4.36.26.
260 Smith, Mbh, 774; 17.2.6. At the end of the Mahābhārata, the Pāṇḍavas were all given a reason as to what killed him. Each reason related to something they enjoyed in excess.
261 Although it seems highly contradictory to the reason for Draupadī’s death, the Mahābhārata was likely written by multiple people over a large span of time, so either her reason for death was a latter addition, or the way Bhīma and Draupadī interact was. It could also be the fact that Arjuna was the one who did win Draupadī in the first place,
more apparent during times when Draupādī is plagued by something (more realistically, someone), she goes to Bhīma for help. Bhīma, in turn, commits his most violent acts in response to treatment of his wife. The first example is his mangling of Kīcaka, who wished to have

Draupādī for himself\textsuperscript{262} and treated Draupādī roughly when she refused:

\begin{quote}
\textit{तस्य भीमो वधप्रे��ुः कीचकास्य दुरात्मनः
दन्तौर्द्वास्तदा रोषायणिष्ठितपेष महामनः} \textsuperscript{263}
\end{quote}

Bhīma and Yudhiṣṭhira were seated there. They saw Kṛṣṇā and could not bear to see her kicked by Kīcaka. High-minded Bhīma, eager to kill the wicked Kīcaka, ground tooth against tooth in fury…\textsuperscript{264}

Bhīma’s anger stems from his love of Draupādī; it angers him to see someone treat his beloved so disrespectfully. It was Bhīma who went to slay Kīcaka for Draupādī at her request:

\begin{quote}
\textit{तं लं प्रहरतां श्रेष्ठ नरं नाग इवोद्वर
अश्रु दु:खारिताया मम मार्जन्यं भारत
आत्मन्त्रव भद्रं ते कुरु मानं कुलस्य च} \textsuperscript{265}
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
You are the best of fighting men: take out the Suta’s son like an elephant tearing out a reed! Heir of Bharata, I am overwhelmed with misery, so wipe away my tears and maintain your own and your family’s honour, good sir!\textsuperscript{266}
\end{quote}

Draupādī must have known that Arjuna would have refused to do as she asked, or that it would be too difficult to speak with Arjuna about Kīcaka, which is why she did not ask him. Bhīma replied with a vow:

\begin{quote}
\textit{सतयं भ्रातृश्च धर्मं च पुरस्कृत्य ब्रवीमि ते}
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{262} Smith, \textit{Mbh} 258-9; 4.13.
\textsuperscript{263} \textit{Mbh}: Critical Edition, 4.15.11ac.
\textsuperscript{264} Smith, \textit{Mbh}, 261; 4.15.11.
\textsuperscript{265} \textit{Mbh}: Critical Edition, 4.21.28c-29ac.
\textsuperscript{266} Smith, \textit{Mbh}, 265; 4.21.28-29.
\end{flushright}
I swear to you by truth, by my brothers and by my dharma that I shall slay Kīcaka.

True to Bhīma’s form, he did more than kill the man: he mangled his body into a lump of flesh. Perhaps she went to him because he is quick to anger and would not consider the possible causes of his actions like Arjuna or Yudhiṣṭhira would.

The second example is the drinking of Duḥśāsana’s blood. As soon as Bhīma witnessed Duḥśāsana’s treatment of Draupadī in the hall, it was he who went on the attack:

\[
\text{इदं मे वाक्यमाददुश्च्य क्षत्रिया लोकवासिन:}
\text{नेतरपूर्व नर्तर्यैनं चान्यो यद्दिष्टिः}
\text{यद्रद्वेदमुक्तवा तु न कृष्णी पूथिवीश्वरः}
\text{पितामहानां सर्वेः नाहे गतिमवापूर्याम्}
\text{अस्य पापस्य दुष्टिभिरतापसदस्य च}
\text{न पित्येव बलाद्रुभिभिषत्वा चेद्रुधरं युधिः.}
\]

Kṣatriya of the world, hear these words of mine that no other man ever spoke before, nor will ever speak again! Lords of the earth, may I not attain the real of all my ancestors if, having said this, I do not carry it out; if in battle I do not rip open the breast of this wicked sinner, this bastard Bharata, and drink his blood!

Bhīma is so overwhelmed with anger over the treatment of Draupadī that he risks his chances at mokṣa (liberation) to avenge her. Not only this, but his method of killing Duḥśāsana is also demeaning: he rips open his chest like a dog would its prey in an effort to make Duḥśāsana feel as Draupadī felt in the hall. This accelerates the necessary act of killing the enemy in war to an unnecessary level of desecration.

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268 Smith, Mbh, 265; 4.21.32.
269 Smith, Mbh, 267; 4.21.
270 Mbh: Critical Edition, 2.61.44ac-46ac.
271 Smith, Mbh, 147-48; 2.61.44-46.
The final example is the trampling of Duryodhana’s head. Bhīma’s treatment of Duryodhana is, again, about humiliation:

\[ \text{गौरीरिति पुरा मन्द द्रौपदीमेकवाससम् यत्सभायां हसन्...}^{272} \]

Long ago you laughed to see Draupadī in your assembly wearing a single garment…^{273} 

Bhīma wanted Duryodhana to feel as Draupadī did; he wanted him to suffer. Bhīma vows to avenge her honour and, like Achilles, does not rest until the deed is done. Gitomer acknowledges that despite the often pairing up of Arjuna and Draupadī, “…it is only Bhīma whose passionate devotion claims her in such a way that in the epic’s transformation to drama (Venīsamhāra) the couple became nāyaka and nāyikā.”^{274} The Venīsamhāra also focuses on their relationship, but, given a close reading of the Mahābhārata, not that much more than the epic itself. Every questionable action Bhīma is motivated by his desire to avenge Draupadī’s honour.

Another instance of Bhīma’s affection towards Draupadī is during the gambling match. 

After Yudhiṣṭhira has gambled away Draupadī, Bhīma turns his attack and anger on his brother:

\[ \text{भवन्ति देशे बन्धकः कितवान युधिष्ठिरे न ताभिषुत दीर्घन्ति दया चैवासि तास्वपि} \]

\[ \text{अथः कुते मनुयरथ तविष राजस्मिपारयते}^{275} \]

‘The gamblers in this land have their whores, Yudhishthira’ he said, ‘but they do not wager them; indeed they show them kindness! … It is for her sake that I must turn my
fury on you, king’ (emphasis added).276

Bhīma cares so much for Draupadī he would turn on his own brother who has mistreated her; in the end, he does not kill him, but he was willing to sacrifice everything for the sake of Draupadī. Clearly, for Bhīma, Draupadī is his sole motivation.

Conclusion

The issue of morality here stems from necessity. Both Akhaian warriors and kṣatriyas are motivated to do battle by their code, by the promise of glory and by the ridicule of shame. These are obligations they must fulfill as the roles they were born into.277 Both men are fighting in a just war – it is seen as just from the readers’ perspective and the protagonists’ perspective: the Pāṇḍavas lost their rightful kingdom though cheating and Menelaos (whom the whole Akhaian army represents) lost his wife through disregard of guest friendship. While war itself could be viewed as immoral and thus everything within it is also immoral, it does not do justice to those who fight in it. These epics take place in a time when war is not uncommon. The fact that warrior classes/castes even exist suggest that war, and the soldiers participating, was not immoral.278 Both Bhīma and Achilles, by killing their opponents to put an end to the wars, are just doing their jobs. The victory in battle and the glory associated with it also demonstrate there

276 Smith, Mbh, 145; 2.61.1, 2.61.6.
277 Achilles being a man of Ancient Greece would have become a warrior when he became a certain age and if the need arose. Unlike Bhīma, his title is not warrior from birth to death, but he is still placed in this role.
278 As with any society there will be people who do find war immoral, but it seems as a whole to be acceptable.
is no immorality associated with battle, otherwise there would not be glory associated with it. It is moral to fight a just war, particularly if done so according to a code.²⁷⁹

Perhaps, although cheesy, Disney got it right about heroes: “A hero isn’t measure by the strength of his arm, but by the strength of his heart.”²⁸⁰ Both Bhīma and Achilles are driven to attack because of an ache in their heart. These actions go against the norm in the case of Achilles, for example his discarding of bodies into the river.²⁸¹ Achilles’ love of Patroklos is so great that he ostensibly forgets he has been insulted by Agamemnon and rejoins the fight. Every single one of Bhīma’s main duels involves harsh treatment of his enemy, all for the sake of his wife. Comparable to Achilles, Bhīma’s reactions are not merely violent as war tends to be, but the Pāṇḍava hero takes it to another, animalistic level. Both extend beyond their respective codes into something more extreme. The code seems to protect the morality of these men, but only in the scope of killing an enemy; how they kill an enemy is up for judgement. The question remains as to whether love is a justifiable reason for immorality? Poetically speaking, it is. From the point of view of a love story, it is really not unexpected, and it is a common driving point of a story. Particularly in the case of Bhīma, the actions feel justified. Readers do not accept the maltreatment of Draupadī, so her abusers getting their just desserts, however horrific it may be, does not seem so bad. Additionally, Bhīma has satya to further absolve him. He had already made a vow, a promise to kill Duḥśāsana in a certain manner, so he was just upholding the vow. His mangling of Kīcaka, though, does not fall under this category.

