Ancient Greek Recognition? Homer, Plato, and the Struggle for Honor

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Abstract: According to a prominent narrative, the problem of recognition arises in the modern period in opposition to premodern notions of honor. This chapter invites us to reconsider this narrative by examining two views of honor in ancient Greek thought. I first show that Homeric honor includes contestable norms of reciprocal respect and esteem for individual virtue. I then show how Plato appropriates the Homeric view in his ethical psychology yet articulates a competing view of the nature and value of honor. By showing that ancient Greek honor is more continuous with theories of recognition than has been appreciated, this chapter offers fresh perspectives on a central strand of ancient Greek ethics and its relevance to social and political thought.

1. Narratives of Recognition

The theory of recognition is not a stranger to its history. Since the landmark studies of Charles Taylor and Axel Honneth, several theorists have drawn on a line of thought from Rousseau to Hegel to reconceive justice in terms of respect, esteem, and other forms of positive regard or 'recognition' (Taylor 1994; Honneth 1995). The animating idea is that one cannot become fully free or indeed self-conscious unless one recognizes and is recognized by others as equal and as distinctive human beings. As Taylor and Honneth emphasize, this social conception of freedom depends on a modern conception of the self, connected on one side to notions of human rights and dignity and, on another side, to notions of individuality and authenticity. As the nature of recognition remains debated, however, so does the history of the concept. The present volume joins growing efforts to understand how other thinkers, from Aquinas and Luther to Machiavelli and Hobbes, not only contribute to the rise of this whole problematic but also offer fruitful resources for contemporary reflection. These efforts have largely focused on late medieval and

early modern moral philosophy. With very few exceptions, ancient Greek thought remains unexplored.[1]

It is therefore worth asking a basic question: did ancient Greeks have a concept of recognition? The question, to be sure, might seem idle. One prominent narrative of recognition suggests they did not. No one denies that ancient Greek culture is obsessed with esteem or that ancient Greek thinkers reflect sensitively on the role of esteem in a good life and a good community. Unlike certain modern philosophers after Descartes, ancient Greeks need no reminder that who we are depends on our relations to others. Yet precisely this innocence might be taken to show that they lack the *concept* of recognition. "In premodern times," Taylor writes, people understand themselves in terms of honor and so the problem of recognition is "too unproblematic to be thematized as such" (1994, 35). On this view, shared in broad strokes by Honneth, honor is a matter of social rank. It structures inequality among groups, not respect for human equality, and defines people and their worth by their group role, not by their individual attributes. Because this social order is relatively stable, honor is largely uncontested and there is little cause to demand recognition; the problem does not arise. But the collapse of the *ancien régime* across modern Europe brings two conceptual shifts. First, honor becomes universalized into the concept of human dignity. Second, because all human beings have dignity, it becomes possible and necessary to seek esteem for individual character and conduct. With these two shifts, the concept of recognition emerges out of and in opposition to the concept of honor. In brief, modern recognition renders ancient honor obsolete (Taylor 1994, 27–35; Honneth 1995, 122–28).[2]

If this narrative suggests that ancient Greeks lack a concept of recognition, the suggestion remains ambiguous. For one thing, we ourselves do not have a single, settled concept of recognition (Honneth 2021). For another, the narrative is silent on antiquity and, with its grand scope, does not pretend to offer a fine-grained account of honor and its conceptual transformation. This leaves unclear whether recognition is supposed to be strictly modern or whether honor constitutes some implicit or attenuated form of recognition. There are difficult questions in this terrain about what it takes to possess a concept and what it takes for different cultures to possess the same concept, not just similar ones, questions that must for the moment be set to one side. But we should note that, on either construal, the above narrative assumes that honor is descriptively unlike and

normatively inferior to modern paradigms of recognition. This assumption oversimplifies the ancient Greek case, I shall argue. My argument complements recent historical and philosophical proposals that honor is more closely tied to dignity, more egalitarian, and more ethically robust than is often appreciated.[3] These proposals complicate notions of honor that have inflected the history of (modern) recognition but also, perhaps surprisingly, classical scholarship. It is for this reason not idle but fruitful to ask whether ancient Greeks have a concept of recognition. The question has a dialectical point, to throw fresh light on a familiar strand of ancient Greek ethics and on some less familiar aspects of recognition.

In what follows, I shall argue that honor in Homer and Plato is ethically more complex and structurally more akin to recognition than contemporary theorists tend to appreciate. I shall concentrate on two 'struggles for honor.' Beginning from the quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon in the *Iliad*, I shall first show that the Homeric view of honor admits of contestation and embodies a normative pattern of mutual recognition among peers (Section 2). I shall then examine how, in the *Republic*, Plato draws on yet criticizes the Homeric view in his ethical psychology to reconceive of honor and its value (Section 3). I shall close by returning to the contemporary import of this historical analysis (Section 4).

