

§47. Amity



Thus as Athena spake he obeyed, and rejoiced in his spirit.
 Then at the altar between them a treaty was made by the goddess
 Pallas Athena, the daughter of Zeus who beareth the aegis,
 Once more likened to Mentor in voice and in bodily semblance.

– *Odyssey 24:545-548*

There is more to the vision of the *Odyssey* than the reuniting of a couple. The way in which that was accomplished, a slaughter given by earlier tradition and not very comfortable for the author,¹ left much unsolved. This last chapter is where it will be resolved. The author fully realizes that killing is not the end, but the beginning, of a problem. And what may be the solution of the problem? It may not be arbitrary that Athena is often portrayed holding a pair of scales; she is the patron of justice, and justice is the foundation of civil life.

This was not lost on whoever put together the Decalogue. Minus its later added theological beginning, and thematically arranged, its precepts are six:²

Sacredness of Marriage and Family Solidarity

Thou shalt not commit adultery
 Honor thy father and mother

Security of Life and Property

Thou shalt not kill
 Thou shalt not steal

Malign Intent (it can lead to any of the other social wrongs)

Thou shalt not covet

Judicial Due Process

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor

It is justice which stands ready to right wrongs that may arise under any of the other headings: divorce, property disputes, accusations of murder or of theft. The confidence that *disputes will be justly decided* makes the rest of it work

Odyssey 24 ends as Athena, our and Odysseus' guide through the story, intervenes one last time to establish that enduring social order. The critics do not like it; they denounce it and everything after the lovers have bedded down, as not only inferior but intrusive. But we have covered that.³ What remains?

¹For her attempts to justify the slaughter as necessary, see §44.

²Following Exodus 20 (the Deuteronomy 5 version has been subtly modified).

³See the previous chapter.

The Last Battle

The joining of battle is necessary to finish the Laertes thread, and to set the contrast for what is to follow: the lesson that war is not the answer to war. Telemachus had a share in the slaying of the suitors; so of course did Odysseus. And now, the *aristeia* of Laertes will be the last act of violence in the *Odyssey*. The act of violence which decisively unites the three – on the old basis.

- v. 477-488 (12) Zeus to Athena
- w. 489-501 (13) The angry citizens approach
- x. 502-515 (14) Odysseus and Telemachus prepare; Laertes rejoices
- y. 516-526 (11) *Aristeia* of Laertes; he kills Eupheithes⁴
- z. 527-548 (22) Athena proposes peace, and all happily agree

<i>Od 24</i>	v	w	x	y	z
v	~	0-00	0-00	0-00	0-00
w	0-00	~	0-00	0-00	0-00
x	0-00	0-00	~	0-00	0-00
y	0-00	0-00	0-00	~	0-00
z	0-00	0-00	0-00	0-00	~

Text

However hastily arrived at, the peace is still a peace, and it ends the entire *Odyssey* on a note which, as a careful reader will see, the *Odyssey* has maintained from the very beginning.

That's *her* take on it all. Now then, how about us?

⁴The choice is important. Eupheithes deserved to die, since he had not paid his debt of gratitude to Odysseus (16:424-430) but instead, allowed his son Antinoös to lead the other suitors in threatening the continuity of Odysseus' line. This one killing distances the scene from the previous deaths of the suitors themselves, and creates a single death which can be seen to be justified. The immediate account is balanced.