²⁷⁹ The main point in the Bhagavad Gītā. Arjuna struggles to do his dharma for he feels it is not right to kill his teachers, who happen to be his enemies. Kṛṣṇa assures him that doing his dharma is better, especially if the war is just.
²⁸¹ His treatment of Hektor at the end of the epic is also judge harshly, but this will be discussed in detail in chapter 5.
All in all, the muddling of morality for Bhīma is because his opponents seem more like villains who need to be punished, in the literary sense. Since immense sympathy is developed for the Trojans over the course of the *Iliad*, Achilles’ actions are not as muddled. The Akhaian warrior needlessly took lives and denied burials from people who were just doing their job and people who did not offend him personally. Considering these, it seems Bhīma can scrape by as moral – though really only just – simply because his opponents are described as bad guys who did bad things that were offensive to readers. Achilles, on the other hand, denied burial to those who fought who did not do anything wrong, and he did it just because he was angry. It would not serve as a large blow to Trojan morale – except to show that Achilles is beyond ruthless. Achilles’ decisions against opposing soldiers created an immoral air about him.

Ultimately, Bhīma and Achilles must struggle with obligations that may not align with morality. Their code attempts to guide them to complete their task as warriors; however, in the instance of vengeance the code could not be a guide. Both warriors were committed to their loved ones and felt obligated to seek revenge in whatever manner they deemed necessary, even if it was not necessarily moral.
Chapter 4: Divinity

The gods play a very significant role in these epics. While there is religiosity associated with the divinity – devotion, sacrifice, worship, prayer – this chapter will not focus on that aspect of the gods. Rather, it will focus on the gods’ interaction with the humans and how the gods manipulated the outcome of the war. Although the gods do exhibit positive attributes in these epics, this chapter will examine the negative attributes, specifically manipulation and deceit. However, the fact that it is a god using deceit complicates things: does being a god diminish the immoral nature of deceit or are gods simply not judged on a scale of moral/immoral?

There are numerous gods at work in the *Iliad*; in fact, nearly every Olympian has their hands in some aspects of the war. The main focus will be on Zeus and Athena, as Zeus seems to have an overarching plan involving the warriors and Athena interacts most with the warriors in a deceitful manner. In the *Mahābhārata*, Kṛṣṇa will be the only god examined and only during the war itself.

Often deceit is looked down upon as a viable tactic because it belongs in the realm of immorality. The gods employ deceit without much thought behind it because they know it will lead to a victory, which is their ultimate goal. When the gods use deceit for victory, there is no comment; however, when a mortal uses deceit (even deceit suggested by a god, in the case of Bhīma), they leave themselves open to criticism.

*Iliad*: Divine Deceit

The gods of the *Iliad* have their hands in the fate of the battle. In fact, it was the gods’ fault the war started in the first place. Had Aphrodite not insisted on the beauty contest in the judgement of Paris and had she not offered up Helen (who was already married to Menelaos) as
Paris’ prize if he declared the goddess of love the winner, then the war would have never started. Helen would have remained in Sparta and Menelaos would have had no reason to attack Troy. The gods have chosen their sides for this war: Poseidon, Athena, and Hera are firm supporters of the Akhaians, while Ares, Apollo, and Aphrodite support the Trojans. Zeus, chief of the gods, minglest between the two. He supports the Trojans insofar as Hektor has provided him due honour and superb sacrifices, but he also supports the Akhaians because Paris did break the rules of guest friendship.

Having favour from the gods provides the success of the hero and often the gods are swayed to favour one or another because of their tribute and “in return for human tribute, the gods are a potential source of help in trouble, the objects of prayer either to obtain something or to overt something.” There are numerous examples of this in the text; most notably when Apollo rains arrows down upon the Akhaians, thereby answering Chryses’ prayers (Bk 1.33-54) as well as when Achilles’ requests help from Zeus through his mother, Thetis (Bk 1.393-412). The gods have no qualms in helping those who pray to them; their relationship loosely resembles friendship, but it is more akin to the principle *do ut des*. It is important to note, as Han Van Wees does, that “in conflict between mortals, gods support their kin and friends regardless of the rights and wrongs of the issue.” Furthermore, “…the gods simply try to do two things at once: they do seek to punish mortals who act unjustly or improperly, but they also wish to support their kin and friends. When it is not possible to do both, *obligation to kin and friends have priority over demands of justice*.” So while the gods do indeed act in relation to morals it is more often than not self-interest. The gods not only interact with their kin and friends to

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283 Van wees, *Status Warriors*, 146.
284 Ibid.
save them, they also dole out punishment, but, similar to the assistance of a god, it is “…not usually on moral grounds… they are punished for personal offences against the gods.”285 The gods act and react in accordance with their own emotion, less so than with any sense of justice or morality in mind.

Given the amount of deceit employed by the gods, it is not surprising that the gods do not react in accordance with a code of justice or morality. Early in the Iliad, the Trojan War nearly had an end when the Akhaians and Trojans agreed upon a truce: Paris said,

αὐτὰρ ἔμ᾽ ἐν μέσσῳ καὶ ἀρηίφιλον Μενέλαον
συμβάλετ᾽ ἄμφ᾽ Ἐλένη καὶ κτήμασι πάσι μάχεσθαι.
όππότερος δὲ κε νικήσῃ κρείσσων τε γένηται,
κτῆμαθ᾽ ἐλόν ἐφ πάντα γυναικά τε οἴκαδ’ ἀγέσθω·
οἱ δ᾽ ἄλλοι φιλότητα καὶ ὀρκία πιστὰ ταμόντες;286

…let Menelaos alone
and me, between the lines, in single combat,
duel for Helen and Spartan gold.
Whoever gets the upper hand in this
shall take the treasure and the woman home;
let the rest part as friends…287

Further in the book, Menelaus had defeated Paris in this duel and both sides had agreed to the conditions set forth by Paris. Despite this, the gods continue to have an active role even after the war has ended by discussing the turnout of the duel:

ἡμεῖς δὲ φραζώμεθ᾿ ὡστε ἔσται τάδε ἔργα,
ἤ ῥ’ ἀυτίς πόλεμον τε κακὸν καὶ φύλοπιν αἰνήν
δρόσομεν, ἦ φιλότητα μετ᾽ ἄμφοτέροις βάλωμεν.288

Let us then consider
how the affair may end, shall we again
bring on the misery and din of war,
or make a pact of amity between them?289

286 Homer, Iliad, Loeb, 3.69-73.
287 Ibid., Iliad, 69-70; 3.69-73.
288 Ibid., Iliad, Loeb, 4.14-16.
289 Ibid., Iliad, 88; 4.14-16.
The gods decided to continue the war, and Athena was given permission by Zeus to interfere.\textsuperscript{290} Athena, disguised as Trojan warrior Laodokos, convinced Trojan Pandarus to shoot an arrow at Menelaus. Tamar Nelson points out how Athena really deceived him twice: “… first by persuading him to do this terrible deed, then by preventing his success…”\textsuperscript{291} Pandarus’ arrow was going to fatally wound Menelaus but Athena diverted its course to protect him, an appropriate reaction for the god who is devoted to the Akhaians. At the end of the \textit{Iliad} when Hektor is running from Athena: Athena assumed the form of Deihobos, Hektor’s brother, and convinces Hektor to stay and fight Achilles,\textsuperscript{292} Athena tricks Hektor into thinking he has an ally (when in fact it was Achilles who had one), so that he might have stood a chance against the demi god. Athena brought an end to the war she had started using the same underhanded tactic.

The two warring parties had finally obtained peace after ten long years, but the gods sought to destroy that for no particular reason. However, there is the idea that the will/plan of Zeus is the driving force of the Trojan War. Jenny Clay Strauss summarizes four potential plans for Zeus which might explain his decision making, and sometimes lack thereof, in the \textit{Iliad}:

1. The plan of Zeus refers specifically to the promise Zeus makes to Thetis to honour Achilles by precipitating a Greek defeat and thereby demonstrating to the Greeks and above all to Agamemnon the cost of dishonouring him. This, as I said, is the orthodox view.
2. The plan of Zeus aims at, and is fulfilled by, the destruction of Troy. At Aulis, years before, an omen had already revealed that Troy would finally fall in the tenth year of the war.
3. The plan of Zeus is to bring an end to the age of heroes.
4. The plan of Zeus is not a concrete plan at all, but a vague expression of the divine will or Fate.\textsuperscript{293}

\textsuperscript{290} Part of Zeus’ willingness to restart the war was Hera’s wager. She had promised Zeus three of her beloved cities in exchange for the fall of Troy (Homer, \textit{Iliad}, 89-90; 4.50-67).
\textsuperscript{292} Homer, \textit{Iliad} 522; 22.226-231.
While it is possible that all of these options could be happening simultaneously, I am inclined to adhere to the idea that Zeus is trying to end the heroic age. Strauss, herself, mentions that when Thetis does request Zeus’ help to regain Achilles’ stolen honour

\[\text{τὴν δ’ οὗ τι προσέφη νεφεληγερέτα Ζεύς,}\
\[\text{ἀλλ’ ἀκέων δὴν ἦστο}^{294}\]

…but the gatherer of cloud said never a word but sat unmoving for a long time, silent.\(^{295}\)

He does not answer one way or another right away, which means he is trying to devise a way in which all can be true.\(^{296}\) Presumably, if he knew exactly what he wanted to do he would have responded quicker. Zeus is able to give Achilles his honour and end the heroic age. Of course, this leads to the idea that Zeus has no solid plan which is why he cannot give Thetis a quick answer. Strauss is not the only one to notice the theme of ending the heroic age. John Alvis suggests that “Homer displaces the focus of heroic song from prowess to moral choices, while Homer’s Zeus turns Thetis’ request to his own account, demonstrating by the reversal of war human reliance on heroes”\(^{297}\) and perhaps shift focus to the gods, as in mortals’ reliance on the gods. It would only make sense that this is Zeus’ aim, that is, to end the heroic age, based on his shift in allegiance throughout the fight. Zeus’ decision to alternate allegiances to help the Trojans and then return to the Akhaians suggests that he wants to maximize the number of casualties in this war.