2. The Homeric View

In Homer, the concept of honor (*timē*) comprises one's worth and the recognition of that worth by others.[4] These facets are intertwined, for honor is necessarily social in three respects. It is, firstly, a relational and a hierarchical notion. Those who have honor occupy a special status as members of a group, a status that not everyone can enjoy. Secondly, one's worth is indexed to what one contributes or is expected to contribute to a group. Thirdly, this contribution should be recognized *by* members of the group. One cannot have honor alone: whether one does, and how much honor one has, depends in part on the regard of others. These social dimensions of honor are clearest where honor is based on social status. A king, for example Agamemnon, has honor by virtue of rank. One cannot be a king without ruling over others and being treated by them as a king. In Homer, such treatment is thoroughly normative. A king is *entitled* to honor from his inferiors; inferiors are *obligated* to honor their superiors, just as all human beings are obligated to honor the gods and their priests. Honor is also owed to supplicants or beggars who may be inferior. But the

most critical obligation is that all warriors honor one another insofar as they are members of the same cooperative group. Such 'horizontal' honor, in Frank Stewart Henderson's terms, constitutes a baseline of equality upon which warriors compete for 'vertical' honor, a greater share of honor than others according to their individual worth (Stewart 1994, ch. 4).

What, then, is the standard of worth? Most basic is the social status of a warrior, familiar from many accounts of Homeric honor as well as its modern counterparts. Yet another standard is virtue, as conceived in the epics, and these two standards potentially conflict. This makes who deserves honor from whom and why hotly contested. As we shall see, underlying such contestation is a normative pattern of reasoning whose structure strikingly resembles mutual recognition: if a warrior A desires honor from a warrior B, then A must think that (1) he has worth and (2) so does B, otherwise B lacks the normative authority needed to satisfy A's desire; but B can have worth only if he recognizes (3) his own worth and (4) that of A. This pattern is never explicit in the epics; it is simply embedded in practices of honoring. But it becomes apparent when those practices break down, when a warrior perceives himself dishonored and, angrily, demands justice. We need not look far for an example. As soon as the *Iliad* begins, Agamemnon dishonors Achilles by threatening to take his prized war captive, the young woman Briseis. This quarrel is well-known, so much so that it is easy to miss the complexity of the Homeric view of honor. A close look will help to untangle some of its strands and to lay the groundwork in turn for Plato's response.

We enter onto a tense scene. Agamemnon, king of the Achaean army, has "dishonored" a priest of Apollo by refusing ransom for his daughter (*ētimasen*, *Il.* 1. 11, 94).[5] His men plead that the priest be "respected" (*aidesthai*, 1. 23). Once Apollo sends a plague, he relents. But in return he seeks an equal prize: a young woman bequeathed to Achilles or another high-ranking warrior. The problem is that, if a king deserves no less than subordinates, to deny a warrior his fair share is to dishonor him. Moved by principle and personal offense, Achilles objects that the Achaeans cannot obey a king who dishonors his men, thinking he is entitled to whatever he wants. The objection is compressed in two interconnected charges with which Achilles begins (1. 149): Agamemnon is (*a*) shameless, without *aidōs*, and (*b*) greedy for profit, *kerdos*.

That Agamemnon lacks *aidōs* means he lacks shame or, we may say, a *sense of honor*, a commitment to shared norms of what is honorable or beautiful (*kalos*) and shameful or ugly (*aischros, aischos*).[6] The aesthetic register of these values reflects the fact that someone who feels shame or has a sense of honor cares how she *looks* to others, whether they be real or imagined. It was once assumed that such reference to the regard of others makes ancient Greek ethics less mature than modern morality, having not developed a broadly Kantian notion of autonomy or internal sanctions of guilt and conscience. However, this so-called progressivist view involves two mistakes, as Bernard Williams (1993) and Douglas Cairns (1993, 2011) have shown. One is to ignore that the ethical psychology of ancient Greek shame and honor is more often than not bidirectional: these attitudes concern the regard of others but also one's own ideals.[7] When the Trojan Hector is ashamed at endangering his people, he imagines how others would be right to reproach him by *his own* lights (*Il*. 22. 99–110). Someone who has a sense of honor, such as Hector, wants not merely to avoid disrepute or to get honors, such as war booty, but to be *worthy* of honor or admiration, worthy, that is, in one's own eyes and the eyes of others whom one respects. This complex ethical psychology, Williams and Cairns argue, corrects a second mistake of the progressivist view by doing justice to the ways our ethical lives are socially mediated. The Homeric view of honor appreciates that "self-esteem depends on the esteem of others," as Cairns puts it (2011, 38), echoing an Hegelian criticism of Kantian autonomy that has powered the theory of recognition.

