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Developments in Western Thought

The *Iliad* is an epic poem written by Homer which provides meticulous details about the quarrels at the end of the famous *Trojan War*. The contemporary relevance of Homer is justified and it also has a fundamental part to play in the developments taking place in western thought. The *Iliad* is highly powerful and profound, therefore, its universality is justified on its own terms. The poem allows us to see certain aspects of the human nature as Homer deliberately curated this masterpiece as a portrayal of the human will to power which is an important aspect as far as advancements in Western thoughts are concerned. The *Iliad* provides insight about the psychological damages which are suffered by great warriors on the battlefield and according to the modern literature and its application in the real world, this is a thought-provoking aspect of war. Homer was the first conspicuous product of the Hellenic civilization. The *Iliad* is a representation of a civilized aristocracy and its viewpoint and this fact leads to the appearance of Homer as an 18th century rationalizer who justified ancient myths. In the poem, it is depicted that religion was a tribal matter and human sacrifice lasted longer than the sacrificial eating. This poem has a lasting impact on the culture of Modern Age. Aristotle introduced the concept of metaphor as a direct outcome of an in-depth analysis of the poem. Through this seminal work of Homer, Plato constructed his own paradigm of reasoning and his dialectics were also unswervingly influenced by The *Iliad*. In book 1 of The *Iliad*, line 163, Achilles himself says that the Greeks as a whole already gave him Briséis, whereas, he wanted this deed to be done only by Agamemnon (Lombardo, bk.1, line 163).

"You shameless, profiteering excuse for a commander!

How are you going to get any Greek Warrior

To follow you into battle again? You know,

……………And now you're threatening to take away the prize

That I sweated for and the Greeks gave me”, (Lombardo, bk.1, lines 160-170)

This line also demonstrates the dialectic struggle of Achilles with the meaning and concept of time. In book 9, amidst the lines 630-643, Aias advocates that Achilles ought to accept Agamemnon's apology and new gifts, since relatives of slain men should and do accept apologies and payment of blood price, and Briséis is of less importance than a slain relative (Lombardo, bk.9, lines 630-643).

“Now listen to this. You're listening? Good.

………….It was time for the others to think about leaving”, (Lombardo, bk.9, lines 630-643)

From these lines, it is evident that emotion has a proscribed yet poignant role in shaping human action and this is also a very important theme in western philosophy.

Similarly, in Book 11, lines 275-280, Homer also demonstrates his command on military knowledge.

"And he pitched Pisander off the chariot on to earth

…………and he sent him rolling through the carnage like a log”, (Lombardo, bk.11, lines 275-280)

These descriptions of killings and slaughter in The *Iliad* may lead to some modern thinkers of the Western philosophy to probe into the values and prevalent beliefs of the time period in which this epic poem was written. Yet it is almost futile to expect Homer for possible condemnation of war because ultimately war is intrinsically tied with man’s desire to tell and propagate stories. The developments in western philosophy are also prejudiced by the fact that war simultaneously brings glory to the warriors and also destroys their lives. Important themes such as post-conflict destruction and chaos are currently discussed in the light of The *Iliad*. Renowned scholars who spent a significant portion of their lives studying Homer stress on the fact that human beings are still both admirers and victims of mass destruction and violence and in the long run, Homer will always be regarded as the most widely accepted interpretation of human nature.

Thucydides, the most prominent Greek historian of ancient times and widely recognized as the father of political realism and scientific history has a lot of influence in the modern world. He studied Peloponnesian War in great depth and his insights are chiefly relevant to the contemporary scenario (Warner). It can be comprehended from the text that wars are almost always results of some systematic changes and this notion has been examined by the Western philosophical thinkers at great length. The introductory pages of the History of the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides, describe the emergent growth and rising economy of the Athenian civilization.

“The Athenians were the first to give up the habit of carrying weapons and to adopt a way of living that was more relaxed and more luxurious”, (Thucydides, bk.1, sec 6). This shows that the advent of civilization is a successor to the formation of city-states. Moreover, in the contemporary landscape, Thucydides managed to show that if there is considerable progress in physical security and people accumulate wealth in great amounts, the conditions for ethical and political achievements are met. Various other themes, such as vulnerabilities persistent in different political communities due to natural disasters have also been analyzed by Thucydides and this theme has played a pivotal role in developing the Western discourse. Following this line of approach, it can be seen that in such situations, no state institution is respected and a nation returns to a pre-political state of nature. Subsequently, in book 3 and book 7, the events revolving around the endemic plague are also demonstrated followed by various scenes that are brimming with violence and outrage. “Thus the Peloponnesians set off by night, at once and in a hurry, for home … ... they seized upon all their enemies whom they could find and put them to death”, (Thucydides, bk.3, sec 81). In another instance, the scenes of terror are stated as, “For the Thracian race, like all the most bloodthirsty barbarians, are always particularly bloodthirsty … … thus disaster fell upon the entire city, a disaster more complete than any, more sudden and more horrible” (Thucydides, bk.7, sec 29-30). These lines are quintessential illustrations of the futility and fragility of the moral and virtuous achievements of civilization in defiance of the ultimate struggle for the survival of mankind. Realism has also been discussed in detail in his book and Thucydides has efficaciously stressed the harsh events that take place during the war and the benefits of wise decisions taken by men of substance. “But success goes to the man who sees more clearly when the enemy is making mistakes like this and who, making the most of his own forces…… and are of the greatest possible service to one’s own side”, (Thucydides, bk.5, sec 9). Consequently, he probes into the transformation of human nature and advocates that war changes the physical, political, and social fabrics of society.

Both Homer and Thucydides’ works are central to the understanding of developments in Western thought and philosophical discourse and one can really benefit in the pursuit of understanding international relations from these two seminal works.

# **Works Cited:**

Lombardo, Stanley. *Iliad*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2009.

Warner, R. *A historical commentary on Thucydides: a companion to Rex Warner's Penguin translation*. University of Michigan Press, 1997.