In order for the Zeus to have his plans realized, he used mortals for his ultimate success. Two mortals, Trojan Hektor and Akhaian Patroklos, are used purposefully to advance Zeus’

\(^{294}\) Homer, Iliad, Loeb, 1.511-512.
\(^{295}\) Ibid., Iliad, 28; 1.511-512.
\(^{296}\) Clay, “The Whip and Will of Zeus,” 43.
plans. Hektor is consistently referred to as Zeus’ favourite, yet “Hektor too is whipped by the
whip of Zeus, goaded on to his moment of triumph, only to discover that his own courage will
indeed destroy him…”298 It was Zeus who gave him courage and a will to fight and it was Zeus
who allowed the Trojan advance, but only for the Olympians’ ultimate plan – to end the heroic
age. Zeus has no qualms about using his most beloved mortal for his own plans. Hektor did lead
the charge on the Akhaians after the tide had turned, and Hektor is and was, no doubt,
responsible for the deaths of many. One of those being Patroklos, another of Zeus’ tools. Hektor
was the aim of Patroklos (though it was not supposed to be) and Patroklos’ intent on killing
Hektor instead of retreating was the cause of his death: “Had Patroclus remembered the orders of
Achilles to return to camp after driving the Trojans from the ships, he would have escaped death;
but the words used by the poet at this point, the purpose of Zeus is always stronger than that of
men” (emphasis added)299 Men cannot go against the will of Zeus; what he determines to
happen shall happen. According to Alvis “Since Achilles’s return is associated with Trojan
defeat, we naturally enough assume Zeus uses Patroclus’s death as a lever to move Achilles so
that he may execute Zeus’s doom upon Troy” (emphasis added).300 Zeus knew that Patroklos’
death would be the only thing that could rouse Achilles to action thus he used him, even though
Patroklos is a good fighter on his own and could have killed many Trojans, but perhaps not with
the same ferocity Achilles exhibited after Patroklos’ death. In a way, he is also using Achilles as
a tool for his grand scheme, but at least Achilles gets glory bestowed upon him.

Even though the gods are using mortals to exact what appears to be punishment, the gods
of the Iliad have very little to do with punishing the wicked. A. Kip notes that the Akhaians

300 Alvis, Divine Purpose, 41.
“…expect the gods to be on their side because they consider it self-evident that the gods – in any case Zeus – defend the law of hospitality and the sacrosanct nature of the oaths. However, the gods do not meet the expectations of the human characters. They do support the Greeks, but for reasons that have nothing to do with morality. They love and they hate, but they never talk about justice.” 301 This harkens back to the idea that the gods care little about right and wrong and more about emotions. Surely the mortals of this war could justify the goings on by suggesting the gods are rewarding and punishing based on judgement – the Trojans eventually fail because Paris did not adhere to the rules of guest friendship; the Akhaian falter because Agamemnon stole the best of the Akhaian honour despite being advised against it. While this is true, the Greek gods as a whole behave more emotionally than this. Hugh Lloyd-Jones acknowledged that the gods are much more like men in their need for honour; however, unlike men they can “…take a terrible revenge…” 302 on those who do not honour them properly. Paris failed to honour Zeus when he kidnapped Helen; Hera and Athena were scorned when Paris did not choose them in the beauty contest. These reasons may very well account for the fall of Troy based on emotion/lost honour. The Akhaian destruction is primarily Zeus’ doing, but, again, Zeus has an emotional reason to grant Achilles’ wish. Hektor has been lauded as being a great bestower of honour to Zeus through sacrifice, so Zeus may want to reward his favourite mortal. This would benefit Zeus’ ultimate plan as the Trojans needed to get the upper hand to vanquish some of the Akhaian heroes.

While it would be easiest to say the gods only punish those who have sinned, 303 Kip offers a good explanation as to why Homer may have the gods behaving that way: “But if the

303 A concept not used very readily before Christianity.
gods acted for the same reason and condemned the Trojans because of their moral faults, and if Zeus sealed the fate of Troy as the inevitable consequence of Paris’ guilt, then the balance of sympathy would undoubtedly be disturbed.”304 Further, “when we try to make them just and moralistic in spite of their creator [Homer], we dehumanize his poem.”305 If the author were to make the Iliad all about the gods exacting just punishment it would not make anyone feel sympathy for the Trojans because they are getting their comeuppance. However, if the gods behave in relation to their emotions the reader can get a sense of sympathy toward the Trojans, especially Hektor who was the main victim of the gods’ abuse. At the beginning, he is losing, then Zeus grants him a slight victory only to take it away at the peak of his success and since it is just the gods playing it is not seen as fair treatment.

Given the importance of honour to the gods, it is clear the Greek gods typically operate the same way as do humans, except they have the power to change what they do not like. Ordinarily, gods are seen as exacting punishment on sinners and being a form to generally look up to; however, the Greek gods do not follow this model. On a number of occasions, they employ deceitful tactics to further those they like as well as to further their own aims. They also tend to ignore any sense of morality choosing instead to act on their emotion which includes protecting their kith even when it is not the ‘right’ thing to do. Given this analysis of the Greek gods, the gods are not driven by a sense of morality; in fact, “Greek gods are not personifications of moral values; they are images of power…”306 The heroes should not look to the gods for guidance on how to be moral for being moral is not their concern. Even if the gods behave immorally who is to judge them? This behaviour is not atypical of the Greek gods; therefore,

305 Ibid.
people may not consider the gods to be significant when it comes to the idea of morality.

**Mahābhārata: Divine Direction**

While there are many digressions regarding the gods of the *Vedas*, this chapter will only focus on Kṛṣṇa and his involvement in the war. Kṛṣṇa, like the gods of the *Iliad*, is integral to the success of the Pāṇḍavas during the war. Similar to the Greek gods, he does not physically participate – attacking the Kauravas himself – rather he is more influential in the actions of the Pāṇḍavas. Kṛṣṇa is most associated with his deceit, like the Greek gods; however, he acts based on logic more so than on his emotion. While he has an emotional attachment to the Pāṇḍavas, his decision to help them as he does is motivated by a necessity for the Pāṇḍava victory. Much like to Zeus’ ultimate plan to end the world of the heroes, “Kṛṣṇa is said to be Viṣṇu reincarnated born at the Creator’s request, on the earth for relieving her of her burden.” This was a war to destroy heroes (again, like the *Iliad*), so Kṛṣṇa’s purpose was to destroy as many as possible.

Further to this desire from earth to relieve her burden, Rekha Jhanji notes that “each yuga has an *avatara* who helps restore the balance of good and evil.” Considering Kṛṣṇa is an *avatara* of Viṣṇu and the Kauravas have been alluded to as *adharmic* demons, this also coincides with Kṛṣṇa’s need to be a part of this war. Kṛṣṇa has an ultimate goal to fix the balance between good and evil and relieve the earth’s burden. These two things, realistically, work together especially considering the mass destruction of the Kauravas and the war in general.

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308 Unlike the *Iliad* there is no need for Kṛṣṇa to behave in a certain way to solicit sympathy for the Kauravas. Unlike the Trojans there is very little wiggle room as far as ‘rightness’ goes for the Kauravas. They are seen as deceitful and *adharmic* and deserve to be destroyed. Of course, this is a necessary view point for the justification of the Pāṇḍavas going to war.

Even though Kṛṣṇa has clear goals to diminish the population of the kṣatriyas and/or destroy the Kauravas, he does not physically attack; however, as Jonardon Ganeri suggests “[Kṛṣṇa] was the supreme manipulator, who did not shoot a single arrow or use a single weapon to kill anyone, but all the main characters were killed by his superior strategy through behind-the-door manipulation. Kṛṣṇa had something to do with the killing of each of the following heroes: Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Karṇa and Duryodhana. And each time it was through a means that violated the well-known moral codes of battle between Kṣatriyas.”

Every attack and success of the Pāṇḍavas was as a result of a suggestion from Kṛṣṇa and, realistically, the Pāṇḍavas were only victorious because of “Kṛṣṇa’s tactful guidance.” Both Droṇa and Bhīṣma told the Pāṇḍavas how they could be killed – perhaps knowing that their deaths would be a struggle for the Pāṇḍavas to accomplish – and Kṛṣṇa took full advantage of this information. Bhīṣma’s death requires a specific type of man whom Bhīṣma refuses to fight:

निक्षिप्तशस्त्रे पारिते विमुक्तकवचध्वजे
द्रवमाणे च भीते च तवास्मीति च वादिनि
स्तियां स्तीनामघेये च विकले चैकपुत्रके

It does not please me to fight against a man who has laid down his weapon, who has fallen, or whose armour and standard are lost; a man who flees, a fearful man, or one who has surrendered; a woman, a man with a woman’s name...