Now, the fact that a sense of honor is bidirectional does not yet imply that honoring be reciprocal. To take this additional step, we must observe another use of the term *aidōs*. To feel *aidōs* (*aideomai*) for a person or a god just is to honor or, we might say, to show them respect. This second use of *aidōs* is internally related to the first by an assumption that a sense of honor prevents one from disrespecting others. Put differently, someone with self-worth who wants others' recognition would recognize their worth, too. This is why Agamemnon allegedly lacks *aidōs*. If he had a sense of honor, and cared about his own worth, Achilles is reasoning, Agamemnon would care to recognize the worth of others and to earn their recognition. Instead, he disrespects his fellow warriors. His threat is a failure of *respect* insofar as it fails to defer to the normative status of others and to limit conduct in response to that status (cf. Honneth 2012, 85). This is not unlike the attitude that Stephen Darwall calls 'honor respect,' a species of 'recognition respect' (2013, ch. 1; cf.

Darwall 1977). One gives recognition respect when one regulates one's conduct towards another by giving appropriate weight to some fact about them. In honor respect, that fact is their social status, and respect is a matter of how one behaves. A crucial difference, however, is that, in Homer, outward behavior and etiquette are sometimes necessary to honor someone but not sufficient. Nor is it sufficient that some social fact about them be 'recognized' in Darwall's epistemic sense. To honor someone, it is also necessary and sometimes sufficient to believe the recipient is worthy of honor. This is to say that Homeric honor also shares aspects of what Darwall calls 'appraisal respect,' a form of esteem for individual conduct or character. While from a contemporary view it may seem that Homer confuses recognition and appraisal respect, or respect and esteem, the fact that the concept of honor cuts across this analytical distinction is better taken to reflect how respect for equality among peers and esteem for individual merit are mutually implicated in actual practice. The force of speaking of *respect* here is to mark, not a moral attitude (as for Cairns 2011, 32), for example a response to the dignity of all human beings, but the way in which honor is both a social status and a normative one. As Kwame Anthony Appiah (2010) has maintained, this feature of honor generally encourages a broader view of normativity than moral theories traditionally recommend.

To return, then, to the charge that Agamemnon lacks *aidōs*: he does not give others the same respect he wants from them, nor appreciate that they regard themselves the same way he regards himself. Agamemnon violates the norm that honor be reciprocal. Does the same objection not apply to Achilles himself? If he had a sense of honor, one might reply, he would respect the status of a king, not insult his superior, and cede his prize. The situation is more complicated, however, for two reasons that Achilles quietly points out as he criticizes Agamemnon. On the one hand, if honor depends on the positive evaluations of others, then one must *show* one is honorable by responding to dishonor publicly. As Hobbes will note in the *Leviathan* (I.10), someone is honored or dishonored in proportion to her evaluation of her own worth.[8] If Achilles were to stand to be "dishonored" (*atimos*, *Il.* 1. 171), to be treated, as he later says, like "a worthless [*atimēton*] refugee" (9. 648, 16. 59), he would betray that he thinks himself worth no better. In that case, he *would* be a "nobody" (1. 231, 293). When Aristotle comes to quote these famous lines (*Rhet*. II.2, 1378b29–35), he makes explicit Achilles' implicit reasoning that someone with a sense of honor should be indignant at disrespect and respond accordingly.

On the other hand, Achilles has a more significant point to make. It is that honor is based, not only on social status, but also on virtue or excellence (*aretē*). These two standards of worth are often complementary. But they can and here do conflict, and despite wise Nestor's hopes as he mediates the quarrel (*Il*. 1. 275–81), these competing standards may not be fully reconcilable (Cairns 1993, 98–101; 2011, 31–4).[9] The result is that honor is more contestable than the received genealogy of recognition allows.[10]

Two dimensions of virtue matter to Achilles' objection. First, Achilles is the most courageous and skilled in battle, a large part for Homeric heroes of what it is to excel as a human being. To recognize this achievement is to give esteem, not respect. Certainly, Achilles wants greater esteem; he needs it to be the person he is. This is a psychological necessity, a matter of what Achilles and many human beings inescapably desire. But it is also a conceptual necessity, a matter of how worth in honor is relational. Just as a king needs subjects, 'the best of the Achaeans' must excel over others. And just as one cannot be a king without subjects' respect, one cannot be the 'best of the Achaeans' without them thinking as much, without wide esteem and glory.[11] Nonetheless, how we should interpret Achilles' desire for more esteem is delicate. When he observes that, while he does the hard work, Agamemnon always receives a greater share of booty and he "some small but dear thing" (*Il*. 1. 165–67), it might seem that he considers himself Agamemnon's equal or even his superior.[12] However, Achilles neither denies that kingship merits honor nor claims that he deserves a reward equal or greater to the king. It is significant to the rhetoric of his argument that he appears content with the usual distribution; however small, his reward is 'dear' to him. For his argument turns on a second virtue of character, generosity.