Arjuna had faltered a number of times when he was supposed to attack Bhīṣma; he could not kill his teacher:

वासुदेवस्तु संप्रेक्ष्य पार्थस्य मृदुयुद्धताम्

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313 Smith, Mbh, 402; 6.103.72-73.
But Vasudeva saw Kuntī’s son was fighting with restraint against Bhīṣma. Kṛṣṇa, being frustrated by Arjuna, went to attack Bhīṣma himself, thus breaking a vow he had previously made. Arjuna, not allowing this, stopped his friend and made an oath of his own:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ममैष्ष भारः सर्वो न ह गनिष्यामि यतत्रतम्} \\
\text{शापे माधव सत्यं सद्यं सुकृते च} \\
\text{अन्तं यथा गमिष्यामि शात्रूण्यं शत्रुकश्चान} \\
\end{align*}
\]

No, this burden is mine; I shall kill Bhīṣma, keeper of his word. I swear by our friendship, Madhu’s heir, tormentor of your enemies, and by my own truth and merit, that I shall make an end of our enemies.

Ruth Katz suggest the reason behind Kṛṣṇa’s behaviour was “to stir up and exact such an oath…” Even though Kṛṣṇa was able to manipulate Arjuna, the Pāṇḍava hero still had difficulty slaying Bhīṣma. Kṛṣṇa then employs Śikhaṇḍin to attack Bhīṣma, and as far as Kṛṣṇa is concerned Śikhaṇḍin will not kill the brahmin. Arjuna, on the other hand, thinks otherwise as Katz observes: “In fact, Arjuna’s response to the arguments offered by Krishna at the end of VI. 103, implies that he will let Shikhandin accomplish the killing of Bhīṣma…” Further, Arjuna, on a number of occasions encourages Śikhaṇḍin to fight Bhīṣma. In a way Kṛṣṇa tricks Arjuna; he uses deceit against Arjuna in this case and not Bhīṣma.

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315 Smith, 
316 
317 Smith,
318 Ruth Cecily Katz, 
319 Kṛṣṇa knows Arjuna takes his vows very seriously and expects the same of others. By Kṛṣṇa striding towards battle, he is forcing Arjuna’s hand and compelling him to make a vow. 
320 Katz, 158. 
321 Smith,
322 It is not as if Bhīṣma did not know who Śikhaṇḍin was, as he mentioned him by name in 
323 so it is not deceit in this case, but still could be considered an underhanded tactic.
One of Kṛṣṇa’s most well-known uses of deceit is during the duel with the clubs. He knows that Duryodhana is the superior club fighter, therefore Bhīma cannot win without use of underhanded tactics. Duryodhana knows how the Pāṇḍavas were helped by Kṛṣṇa and the Kaurava prince “…took Kṛṣṇa to task for his questionable part in the battle of Kauravaksetra. In a way Duryodhana was right. According to him Kṛṣṇa broke the moral code of dharma in more ways than one, whenever he found it suitable for ensuring victory for the Pāṇḍavas.”

Duryodhana says to Kṛṣṇa:

कंसदाससं दायद न ते लज्जास्यनेन वै
अथर्मण गदायुद्रे यदहं विनिपातितः
उरवृभिषीति भूमस्य स्मृति मिथ्या प्रयच्छता
कि न विज्ञातमेतेमे यदर्जुनम्वोचथाः
घातयित्वा महापालानुरुद्रास्तासहस्वा
जिशृःरुपायैर्हुभिन्न ते लज्जा न ते घृणा

“Son of Kamsa’s slave, have you no shame that I have been brought down unfairly in a battle with clubs, because you deceitfully reminded Bhīma, “Break his thighs!”? How could I not be aware of what you said to Arjuna? Have you no shame, no self-disgust, that you employed so many crooked stratagems to slay thousands of kings who fought fairly?... But I and the other princes who were abiding by our dharma have been slain thanks to you and your ignoble, crooked ways.”

Ganeri, who made the previous observation, also noted that “For Kṛṣṇa, dharma is, at least sometimes, situational.” It went against kṣatriya dharma to fell Duryodhana as Bhīma did, yet Kṛṣṇa still encouraged it. Kṛṣṇa accepts going against dharma, despite the fact that he preached

324 Mbh: Critical Edition, 9.60.27ac-29ac; 9.60.38ac.
325 Smith, Mbh, 558; 9.60.27-29; 9.60.38.
326 Ganeri, The Collected Essays of Bimal Krishna Matilal, 47.
about maintaining one’s dharma in the Bhagavad Gītā. Realistically Kṛṣṇa follows his own rules when it comes to his dharma.

Kṛṣṇa is not just accused of poor decision making in the acts of people’s deaths, but he also received criticism for his peace-making efforts. While on the outset it seems as though Kṛṣṇa did all he could to convince Duryodhana to make peace and that it was really Duryodhana who was too stubborn to see the benefit of peace, as pointed out by Katra, “there is distinct evidence to show that peace-making was quite possible for Kṛṣṇa and that many persons had been expecting Kṛṣṇa to make the achievement. This shows that Kṛṣṇa was not serious in his peace-making which, he confessed, he had undertaken only with a view to avoid future blame for himself.”

Kṛṣṇa spends about seven verses attempting to dissuade Duryodhana from the war, but the Kaurava prince was not interested. However, it is clear by Mahābhārata 5.126, the last attempt made, that Kṛṣṇa is no longer interested in making peace. His sweet demeanour had become ferocious as he uttered threats to Duryodhana:

लप्यःसे वीरशयनं काममेतदवापि शसः

You shall have your hero’s bed – rest assured, you shall have it! In fairness to Kṛṣṇa, talking Duryodhana out of war was a nearly impossible task – even Duryodhana’s allies and elders could not convince him to make peace. However, to discredit Kṛṣṇa’s peace efforts, by verse 129 Kṛṣṇa has revealed his godly form and powers to the Kauravas, but did not give the Kauravas a chance to make peace then (even out of fear). Once again, Kṛṣṇa was threatening the Kauravas, though it ends up being an empty threat since Kṛṣṇa

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327 There are suggestions that the Bhagavad Gītā is a later addition to the epic.
328 Katra, “Kṛṣṇa and the Mahābhārata War,” 221.
330 Smith, Mbh, 327; 5.126.2.
does not fight. Prior to meeting with Duryodhana, Kṛṣṇa mentions being bound by fate which could explain why he is so lackadaisical, but he also does not use divine influence:

अहं हि तत्करिष्यामि परं पुरुषकारतः
देवेः तु न मया शक्यं कर्म कर्तृं कथितः

I will do all that can be done by human exertion at its best. But I shall, by no means, be able to control what is providential (emphasis added).\(^{332}\)

Kṛṣṇa goes into the negotiations expecting to come out empty handed. John Brockington agrees with Katra and suggests Kṛṣṇa “… appears, in fact, as one of the strongest protagonists of conflict, since his peace embassy is aimed more at strengthening Yudhiṣṭhira’s resolve than dissuading the already committed Duryodhana.”\(^{333}\) Both scholars see Kṛṣṇa as not trying very hard in this scenario, and is only trying hard to protect himself should something bad happen.

Although Kṛṣṇa is not a successful peace maker, he is a successful tactician, though at a heavy price. Another incident worth mentioning occurs just before the death of Karṇa. Kṛṣṇa does not dare send Arjuna against Karṇa initially for it would be the death of him, so he sends in Ghaṭotkaca in order to force Karṇa to use his celestial weapon. Kṛṣṇa knew that Ghaṭotkaca would not survive the battle with Karṇa, and he also knew that without the celestial weapon Karṇa was no match for Arjuna. Karṇa’s death also marks the end of the war, thus his defeat is paramount. Kṛṣṇa, like Zeus, used Ghaṭotkaca in order to facilitate the end of the war, but not only was Kṛṣṇa trying to ensure Arjuna’s success, he was also trying to destroy Karṇa for his own reasons. Karṇa had destroyed the Vṛṣṇis, a clan that Kṛṣṇa is a part of, which meant Kṛṣṇa felt threatened so “Kṛṣṇa thereupon seems to have realised the danger to his supremacy for the Kauravas and seems, as is the case of Jarasandra, to have decided upon their destruction by all

\(^{331}\) _Mbh: Critical Edition_, 5.77.5ac.

\(^{332}\) Vyasa, _Mahābhārata_, 5.79.