The crucial claim is that Achilles has, and Agamemnon has not, followed shared norms of reciprocal generosity. If virtue demands competitive displays of courage in battle, the scene of one's 'besting' (*aristeia*, cognate with *aretē*), it also demands cooperative efforts with peers, family, and friends. In particular, warrior-chieftains are supposed to give generously to one another without obligating anything specific in return. The model of exchange is gift-giving or hospitality (*xenia*), rather than transaction, debt payment, or *quid pro quo* agreement (Donlan 1982; Gill 1996, 133–41). Thus, Achilles frames his outsized contribution in battle as a "favor" (*charis*) to

Agamemnon, risking his life for the honor of the king and his brother Menelaus after Paris abducted Helen, Menelaus's wife (*Il*. 1. 157–60). When Achilles observes that his prize is never equal to Agamemnon's, his point is to emphasize that he has generously rewarded Agamemnon and, perhaps, accepted less than he deserves based on his distinctive merit. The ethical code of honor leads him to expect, not a specific reward, but a similar display of generosity in return. Yet, the moment Agamemnon feels he has less than he deserves, he seeks compensation, paying no regard to the worth or prior generosity of others. As Achilles later states, from Agamemnon "there has been no gratitude [*charis*] in return" (9. 316). Agamemnon not only ignores, then, that virtue merits honor like social status; he ignores that the value of honor is quite distinct from the exchange value of material goods. Hence, the second opening charge that Agamemnon is not merely shameless but focused on profit. Achilles cannot fight for a man who, fixated on "wealth" and "luxury" (1. 171), fails to respect his status, esteem his virtue, and reciprocate his generosity. And so, after some escalation, Achilles withdraws to his ships.

The charge of profit-seeking depends upon an analytical distinction between honor itself and material tokens of honor. This distinction is analytical because, in many cases, respect and esteem are in fact expressed through tokens of honor ('honors,' *timai*) or rewards (*gera*), including booty, choice cuts of meat, full cups of wine, and prizes. Material tokens make conspicuous *that* one is being honored, which is no small part of actually being honored. Conspicuous above all is the greatest prize, the glory (*kleos*) through which one's name and virtuous deeds are immortalized in song. When Pindar calls his beautiful poetry a "mirror for beautiful deeds [*ergois kalois*]" (*Nem*. 7.14), his mimetic logic echoes the Homeric idea that glory falls to the young hero who dies in battle and, though dead, "still all that shows about him is beautiful" (*panta de kala... phanēē*, *Il*. 22. 73).[13] Beautiful poetry celebrates the beautiful death that caps an outstanding life.

At the same time, honor is irreducible to its material expressions. This distinction has two important consequences. The very fact that honor takes non-material forms, for example in admiration or care for friends, implies that acquiring honor is not necessarily the zero-sum competition that it is sometimes taken to be (Cairns 1993, 94 n141). Moreover, material goods count as honors only if they express and are believed to express the right attitudes. Such attitude-dependence implies that it is possible in the Homeric scheme to view conventional tokens of honor

as mere material things without value depending on who gives them and under what circumstances. This is to take what might be called a *deflationary view of honor*. An extreme form of this view is the Stoic doctrine that honor is not a good at all: having or not having honor does not affect whether one lives well or poorly. How far does this deflationary view extend in Homer?

This question is forced by a notoriously difficult passage at *Iliad* 9 when Achilles rejects compensatory gifts from Agamemnon's embassy. After Achilles complains that he has received no gratitude (*charis*), he continues:

> There is an equal lot [*moira*] for the man who stays back and the man who fights hard.
> We are all held in one honor [*timē*], coward and brave alike:
> A do-nothing dies just the same as a man who does much.
> (*Il*. 9. 317–20)

These lines, and Achilles' rejection of the embassy itself, are often taken as a rejection of the Homeric system of honor.[14] On this reading, Achilles' reasoning can be parsed as follows: all human beings receive the same honor, their lot in life, namely death; and if that is the case, then (*a*) distinctions in honor are baseless, not based on distinctions in virtue, and (*b*) honor comes only from the gods, not members of a community. This reading gains support when Achilles proceeds to question the reasons for the Trojan war (9. 337–41), declares his life worth more than any number of gifts that Agamemnon could give (9. 379–409), and claims not to need gifts to increase his honor from the Achaeans because he already has the honor of Zeus (9. 608–10). This last might seem to suggest that the only audience whose recognition matters is a supreme god, not members of his community. Still more striking is Achilles' suggestion that he and his fellow warriors face a choice whether to die in battle with glory or to return home to a long but inglorious life (9. 410–20). If these options are equally choice-worthy, then the value of honor has become radically deflated, indeed. Achilles is alienated from his ethical world, this reading continues, and only after a savage rampage does he regain his capacity for pity and become reintegrated in *Iliad* 24.