\(^{333}\) Brockington, _The Sanskrit Epics_, 258.
possible means. He … did everything, fair and foul, to give effect to his wishes.” 334 So Kṛṣṇa also wanted to destroy Karṇa to protect himself. Kṛṣṇa behaved very selfishly in this scenario. After Ghaṭotkaca was slain, the Pāṇḍava brothers were, understandably, upset at the loss of their family member, but Kṛṣṇa was quite jubilant:

हैदिंमबं निहतं द्वंद्व विकीर्णमिव पर्वतम्
Pāṇḍवा दीनमनसं सर्वं बाधाकुलेक्षणा:।
वासुदेवस्तु हर्षण महताभिपरिप्रलुतं:
ननाद सिंहवन्तादं व्यथयत्त्रिि भारत।
विन्दा च महानादं पर्युंजत फलुनम्:
सिंवन्द महानादमभीशूसनःनियम्यं च
नन्तर हर्षसंवीतो335

“Beholding Hidimva’s son slain and lying like a riven mountain, all the Pāṇḍavas became filled with grief and began to shed copious tears. Only Vasudeva filled with transports of delight, began to utter leonine shouts, grieving the Pandeva’s. Indeed, uttering loud shouts he embraced Arjuna. Tying the steeds and uttering loud roars, he began to dance…” 336

Kṛṣṇa does not care much about the means of war, just the end. The god is also less concerned with familial ties than are the Pāṇḍavas.337

It seems challenging to deal with Kṛṣṇa as both a god and essentially adharmic; however, Ruth Katz offers some suggestions to deal with these troubling characteristics: first she suggests that

…God’s games and tricks create no moral dilemma when viewed at a level above the human, for the supreme God is beyond such considerations… 338

Gods, like those in the Iliad, are above moral considerations, so for Kṛṣṇa to act in this way does not diminish his character as it would were it Bhīma or Arjuna committing the same act because

337 Perhaps this is because Kṛṣṇa knows that everyone will attain heaven anyway, so the circumstances around death and war are irrelevant.
the gods are not judged as mortals are judged. Further, Katz says, “it was Hopkins’ belief that Krishna’s role in instigating the various Pāṇḍava deceits was a later addition to the epic, aimed at justifying actions which, originally quite acceptable, were not seen as evil; if a ploy was suggested by God, it had to be approved by the epic audience.**339 Originally these acts were no concern (likely the same is true of the Iliad), but at some point in the tradition the audience had an issue with these beloved heroes being tricksters. If the gods were to suggest these deceits, it would lessen the impact of them, for the gods would (seemingly) never do something immoral. The gods are seen as being above morality. It might even be said that the gods determine what is moral. Although the actions performed seem to be in poor taste, it is obvious that they are not bad enough to prevent people from using similar tricks or even from commenting on them.

Conclusion

Realistically the gods are not ones to look up to for inspiration on how to behave, as they believe that the ends justify the means. The Greek gods behave virtually entirely based on their emotion which is how nearly all of the heroes in both epics behave. Kṛṣṇa is truly one of the only logic driven characters. He has one goal in mind: victory over the Kauravas and he does whatever it takes to achieve it. Despite its destructive effect on the level of the gods, behaving emotionally is not inherently bad, particularly from a literary viewpoint. Readers feel for characters motivated by a sense of love or respect; were the heroes to behave like Kṛṣṇa, the bond between the reader and characters would be lost as it is hard for a mortal to behave without being influenced by emotion. Kṛṣṇa, on the other hand, being a god, can easily disregard

emotion to make the right choice. During the Karna episode, though, Krsna was motivated slightly by a selfishness and fear of losing his standing to Karna.

The gods operated on a different plane of ethics during their respective epics. In the end, for the gods the ends *always* justify the means and the ends are in place by the gods. Zeus and Krsna had the task to relieve the earth of her burden and effectively end the heroic age and were they to fail on their task could they really be divine? Could they really be someone for a mortal to look to in a time of need? No. Both Zeus and Krsna *have* to complete their tasks in order to maintain their following. Of course, one might wonder why the gods did not simply use their power to control everything. While fearmongering can be an effective method for a god to obtain reverence, it does not necessarily carry the honour they desire. M.M. Willcock notes that the gods in the *Iliad*, with the exception of Ares, do not kill mortals as “…such behaviour would seem quite wrong…”340 and Krsna himself vows not to kill anyone in the *Mahābhārata* war. This indicates that the gods are not interested in the dirty work of actually relieving earth of her burden. It also may be that the gods who punish mortals with their own hands are subject to judgement themselves. Jhanji suggests “each being, whether human, divine or demon suffers the consequences of his actions.”341 She is referring in particular to Krsna, but it is not unlikely the same concept could be applied to the Greek gods. It is often said that the Greek gods can do nothing to change fate and all that happens in the *Iliad* is fated to happen. From a literary standpoint, it would make for a far less interesting work if the gods smote everyone just to achieve their final goal: Book I – Zeus/Krsna descends gloriously from the heavens wielding his lightning bolt/discus. He hurls his weapon at mankind, silencing many screams and scattering

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many souls. There is no need for a book II because the main objective has been completed and the story has shifted from being about the heroes and how mortals should behave to a story on the mightiness of god.

Ultimately, the gods seemingly cannot be judged from a moral standpoint and they do not seem to really judge anyone for his actions.\textsuperscript{342} Were the gods to be judged as humans are, this would put them on the same level as humans, and who would look up to their equals, their peers, for guidance? Being a god affords them certain leeway in their actions. It is worth noting, however, that both sets of gods do actively avoid getting blood on their hands, possibly because they view it as wrong themselves. It could also be possible that a god who kills humans may not get the adoration he/she desires from his/her devotees. On the outset, it may seem as though the gods adhere to some sort of moral code, at least when it comes to killing humans; however, I do not think this is really the case. There is an underlying selfishness at play. The gods aid humans to show how humans need the gods to be victorious – it is already obvious to every mortal that the gods do not need humans to gain victory in a war.\textsuperscript{343} Realistically, gods are above moral considerations. They can play tricks, be devious, and suggest the use of underhanded tactics so their favoured mortals may gain victory. Being a suggestion from a god lowers the immoral impact on the mortal committing the act.

Similar to the heroic code, the gods almost have a godly code to follow. It is their job to ascribe to the necessary flow of time. At the time of the \textit{Iliad}, the age of heroes was to come to an end and it was Zeus’ duty to make this happen. In the \textit{Mahābhārata}, it is Kṛṣṇa’s duty to relieve the earth’s burden (and dispel \textit{adharma}). The gods in both epics utilize all their skills in order to complete these duties, but unlike the heroes, it was an anything goes skill set.

\textsuperscript{342} There is an exception in Bhīma’s treatment of Duryodhana, but that will be examined in chapter 5.
\textsuperscript{343} Zeus, after all, defeated the Titans and overthrew his father without the help of mortals.
The gods’ behaviour in the epics does not provide a good example for morality for the heroes. Since the gods are also supreme, it would be challenging for a mortal (even a half-mortal, like Achilles) to defy them and their requests. Bhīma and Achilles had to behave in a way that was different than the gods, arguably their closest allies.
Chapter 5: Action

In each epic there is a decisive duel that ends the war; however, in the case of the *Iliad*, it is just a step towards the end. For the *Iliad*, it was Achilles’ duel with Hektor outside the walls of Troy and for the *Mahābhārata* it is Bhīma’s duel with Duryodhana. In the case of both it is the protagonists’ best warrior against the antagonists’ best. In both instances, victory was obtained only through the help of a god. Athena’s constant trickery and illusions were the downfall of Hektor. While Athena’s meddling was physical, Kṛṣṇa’s meddling was a suggestion. It was Kṛṣṇa’s suggestion, albeit Bhīma’s vow, to smash Duryodhana’s thighs with the club. Achilles did not kill Hektor by unfair means, but it is said that Bhīma had used underhanded tactics against Duryodhana. After both enemies are vanquished, the poor judgement begins; however, commentary exists for Bhīma’s decisive hit on Duryodhana more so than on his action afterwards. Both bodies are mistreated in some capacity, but Achilles’ treatment of Hektor appears worse; possibly because of its length and the fact that Achilles intends to mutilate Hektor’s body while Bhīma does not have similar intentions. The morality associated with treatment of the enemy during the duel and raises a number of questions: is it just a part of war? Is it abnormal behaviour relative to other soldiers? Is vengeance a valid excuse to commit unsavoury acts? And does fulfilling a vow counterbalance the injustice? As chapter 3 demonstrated, both warriors were men of passion and that passion motivated them to destroy their enemies. Both were motivated also by anger which allowed them to overstep normal wartime situations. Their morality may be protected by simple tit-for-tat mentality (Achilles

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344 The *Mahābhārata* actually points to the end being the defeat of Karṇa, but since Yudhīṣṭhira makes an all or nothing wager on the final duel, it would seem that the duel between Duryodhana and Bhīma is truly the mark of the end of the war.
versus Hektor) and promising keeping (Bhīma versus Duryodhana); however, the emotion behind their motivation may overpower the potential protection as it overpowered their enemies.

*Iliad*: Behind a Chariot

The way in which Achilles slays Hektor is not abnormal for the *Iliad*; it is a normal spear joust that ends his life and the action itself was not underhanded. Even his taking advantage of Athena’s trickery is not seen as a point of contention.\(^{345}\) The issue with Hektor’s duel with Achilles does not arise until Hektor’s dying breath. First, Hektor pleaded with Achilles for his life which Achilles, understandably,\(^{346}\) denies him the claim. The *Iliad* had, for the most part, displayed two warring nations that respected each other and their dead. The dead would often be collected at night, only their armour stripped and limited damage to the bodies.\(^{347}\) Achilles’ denial of Hektor’s pleas to not throw his body to the dogs\(^{348}\) tends to make scholars feel uncomfortable. Samuel Eliot Bassett suggests the reason why many think ill of Achilles at this point is because of their inability to think of the situation in the context of the Heroic Age of Greece.\(^{349}\) This is not the first time Achilles ignored the supplication of an enemy; he did the same thing, arguably worse, to Lykaon.\(^{350}\) The vengeful Achilles, which is the only Achilles

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\(^{345}\) Of course, he would have been foolish not to. Not only was this his chance to end the war, gain glory, and avenge Patroklos, but it is clear that Athena’s illusion is not just help, but also somewhat of a command. Killing Hektor was her aim, but she could not do it lest it tarnish her own reputation (see chapter 4), so she needed Achilles to do it for her. By presenting Hektor as she did before Achilles, did he really have a choice?

\(^{346}\) Hektor was the primary reason for Patroklos’ death and the sole motivation for Achilles rejoining the fight.

\(^{347}\) Exceptions to this do exist. There are descriptions of the occasional mutilation. See Charles Segal’s *The Theme of Mutilation of the Corpse in the Iliad* (1971), for more information on mutilation.

\(^{348}\) Homer, *Iliad*, 526; 22.338-339.


\(^{350}\) Achilles behaved worse here because he let Lykaon’s body be devourd by the river, never to be seen or burned by his family. Which can have long lasting effects as Patroklos’ shade did not go to the Underworld until Achilles gave him a proper burial. Although the intent for Hektor’s body was horrific mutilation, there is always still a chance for Priam to get, at least parts of, the body back for burial.
readers are familiar with (assuming they have not read any other sources describing him before the war), does not give in to the supplication of his enemies. It makes sense that Achilles would not acknowledge Hektor’s plea considering Achilles has more invested against Hektor. If he did not give into Lykaon, whom he had little against, then he would not give in to Hektor.

As Bassett points out “modern scholars accuse Achilles... of conduct unbecoming of a knight in outraging Hector’s body…” 351 Before Bassett’s analysis, I thought much the same way. Initially it seems that Achilles is behaving inappropriately towards Hektor’s body by dragging it behind his chariot in the hopes of damaging the corpse; however, as Bassett acknowledges, Hektor had nearly the same misdeeds planned for Patroklos: “… the poet tells us that Hector was dragging the body of Patroclus that he might cut off the head and throw the body to the dogs…” 352 and it had even gotten to the point where “Hippotus… had passed a strap about the ankle of Patroclus and was dragging the body when Ajax slew him.” 353 Bassett predicted that “the body of Patroclus, if the Trojans had prevailed over its defenders would certainly have been dragged by the strap to the walls of Ilios.” 354 Considering this, is Achilles simply not retaliating? Achilles’ behaviour is motivated primarily by his resentment of Hektor’s ill intentions towards Patroklos.

352 Ibid., 5;
353 Ibid., 56;
354 Ibid.

"Ἕκτωρ μὲν Πάτροκλον ἐπεὶ κλυτὰ τεύχε᾿ ἀπηύρα,/ ἐλξ’, ἵν’ ἄπ’ ὀμοίῳ κεφαλὴν τάμοι δέξα χαλκικο,/ τὸν δὲ νέκυν Τρῳῇσιν ἐρυσσάμενος κατὶ δοίη·” (Homer, Iliad, Loeb, 17.125-127)
“…Hektor pulled at the corpse: now to behead it/and give the trunk to Trojan dogs!” (Homer, Iliad, 411; 17.125-127)
"Ἦτοι τὸν Λῆθοο Πελασγοῦ φαίδιμος νάος/, Ἄποδοθος, ποδὸς ἐλκε κατὰ κρατερὴν ύσμην/ δησάμενος τελαμῶν/ παρὰ σφυρὸν ἀμφὶ τένοντας…” (Homer, Iliad, Loeb, 17.288-290)
“… Hippothoos, looping his swordbelt/ around the tendons at the ankles, drew/ the body backward on the field of war.” (Homer, Iliad, 416; 17.288-290)
354 Ibid.
Bassett, in his observance of Hektor, Achilles, and Patroklos, suggests that Hektor should have foreseen Achilles’ behaviour towards him because Hektor knew that Achilles was aware of the injustices that would await his friend. Iris told Achilles that Hektor intended

\[ \pi ξει\text{\`a }\acute{\text{n}}\alpha\text{ scolopessi tamon}\text{`}a \acute{\text{p}}\alpha\lambda\eta\acute{\text{z}} \acute{\text{a}}\pi\text{do dei}\eta \]

…to sever and impale Patroklos’ head on Trojan battlements.

All that happened to Hektor should have been expected by the reader given Hektor’s previous behaviour to Patroklos. Yet Hektor, despite behaving similar to Achilles, is the subject of sympathy for the majority of the *Iliad*. Even the gods felt sympathy to Hektor’s mutilation; the same sympathy may not have been for Patroklos. When Ajax and Menelaos are fighting for Patroklos’ body, they must be victorious on their own without the gods, and it is difficult to say whether the gods would have protected Patroklos’ corpse as it was dragged to Troy. Based on the fact that Patroklos’ death was contrived by the gods, it is unlikely the gods would have protected him. The mutilation of Patroklos would only further enrage Achilles, but his death proved enough. Further, if Hektor was allowed to behave as Achilles had, there would be no need to give sympathy to Hektor. It would also mean that Achilles did not do anything wrong.

While there has been plenty of modern scholarship about Achilles’ behaviour towards Hektor’s body, Homer himself does offer bits of disapproval without outright saying it. Achilles, he writes,

\[ \kappa \acute{\nu} \text{`Ekto}ra \acute{\text{d}}\text{o}n \acute{\text{a}}\text{eik}e\acute{\text{a}} \mu\acute{\eta}\acute{\text{d}}\text{eto }\acute{\text{e}}\text{rga}. \]

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357 Ibid., *Iliad*, 441; 18.177.
… had in mind for Hektor’s body
outrage and shame (emphasis added).\textsuperscript{360}

The gods made their disapproval evident when Achilles gets back to the ships with the enemy’s body. Achilles’ intention of Hektor was to drag his body around to tear it up, allow the Akhaian dogs to eat his body, and allow the sun to damage him. The gods protected his body to the fullest:

\begin{quote}
Ὣς φάτ᾿ ἀπειλήσας· τὸν δ᾿ οὐ κύνες ἀμφεπένοντο,
ἀλλὰ κύνας μὲν ἀλαλκεί Διώς θυγάτηρ Αφροδίτη
ηματα καὶ νύκτας, ῥοδόεντι δὲ χρῖεν ἐλαίῳ
ἀμβροσίῳ, ἵνα μὴ μιν ἀποδρύφοι ἐλκυστάζων.
τῷ δ᾿ ἐπὶ κυάνεον νέφος ἤγαγε Φοῖβος Ἀπόλλων
οὐρανόθεν πεδίονδε, κάλυψε δὲ ὅσσον ἐπεῖχε νέκυς…\textsuperscript{361}
\end{quote}

…but no dogs nosed at Hektor…
Aphrodite kept them from his body night and day, anointing it with oil ambrosial, rose-fragrant, not to let rough dragging by Akhilleus rip the skin. Phoibos Apollo, too, from heaven sent down a black cloud to the plain, shading the spot the body lay on…\textsuperscript{362}

In doing so, Achilles would not be satisfied by not seeing the marring of Hektor’s body. In a way, this is a commentary on the matter from the view of the gods. They are punishing Achilles for his decision and will not allow him to be satisfied by the mutilation of Hektor. Not only do they keep Hektor’s body unblemished, but they also prevent Patroklos’ funeral pyre from being lit:

\begin{quote}
Οὐδὲ πυρὴ Πατρόκλου ἐκαίετο τεθηνῶτος…\textsuperscript{363}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{360} Homer, \textit{Iliad}, 528; 22.395.
\textsuperscript{361} Ibid., \textit{Iliad}, Loeb, 23.194-190.
\textsuperscript{362} Ibid., \textit{Iliad}, 541; 23.194-190.
\textsuperscript{363} Ibid., \textit{Iliad}, Loeb, 23.192.
And now, too,
Patroklos’ pyre would not flame up, \(^{364}\)

which further torments Achilles as he had previously been visited by Patroklos’ shade and has since felt guilty for postponing his friend’s funeral (Bk 23.65-109). By postponing the funeral further, it forces Achilles to think about his selfish actions. \(^{365}\) As previously mentioned in chapter 4, it is more likely than not that Zeus is protecting/ allowing Apollo and Aphrodite to protect Hektor’s body not for ethical reasons, but because of “…Hector’s always having made due sacrifices to the gods.” \(^{366}\) Even Apollo speaks up against Achilles’ actions:

\[
\text{ἀλλ’ ὀλοφ Αχιλῆι, θεοί, βούλεσθ’ ἐπαρήγειν,}
\]
\[

d’ οὔτ’ ἄρ φρένες εἰσίν ἔναίσιμοι οὔτε νόημα
\]
\[

gναμπτόν ἐνι στήθεσσι, λέων δ’ ὡς ἄγρια οἴδεν,
\]
\[

……………………………
\]
\[

ὡς Αχιλεὺς ἔλεον μὲν ἀπώλεσεν, οὐδὲ οἱ αἰδὼς γίγνεται\(^{367}\)
\]

Murderous Akhilleus has your willing help -
a man who shows no decency, implacable,
barbarous in his way…
The man has lost all mercy,
he has no shame… \(^{368}\)

Only Hera argues with Apollo, but simply on the grounds that Achilles is a demi-god and this implies that his actions are not to be judged the same as mortals. Her speech (which seems more about her than what Achilles is doing) is quite a bit shorter than Apollos’ and Zeus quickly sides

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\(^{364}\) Homer, \textit{Iliad}, 541; 23.192. This comes after the description of Apollo and Aphrodite’s interference, therefore the gods likely halted the pyre.

\(^{365}\) Even though Achilles tells himself he is killing Hektor for Patroklos, he is doing it make himself feel better for his shortcomings which resulted in Patroklos’ death.


\(^{368}\) Ibid., \textit{Iliad}, 568; 24.39-41; 24.44-45.
with Apollo insofar as Hektor’s body needs to be returned to Troy and Achilles needs to stop his behaviour (Bk 24.32-76).