However, Achilles' stance at *Iliad* 9 is intelligible only in terms of a sustained commitment to the usual norms of honor (Gill 1996, 138–47). The rejection of the embassy is not a rejection of those

norms but of Agamemnon's standing to honor: *his* gifts are worthless, claims Achilles. One indication of this more circumscribed position is that Achilles remains angry at Agamemnon's offence (*Il*. 9. 312–13, 344–45, 367–78, 645–47), rather unlike the proto-Stoic rational perspective that Chrysippus found in the hero.[15] He nurses his anger because he continues to believe that Agamemnon has no sense of honor. Agamemnon has promised – not, mind you, to Achilles directly – an incredible array of gifts, including his daughter in marriage, *if* Achilles gives up his anger (9. 260–99). But Achilles has no reason to believe the gifts express the right attitudes, so no reason to give up his anger. Before Agamemnon grossly violated norms of reciprocity. Now, Achilles understands, he is offering an overabundance of gifts to assert his superiority as king (9. 379–400).[16]

It is in the context of Agamemnon's denial of esteem that we must place Achilles' remark that everyone is held in the same honor. The reasoning is that, since the king shows no gratitude, brave fighters happen to receive no more honor than cowards, and both will die without. It is not that distinctions in honor are baseless, but that distinctions in virtue are not being recognized. Nor is it that honor comes only from the gods. The 'honor of Zeus' that Achilles claims for himself is not some private relationship with the divine unmediated by public forms of recognition. It is the very observable proof of his worth in what has come to pass, the fact that Achaeans are dying without him, as context makes clear (1. 352–56, 508–10; 9. 118). By the same token, however, Achilles' withdrawal from the war means he is failing to protect his friends and reciprocate the honor they have given him, as Ajax points out (*etiomen*, 9. 631; *aidessai*, 640). This criticism is sufficiently persuasive that Achilles remains at Troy rather than return home (9. 650–55). Achilles has not rejected the Homeric view of honor. His extreme position demonstrates its complexity and internal tensions.

The quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon has revealed four strands of the Homeric view of honor. First, honor comprises one's worth and its recognition by others based on communal norms of what is admirable or shameful. These norms require reciprocal respect among peers and esteem for virtuous character and conduct. Second, these standards of worth – social status and virtue – can conflict. Third, the material expression of honor makes it necessary to distinguish a salutary desire for honor from a baser desire for material gain. If Agamemnon represents the latter, Achilles

represents a different problematic tendency. This is, fourth, the worrisome suggestion that desire for honor must be controlled to avoid political and personal disintegration. Alert to the tensions within the Homeric view, Plato draws on each of these strands to construct a rival view of honor and its place in a good life.

3. A Platonic Revaluation

It is well-known that Plato is critical of the Homeric values that continue to hold sway at classical Athens. His criticism is powerful enough that it can seem as though Plato dismisses honor as a trivial or, worse, a harmful goal. But with the Homeric background brought to the fore, we can better see the battlelines of a debate and, in turn, find a subtler critique and more positive proposal in Plato's fullest reflection on honor in the *Republic*.

Very roughly, we might identify four competing strands in response to the Homeric view. The first challenges the Homeric assumption that a standard of worth is internal to the evaluative practices of a community, whether it be facts about social status or facts about virtue as understood by the community. Plato, too, assumes honor is a measure of worth that deserves to be recognized. But he thinks facts about worth are based ultimately upon an independent standard of beauty (*to kalon*) to which evaluative practices of a community are answerable. A philosophical task is to inquire into, understand, and apply this standard, which in the *Republic* correlates to a metaphysical 'form.' This metaphysical hypothesis, second, dissociates honor (and virtue) from aristocratic social status, a conceptual shift already underway with the rise of democracy. At the same time, third, Plato sometimes has Socrates associate honor with money and bodily goods, exploiting the tension represented by Agamemnon. It might then seem that Plato dissociates honor from virtue or adopts the deflationary view that honor is not a distinct good. However, I shall suggest, these moments belong to a strategic attempt to displace the Homeric view in order to *redefine* and *revalue* honor in support of a philosophical life. This critical and constructive project is clearest from a fourth strand, on which this section shall therefore focus. This is Plato's response to the problem represented by Achilles of controlling desire for honor personally and politically. His response is to subordinate honor to virtue and 'spirited' desire for honor to desires of reason. What I should like to emphasize is that, while contending with the Homeric view, Plato's ethical psychology retains a central role for recognition.

In the *Republic*, Plato distinguishes three sources of motivation in the human soul. Appetites seek bodily pleasures. Reason wants to know the good and to rule in light of that knowledge. Most critical for us is spirit (*thumos*, *to thumoeides*), characterized by a love of honor (*philotimia*) and victory insofar as these appear beautiful (*kalon*).[17] As in Homer, spirit is the source of social and self-reflexive emotions presupposed by the concept of honor, including shame, pride, and anger at perceived injustice, especially perceived disrespect (440c–d, 549d, 550b, 560a, 563d, 568e).[18] These bellicose tendencies must be carefully trained to support rational rule in the soul against the excesses of the appetites, just as in the ideal city spirited auxiliaries must support rational rule of the guardians against foreign and domestic enemies. If spirit seems suspiciously to fit the dialogue's famous city-soul analogy, recent scholars have shown that this psychological element is well-grounded. According to Angela Hobbs, through spirit Plato captures the "need to believe that one counts for something," the tendency "to form an ideal image of oneself" that is shaped by and in need of "social recognition" (2000, 30). Hobbs herself draws modern parallels to Nietzsche, Freud, and Adler. Yet it is difficult not to hear in her terms a tantalizing reference to Rousseau's *amour propre*, a desire for esteem that, too, drives one "to count for something," in one common translation.[19] Like Rousseau, Plato worries that his culture misshapes the desire for esteem in ways that make true virtue less apparent. If one admires a hero such as Achilles, one will mistake honor and glory for the greatest of goods. One will pursue an attractive yet poor image of virtue.

The harm of mistaking honor for the good is exemplified by the lover of honor (*philotimos*), a figure like Achilles ruled by spirit rather than reason (*Rep*. 548e–551a). This is someone who conflates excelling over others with dominating others by force. He is sensitive to what others admire, as must anyone with a sense of honor, but his sense of honor is corrupted by cultural patterns of esteem. The lover of honor comes to find admirable whatever is widely admired. Where wealth is prized, honor follows money, for example. This diagnosis assumes that one tends to admire and emulate what others admire, such that dominant cultural values become reinforced (550e). Insofar as this social psychology embodies a desire for recognition, Plato is fully aware that dynamics of recognition can prevent rather than promote virtue. This is why education in the *Republic* begins by managing the material and symbolic culture, not least Homeric poetry, which

deeply shapes who one admires and aspires to become. The aim is to redirect spirit toward genuine beauty (401b-402a).[20] This solution, however, does not dispense with the Homeric framework.[21]

The point is not obvious. Plato has Socrates disgrace Achilles so thoroughly at *Republic* III, as Hobbs details (2000, ch. 7), that his debt to Homer is easily obscured.[22] The general criticism is that Achilles lacks self-control. Obviously, Achilles is arrogant; Socrates need only quote a single line of the insult to Agamemnon (*Il*. 1. 225 at *Rep*. 389e). Another criticism is more distortive: Achilles is a money-lover who would accept Agamemnon's gifts or return Hector's corpse only for a "ransom" (390e). The word is *timē*. Socrates exploits its sense of 'price' and its often-material expression to associate honor with money, as I intimated, and therefore turn Achilles' criticism of Agamemnon against himself (cf. 371e, 434a–b, 568d). Honor and money do share an ontological affinity, as their existence and value depend on people's attitudes, which may explain why, in the *Phaedo*, Socrates lumps love of money and love of honor together with the body as opposed to the soul (*Phd*. 64de, 68bc). The *Republic* offers a different psychology. But does its presentation of Achilles imply the same low view of honor?

One penetrating account of spirit suggests so. According to Tad Brennan (2012, 108–12), spirit pursues honor but cannot grasp what honor is: for Plato, honor just is a complex system for the distribution of bodily goods, such as food and wealth, based on a fictitious notion of 'worth.' Someone motivated by honor *thinks* they are after what is worthy of admiration (*kalon*) *as opposed to* the value of bodily goods. But such is ideology, the account goes. A wise person would sharply distinguish mind-independent facts about what is beautiful from honor, since honor is parasitic on social patterns of esteem. Unmask the ideology, and proud Achilles shows his true colors.

This account of spirit picks up on a streak running throughout the *Republic* that discourages attention to the social and, indeed, the sensible world in general. However, several passages reflect a less reductive view of honor. The imaginary regime not only includes non-material forms of honor, such as what children give the gods (*timaō*, *Rep*. 386a), but is structured by a need to make philosophy, now in disrepute, more esteemed (*timiōteron*, 539d). One way is to give them public memorials and sacrifices after they rule (540c). It would be surprising for Socrates to be so concerned with the reputation of philosophy if he did not consider honor a distinct good. Moreover,

the association of honor with money comes in a specific context of criticizing, not desire for honor itself, but the debased form of spirit exemplified by Achilles and the lover of honor. It is part of a critical strategy to displace the Homeric view, ultimately, I would suggest, to restructure honor around philosophical virtue. These critical and constructive phases are not entirely distinct. But we might single out two constructive moments that redeem the value of honor.

In the first moment, honor is both a proper goal and a reward for auxiliary guardians who courageously defend the ideal regime. They are not fully virtuous but, unlike the debased lover of honor, feel shame at the right things and respect convention (*aidōs*: 463d, 465a). These emblems of a well-trained spirit vie to achieve great and beautiful deeds, to claim a victory "more beautiful" (*kalliōn*) than at the Olympics, by the prospect of being honored with public support and a worthy burial (465d–e). As we saw with glory, this suggestion of beauty in the *kalon* reflects a fact that virtuous actions must be conspicuous if they are to be admired.[23] So must be the honors, if they are to satisfy a desire for recognition:

> We, too, at sacrifices and all such occasions will honor [*timēsomen*] the good so far as they have shown themselves good [*agathoi phainōntai*] with hymns and the other ways we just mentioned, 'seats of honor and meats' and 'full cups of wine,' so as to honor [*timan*] at the same time as train good men and women. (*Rep*. 468d–e, quoting *Il*. 8. 162)

This self-conscious nod to the Homeric view shows Plato contesting it from the inside, so to speak, working against it from within it. He appropriates the motivational power of honor for virtue, but uses it here as a public means to promote rather different pictures of virtue and political order.