Realistically, Achilles’ behaviour was no different from anyone else’s, but since it was from the mindset of vengeance it seems all the worse. Van Wees suggests the immorality of Achilles’ actions was not from dragging Hektor, but it was the length of time that it happened for. Part of this rests on the gods’ shoulders, for if Achilles had seen his attempted mutilation succeed then he may have stopped sooner. Achilles had also proven himself to be outside humanity after the death of Patroklos: he refused to eat and wished to jump straight into battle, as if death of the enemy would sate his hunger and quench his thirst. He did not give in to supplication or stop to raid bodies, and he even wished to devour Hektor’s body:

\[
\alpha\i\gamma\acute{r}\ \pi\omega\varsigma\ \alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\omicron\upsilon \mu\epsilon\mu\nu\varsigma \kappa\i\vartheta \theta\omicron\mu\omicron\varsigma \\acute{a}n\acute{e}i\eta
\\\omega\omicron\mu\iota\ \acute{a}π\omicron\tau\omicron\alpha\mu\nu\omicron\omicron\omicron\upsilon\omicron \kappa\acute{r}e\acute{a} \acute{e}d\omicron\nu\epsilon\omicron\alpha\i
\]

would god my passion drove me
to slaughter you and eat you raw…

Schein’s analysis of Achilles at the end suggests “Homer’s audience would rightly have expected the most terrible deeds of warfare from an Achilles who is so utterly cut off from the human community and who has nothing left to lose” (emphasis added). Achilles knows he is going to die before he leaves Troy, and now that his best friend has perished he does not care what happens to himself or anyone else. Even the gods do eventually concede to Achilles when he summons Zephyros, a wind god, to assist with lighting the pyre. While Zephyros is a minor god, he does not get stopped by Zeus, nor does he seem to fear Zeus’ potential wrath.

370 Homer, Iliad, Loeb, 22.346-47.
371 Ibid., Iliad, 526; 22.346-47.
372 Schein, The Mortal Hero, 144.
Achilles’ actions are still not out of the ordinary for the Akhaian warrior; however, he manages to take it further than ordinary by extending the time because he is malicious and for no other reason. This is not to say that Hektor also would not have dragged Patroklos to be malicious, but Achilles has no other intention. Hektor could have mutilated the body of Patroklos, as a skilled warrior, in order to frighten the remaining warriors, but by the time Achilles begins his attempted mutilation there are no Trojans to frighten; they lost their leader and their hope. The issue of morality is not so much in the action, but in the motivation. Achilles was behaving as any warrior wanting to bring back a body would: there is not enough space in the chariot for a dead body, so why not drag it behind? In any case, the unblemished body of the enemy holds no value, as Hektor’s father, Priam, would have wanted Hektor back in any condition. However, Achilles was not trying to win the war, cause panic, or gain glory; he was just trying to kill and maim the man who killed his friend. Achilles wanted to placate his rage more than anything else, by getting revenge for Patroklos.

Mahābhārata: Under the Foot

Unlike the Achilles encounter with his opponent, Bhīma did fight unfairly in order to win his battle and in the moments after he felled Duryodhana, he committed a shameful act on the Kaurava king. Bhīma was chosen by Duryodhana for the battle of the clubs and the entire outcome of the war rests on this battle (Mahābhārata 9.31). During the battle, it is mentioned that Duryodhana was the superior fighter and Bhīma could only win if he used underhanded

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373 Even Hektor started to drag Patroklos back to Troy behind his chariot (Iliad, 416; 17.288-292).
374 Revenge for Patroklos had nothing to do with what Patroklos wanted. Patroklos wanted Achilles to give him a timely funeral (Iliad, 537-38; 23.68-92). The language seems to indicate that at least a couple of days have passed since Hektor’s death (which was, likely, a few days after Patroklos’ passing). While Achilles is so focused on getting revenge “for” Patroklos, he neglected his closest friend.
tactic of hitting below the belt.\textsuperscript{375} After Duryodhana has fallen, Bhīma places his foot on Duryodhana’s head. Scholars have more to say about whether Bhīma should have hit Duryodhana below the belt and whether this was a justified act as opposed to the action that follows. Early on in the epic, Bhīma had vowed to

\begin{quote}
सुयोधनमिं पायं हत्तास्मि गदया युधि शिरः पादेन चास्याहमविश्वास्यामि भूतले
\end{quote}

…kill this wicked Duryodhana with [his] club in battle, and trample his head into the ground with [his] foot.\textsuperscript{377}

Bhīma has not failed to fulfill any vow he has taken, regardless of whether it is right or wrong (see chapter 4). Some scholars, like Dhairyabala Vora, see the vow as a way to justify Bhīma’s actions: “The actions of Bhīmasena are justified on the ground, that he has taken a vow to break the thighs of his enemy as a vendetta, for insulting Draupadī and hence, there was nothing wrong about his actions.”\textsuperscript{378} Arun Kumar Mookerjee disagrees with Vora by suggesting “the vow itself was wrong and the act following it was a sin against a specific dharma.”\textsuperscript{379} Vows are very important in this epic and are only broken in certain situations. Further Bhīma’s ultimate goal was victory for the Pāṇḍavas which could only happen if he cheated. Krṣṇa points out that Bhīma had made his vow and that

\begin{quote}
सोऽयं प्रितिः तां चापि पारियत्वारिकर्षणः
मायाविनं च राजानं मायैव निकृतंततु
यदोष बलम्भस्थाय न्यायेन प्रहरिष्यति
विषमस्थातो राजा भविष्यति युधिष्ठिरः.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{375} Smith, \textit{Mbh}, 549-50; 9.57.
\textsuperscript{376} \textit{Mbh}: Critical Edition, 2.68.28ac.
\textsuperscript{377} Smith, \textit{Mbh}, 161; 2.68.28.
\textsuperscript{380} \textit{Mbh}: Critical Edition, 9.57.7ac-8ac.
the tormentor of his enemies ought to fulfill that vow and use deception to cut down deceitful King Duryodhana. If he fights fairly, relying on his strength, then King Yudhiṣṭhira will be placed in danger.\textsuperscript{381}

Kṛṣṇa wanted Bhīma to keep his vow, and Kṛṣṇa, as seen in the previous chapter, has no qualms with victory by deceit. Kṛṣṇa further justified Bhīma’s actions by reminding everyone

\textit{मायया निर्जिता देवैरसुरा इति न: श्रुतम्}\textsuperscript{382}

…that the gods defeated the demons by means of deception…\textsuperscript{383}

Kṛṣṇa backs Bhīma’s decision indefinitely, even when Kṛṣṇa’s brother, Balarāma, scolds Bhīma for his behaviour:

\textit{नैतद् गदायु ग्रुतवायदुवृकोदर:}
\textit{अर्थो नाभ्या न हन्तव्यमिति शास्तस्य निष्क्षण:}
\textit{अव वाशास्तविन्मूढः स्वच्छन्दात्स्प्रवर्तति}\textsuperscript{384}

What the wolf-belly has done is something never before seen in a battle with clubs: the learned texts are clear that no blow should be struck below the navel, but Bhīma, this unlearned fool, acts however he wishes!\textsuperscript{385}

Bhīma defended himself to Gāndhārī as well on the bases of self-protection and the need to observe his vow (\textit{Mahābhārata} 11.14).\textsuperscript{386}

\textsuperscript{381} Smith, \textit{Mbh}, 550; 9.57.7-8.
\textsuperscript{382} \textit{Mbh}: Critical Edition 9.57.5a.
\textsuperscript{383} Smith, \textit{Mbh}, 549; 9.57.5.
\textsuperscript{384} \textit{Mbh}: Critical Edition, 9.59.5c-6ac.
\textsuperscript{385} Smith, \textit{Mbh}, 554; 9.59.5-6.
The Pāṇḍavas did not seem to take much issue with Bhīma’s breaking of the thighs.

However, Yudhiṣṭhira commented on his brother stepping on Duryodhana’s head, and it was not well received by the Pāṇḍavas or their allies:

\[
\text{नथमांनः सोमकानां प्रबहाः:}
\text{तव पुत्रं तथा हल्मा कथ्मानं वृकोदरम्}
\text{नृत्यान्त्या म बहुशो धर्मराजोस्वरीदिदम्}
\text{मा शिरोस्वय पदा मर्द्मी धर्मस्ते स्वगान्महान्}
\]

\[
\text{उत्सर्पिण्डो भ्राता च नैत्राय्यं कृतं त्वया}^{387}
\]

the righteous minded Somaka leaders were not happy to see joyful Bhīma mean-mindedly placing his foot on the head of the Kaurava King. Yudhiṣṭhira …spoke: ‘Do not trample his head with your foot, do not let your great dharma fail!... it is not right for you to behave thus.’^{388}

Immediately there is commentary on Bhīma’s behaviour for stepping on Duryodhana’s head. A lot of this stems from the idea that the feet are the least pure part of the body while the head is the most pure. This sort of idea is not uncommon. In the primordial man myth in Hinduism brahmins, the priestly, highest caste, are born from his mouth/head while the śudras, the lowest caste, are born from his feet. Even though the breaking of the thighs was actually cheating, it is Bhīma’s actions afterward that upset most. Even Balarāma does not speak up against Bhīma until Bhīma pushes Duryodhana’s head;^{389} however, oddly enough Balarāma makes no comment about Bhīma kicking Duryodhana’s head, even though, based on the text, that is what triggered his anger. Kṛṣṇa placates Balarāma and defends Bhīma’s actions of the club hit; however, it is clear that Kṛṣṇa condemns the second actions when he asks Yudhiṣṭhira:

\[
\text{धर्मराज किमथ तमधर्ममनुमन्यसे}
\]

---

389 शिरस्यभिभत्त हद्द्रा भीवसनेन ते सुतम् / राम: प्रहलद्यां श्रेष्ठक्रोध बलवद्भली (Mbh: Critical Edition, 9.59.3ac) “When mighty Balarama…saw Bhīma kick [Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s] son in the head, he was furiously angry” (Smith, *Mbh*, 554; 9.59.3).
Lord of dharma, why do you give your approval to an act of adharma? Bhīma has trampled with his foot the head of Duryodhana… O king, how can you as lord of dharma connive this?\textsuperscript{391}

Kṛṣṇa accusing Yudhishthira of accepting Bhīma’s action so soon after the king of dharma had commented on it further drives home the point that this is unacceptable; that is, even Kṛṣṇa himself needs to express his disapproval. While Kṛṣṇa found justification for the thighs, he could not find any for the trampling; in a way, it makes it clear that Bhīma’s decision (in an act of rage) was immoral as it is the first time Kṛṣṇa condemned him.