The second moment concerns the philosopher's attitude toward honor. The redistribution of honor to philosophers is no doubt instrumentally valuable. It helps their own educational development to be honored (503d, 537d), drawing on and shaping their spirited ambition in pursuit of intellectual ends. And it creates better political conditions for their rule or even survival. Yet there are suggestions that the philosopher herself does not value honor merely instrumentally, if it is conferred by the right audience in recognition of virtue. She willingly partakes in honors (*tas timas*), including political offices, if they are beneficial (592a). She has enjoyed being honored, more than honor-lovers enjoy the pleasures of knowledge (582c). It is true that philosophers are

critical of what passes for honor among the many, the rich, or the nobility: they "will look down on [*kataphronēsōsin*] present honors" and think them "worth nothing" (*oudenos axias*). However, Socrates continues, more constructively, they will "deem greatest what is right and the honors [*tas timas*] that come from it" (540d–e). In place of what honor is at classical Athens – and what honor was in Homer – comes a philosophical view of honor. It is an outstanding question of the *Republic* what this involves; Socrates claims not to know, and Plato does not give, the standard of worth that his ideal philosophers would have to know to rule well. One aim of the dialogue, though, is to clear the way to let virtue be recognized.

4. Concluding Remarks

I have tried in this short compass to show that ancient Greek debate about honor is more continuous with modern paradigms of recognition than has been appreciated. Ancient Greek honor embodies a norm of reciprocal respect among peers and esteem for individual character and conduct. Conflicting standards of worth make claims to honor contestable, indeed deeply contested, first within the Homeric framework and against that framework by Plato. While critical of the Homeric view, Plato treats quite seriously the desire at its core to be someone worthy of admiration by others.

These structural similarities serve to open, not to settle, the question whether ancient Greeks have a concept of recognition. It cannot be denied that the concept has found its point in an entirely different problematic. Whatever the analogies between Homeric honor and Hegelian recognition or Plato's notion of spirit and Rousseau's of *amour propre*, ancient Greek thinkers were not concerned to explain how self-consciousness develops or how political institutions should enshrine respect for autonomy. Nonetheless, the above discussion may prove a useful corrective to the tendency to contrast recognition with an impoverished notion of honor or to assume ancient Greeks more confused than complex when they cut across modern moral distinctions between respect and esteem. The structural similarities can point in the other direction, too, illuminating features of sociopolitical life that theorists of recognition might discuss further. One significant thought in ancient Greek ethics from Homer to Plato, for example, is that the value of honor reflects the value of *appearing before others* in human life. We saw this in the ethical need for shame and a sense of honor and the aesthetic dimension of the values that govern these attitudes. We saw this in the

imperative that virtuous actions must be conspicuous to earn admiration. While it has found an excellent exponent in Hannah Arendt, many theorists, including Rousseau (*Second Discourse* II.27), dismiss such emphasis on appearance as deceptive or vain, as though appearance were a mask covering reality and one's true worth. Perhaps for this reason, the aesthetics of appearance have been little discussed under the head of recognition.[24] There are fertile connections to be explored in this area, not only the resources offered by the concept of honor but forms of self-expression in dress or forms of political protest that reconfigure what or who can be seen as worthy of respect. In this way, to ask whether ancient Greeks have a concept of recognition is to rethink not just the history of the concept but its future possibilities.[25]

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[1] See, for example, Toto, Pénigaud de Mourgues, and Renault 2017; Honneth 2021; for emphasis on medieval theological contributions, Saarinen 2016 and Kahlos, Koskinen, and Palmén 2019. Notable forays into recognition in ancient Greek philosophy include Tarnopolsky 2014; Burns 2020; and Cairns, Carnevaro, and Mantzouranis 2022. The title of Fussi 2008 is suggestive in this direction.

[2] Taylor and Honneth follow Berger 1970 on the alleged 'obsolescence' of honor in modernity: "The social location of honor lies in a world of relatively intact, stable institutions, a world in which individuals can with subjective certainty attach their identities to the institutional roles that society assigns to them. The disintegration of this world as a result of the forces of modernity has not only made honor an increasingly meaningless notion…" (345).

[3] Waldron 2012 argues that dignity arose out of and bears the impress of honor as a social rank. The conceptual history of Debes 2017 is broader historically, reaching back to Homer, yet narrower in its focus on a moralized sense of dignity. For historically grounded philosophical defenses of honor, see Krause 2002, Appiah 2010, and Sommers 2018. I follow Mark 2014 in taking these considerations to challenge Taylor's and Honneth's history of recognition, though my concern is to add historical detail rather than to criticize their normative theories.