Conclusion

In the end, the acts used to kill all major Kauravas was through deceit/underhanded tactics, which is why the Pāṇḍavas and Kṛṣṇa do not find much wrong with Bhīma hitting blow the belt; it was just a means to an end. Like all others, it was advised by Kṛṣṇa, which alleviates the immorality associated with the acts. In both epics, both enemies had been felled, vengeance should have been completed, yet both heroes continued past acceptable means. Bhīma’s breaking of the thighs is acknowledged as cheating, but is justified because it was a vow and it is better to observe a vow (even an adharmic one) than to ignore it. The act is further justified because it was on par with the deaths of other Kaurava generals which was completed under the

\textsuperscript{391} Smith, \textit{Mbh}, 556; 9.59.29-30.
advice of Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa also supports Bhīma’s decision to cheat when he argues for Bhīma against Balarāma.

Even though Bhīma did vow to step on Duryodhana’s head, Kṛṣṇa does not support the action; no one on either side appreciate this. This decision of Bhīma’s was an afterthought and he did it from a place of anger and vengeance. This is much like Achilles’ mutilation of Hektor. Dragging the body and feeding it to the dogs was not unheard-of, or even uncommon, in Heroic warfare and Hektor had similar plans for Patroklos which Achilles was aware of. Achilles behaved purely out of vengeance on Hektor’s body. The length of time, which was most unacceptable, Achilles abused the body was extended by the gods who showed their disapproval of the action by helping Hektor. The protection of Hektor’s body and the unlit funeral pyre are commentaries on Achilles’ actions; if the gods did accept Achilles’ action they may have allowed the pyre to be lit and there would have been more contention between the gods over protection of Hektor’s body.

Truly it is the motivation which hampers the heroes’ morality. Both Achilles and Bhīma do their immoral actions primarily for vengeance and rage. Achilles’ actions were no different than what Hektor had planned for Patroklos. Bhīma was just observing a vow – his stepping on Duryodhana’s head, however, does seem to be immoral given the fact it is the only time Kṛṣṇa shows disapproval. The vows absolve them of parts of their immorality, but not the entire action. It is clear that the negative motivation cannot be justified. The decision to dishonour the enemy came from a place of vengeance and malice. Victory had been attained, but it seemed for the heroes it was not enough to abate the anger they felt towards their opponents. Their motivation, while noble from a poetic standpoint, pushed them into a realm of immoral behaviour. The characters surrounding the heroes could not keep their comments to themselves
over these incidents. The intentions behind the violators was to defend the honour of a loved one, but that intention is not enough to protect these heroes from immorality. Part of the reason for this is because their intention, while decent, was dripping with malice and they still attacked out of anger, almost out of an attempt to make themselves feel better. Immorality for these heroes did not start as soon as they killed their opponents, in seemingly underhanded ways; it occurred after the deed was done.

392 Obviously in the case of Achilles since Patroklos could not feel much sense of retribution in the afterlife.
Conclusion

Bhīma and Achilles had fairly similar personality traits which made them more comparable to each other than Arjuna and Achilles; the latter pairing is often seen in academic literature. During the epics, both exhibited two sides of their personalities. Bhīma’s personality seemed to move very fluidly between his human and demon side. His behaviour was determined by where he was on a sliding scale between human and demon; some actions leaned heavily to his demon side (his killing of major enemies), while others were more human (his killing in general). Achilles did not have the same fluidity that Bhīma had. His change was like a switch: there was not much left of heroic Achilles when the anti-hero emerged after Patroklos’ death.

The demon and anti-hero personality traits were triggered by the warriors’ obligations to their hearts. Bhīma’s most demon-like qualities emerged only after Draupadī was mistreated; otherwise, he was just a regular warrior bound by his kṣatriya dharma to act in a just war. The demon-like qualities caused Bhīma to attack in horrid ways: he ripped open Duḥśāsana’s chest and he mangled Kīcaka. The former he had vowed to do and by abiding by his vow he was upholding satya, the highest dharma. His mangling of Kīcaka was purely out of rage. Bhīma’s treatment of Duryodhana by trampling his head is the direct result of his rage inspired by Draupadī. This is the first instance Kṛṣṇa voices his disapproval of Bhīma’s actions. This action was also a completed vow, yet it still was not acceptable.

Not only were the heroes influenced by their own emotions, but the gods were influencing the war in both epics. In the Iliad, the war continued and ended because of Athena’s deceit. The gods used deceit in order to gain victory for their favoured mortals. However, they never did it because it was the right thing to do; rather, they did it because they liked certain mortals more than others. In the Mahābhārata, Kṛṣṇa provided counsel to the Pāṇḍavas and was
very influential in their victory. Gods in both epics guided their favoured mortals to victory. The gods themselves also had their own obligation to complete; they were obligated to relieve the earth’s burden by destroying heroes. Neither sets of gods could bloody their own hands and kill the mortals themselves, so they had to use the mortals as tools to achieve this goal.

Achilles lost his best friend to Hektor; the death of Patroklos stirred up such an immense rage in him that he became the anti-hero. He killed without mercy and did not allow proper burials for many of his victims. His entire focus was to kill Hektor and to desecrate his body so the prince would be unrecognizable and his family would suffer knowing they could not give him a proper burial. Achilles wanted Priam and his family to feel the same pain he felt which is why he wanted to mutilate the body. The gods showed their disapproval of the action by protecting Hektor’s body and preventing Patroklos’ funeral.

Morality

Bhīma and Achilles are the best fighters in their respective epics. They have similar personalities and motivations, yet Arjuna is still cast as the main comparative player to Achilles. This lack of literature, along with my presentation of Bhīma and Achilles, demonstrates a commentary on morality in war. Achilles is deemed the protagonist of the *Iliad*, despite his questionable actions: dumping Lykaon’s body in the river, desiring to eat Hektor’s flesh, and his prolonged attempted desecration of Hektor’s body. His superiority in battle overshadows any negativity associated with his morality. Bhīma, who behaves similarly by mangling Kīcaka’s body and actively drinking the blood of Duḥśāsana, is very similar, yet he falls by the wayside and is only a secondary - maybe even a tertiary – character. Bhīma’s place in the epic, behind
Arjuna, demonstrates that the war was not of prominent importance since Bhīma is the embodiment of war. The *Mahābhārata* is more about *dharma*, therefore Arjuna, the embodiment of *dharma* and its main teaching tool, is at the forefront. By pushing Bhīma to the background of the story, it is clear the *Mahābhārata* does not really like the idea of war, but it provided a good basis for teaching *dharma*. It did so because killing is, in general, *adharmic*, which leads *kṣatriyas* to a paradox. However, doing a *kṣatriya’s dharma* (killing) in an unattached way and *only* when necessary results in less *karma* than avoiding the *adharmic* action completely. The *Iliad*, on the other hand, is accepting of the war which is why its embodiment of war (Achilles) is the protagonist.

It seems to me that Bhīma protects Arjuna’s character. Without Bhīma, no one would defend, or avenge Draupadī. The readers would see her being mistreated and wonder why no one helped her. Furthermore, the difference between Bhīma and Arjuna’s reactions are teachable moments: Arjuna stays calm and collected, but Bhīma is quick to anger which is not necessarily appropriate behaviour. Additionally, Bhīma, the best club fighter of the Pāṇḍavas, had to defeat Duryodhana in an *adharmic* manner. If Arjuna (who likely would have been Bhīma’s alternative) had done this it would have tarnished his reputation and his authority on *dharma*. Arjuna always behaves *dharmically* and to have him slip up at the end would be contradictory.

Morality, for these warriors, is blurred by their outside influences. The code protects their morality so long as they adhere to it, but they cannot deny the obligations they have to their loved ones. These obligations they have turn into motivation for them to commit their worst acts. If it were not for the mistreatment of Draupadī at the hands of Duḥśāsana, Bhīma would have never ripped open his chest nor drank his blood. Had Patroklos not died, Achilles would not have gone on a rampage. Furthermore, Achilles also would not have participated in the war
and the Akhaians would have likely been defeated which would not be very good literature for country.
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