[4] For extensive references to *timē*, see Yamagata 1994: 121–38.

[5] Translations are mine, consulting first Lattimore's *Iliad* and Shorey's *Republic*.

[6] One definition of *aidōs* in the standard Greek-English lexicon compiled by Liddell, Scott, and Jones. Stewart 1994, ch. 3 defines a sense of honor similarly but dates its rise much later in modernity.

[7] The Kantian charge, most famously advanced by Adkins 1960, remains curiously influential. As recent a study as Jimenez 2021, ch. 4 is compelled to show that Aristotelian shame is not objectionably heteronomous.

[8] Mandeville takes up this point, like much from Hobbes, in his 1732 *Enquiry into the Origin of Honor and the Usefulness of Christianity in War* (First Dialogue, 2–3). In Mandeville's terms, honor arises from the passion of self-liking.

[9] Finkelberg 1998, 19–20 rightly notes that Homeric honor is based on social status but takes status and wealth to determine virtue.

[10] This is to develop in historical detail a systematic point about honor made by Mark 2014.

[11] For the title 'best of the Achaeans,' see *Il*. 1. 244, 412; 2. 239, 769; 4. 512–13; 5. 788–91; 7. 114; 11. 787; 16. 709; 18. 106; 22. 158. My formulation above has been helped by similar remarks of Neuhouser 2008, 32–3 on Rousseau.

[12] This is Agamemnon's misinterpretation. He threatens to steal Briseis to prove "how much better" (*pherteros*) he is than Achilles, lest others think that they are his "equal" (*ison*, 1. 184–87). Achilles said it was "better" (*pherteros*) to return to his ships (1. 169). Agamemnon uses the term to compete on Achilles' terrain: *pherteros* usually means *braver* or *stronger*, better as a warrior: *Il*. 3. 431; 4. 56; 19. 217. In his attempt at reconciliation, Nestor grants that Agamemnon is "better" (*pherteros*) *as king* but calls Achilles "stronger" (*karteros*, 1. 280-81). This awkward use of 'better' captures the competing and ambiguous standards of worth within the community.

[13] See Vernant 1980 for discussion.

[14] Versions of this reading may be found, for example, in Redfield 1975, 99–108; Zanker 1994, 86–91; Hammer 2002; and Martin 2011, 21 ('rejects the entire system of honor as material payment').

[15] Strictly speaking, Chrysippus finds in Achilles' consolation of Priam (*Il*. 24. 549–51) a model of Stoic extirpation of emotion. The focus is grief rather than anger. See Galen, *De Placitis Hippocratis et Platonis* 4.6.40–1, 4.7.24–8 = *SVF* 3.478, 3.467.

[16] As Gill 1996, 144 (with n171) notes, Achilles gets the message. He retorts that Agamemnon should find a 'kinglier' son-in-law (*basileuteros*, *Il*. 9. 392) and that he can marry whomever he likes (9. 395–400).

[17] Love of honor and victory: *e.g*., *Rep*. 545a, 548c–d, 550b, 551a, 553b, 554e–555a, 581a; connected to the *kalon*: *e.g*., 401e–402a, 439e–440a, 465d–e, 555a. See further Cairns 1993, 387 and Brennan 2012.

[18] Renaut 2014 and Wilburn 2021, the two most comprehensive studies of spirit, have well shown the social nature of spirit, though the matter remains controversial.

[19] *Émile* II.160, trans. Bloom of *OC* IV.258: "*d'être compté pour quelque chose*". I owe the reference to Neuhouser 2008, 67. Neuhouser's view that *amour propre* is responsible for social and psychological goods, not just ills, brings it closer to Platonic spirit, in my view, than do traditional accounts. Hobbs may agree, given her passing reference to Achilles' "intense *amour propre*" (2000, 201 n10).

[20] See further Richardson Lear 2006 on how cultural education in beauty shapes the social psychology of spirit.

[21] The Homeric background to Platonic spirit is well reviewed by Renaut 2014, 26–46, 122–24, 190–206. Renaut attributes to Platonic spirit "un désir de reconnaissance" (190).

[22] I am less persuaded by Hobbs 2000, 215–27 that Plato identifies the good and the beautiful (*kalon*) to overcome the threat, represented by Achilles, of facing an irreconcilable conflict between these values. On the one hand, Achilles' deliberations do not clearly involve such conflicts. On the other hand, Plato appreciates how, from an agent's perspective, beauty often seems *not* to be good. I discuss the latter point in Fine 2020.

[23] The aesthetic dimension of the *kalon* complicates the view that Plato associates "concern for appearances" with an "unfettered love of honor," as Cairns 1993, 390 states, despite the drift of his account. Note also the language of appearance (*phainōntai*) quoted immediately below.

[24] But see, recently, Carnevali 2020 and Congdon 2021.

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