

Contents

<i>List of Contributors</i>	viii
Introduction	1
<i>Richard Ned Lebow, Peer Schouten and Hidemi Suganami</i>	
1 Homer (c.850 BCE)	6
<i>Richard Ned Lebow</i>	
2 Conversations with Confucius (551–479 BCE)	13
<i>Pichamon Yeophantong</i>	
3 Lao Zi (6th–5th century BCE?): Dao of International Politics	22
<i>Chen Yudan</i>	
4 Thucydides (c.460–c.395 BCE): A Theorist for All Time	29
<i>Richard Ned Lebow</i>	
5 Discussing War with Plato (429–347 BCE)	36
<i>Christopher Coker</i>	
6 Aristotle (384–322 BCE): The Philosopher and the Discipline	44
<i>Anthony F. Lang, Jr</i>	
7 Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527): Two Realisms	57
<i>Erica Benner</i>	
8 Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679)	67
<i>Michael C. Williams</i>	
9 An Interview with John Locke (1632–1704)	74
<i>Beate Jahn</i>	
10 Two Days in the Life of ‘Dave’ Hume (1711–1776)	82
<i>Hidemi Suganami</i>	
11 The Dangers of Dependence: Sultan’s Conversation with His Master Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778)	91
<i>David Boucher</i>	
12 Immanuel Kant (1724–1804): A Little Kantian ‘Schwaermerei’	99
<i>Friedrich Kratochwil</i>	
13 A Fine Bromance: Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) and Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527)	110
<i>Seán Molloy</i>	

14	G.W.F. Hegel (1770–1831) and International Relations <i>Richard Beardsworth</i>	117
15	A Brief Encounter with Major-General Carl von Clausewitz (1780–1831) <i>Jan Willem Honig</i>	126
16	A Conversation with Karl Marx (1818–1883) on Why There Is No Socialism in the United States <i>Joshua Simon</i>	134
17	Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) <i>Tracy B. Strong</i>	143
18	Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) <i>Bertrand Badie</i>	156
19	Theory Talk #-100: John Dewey (1859–1952) on the Horror of Making His Poetry Public <i>Christian Bueger and Peer Schouten</i>	164
20	Max Weber (1864–1920) <i>Richard Ned Lebow</i>	173
21	The Republic of Norman Angell (1872–1967): A Dialogue (with Apologies to Plato) <i>Lucian M. Ashworth</i>	182
22	Functionalism in Uncommon Places: Electrifying the Hades with David Mitrany (1888–1975) <i>Jens Steffek</i>	193
23	Dialogue with Arnold Wolfers (1892–1968) <i>James W. Davis</i>	201
24	E.H. Carr (1892–1982) <i>Michael Cox</i>	210
25	Modernity, Technology and Global Security: A Conversation with Lewis Mumford (1895–1990) <i>Rens van Munster and Casper Sylvest</i>	218
26	More Fragments of an Intellectual Biography: Hans J. Morgenthau (1904–1980) <i>William E. Scheuerman</i>	227
27	The Return of the <i>spectateur engagé</i> : Interview with Raymond Aron (1905–1983) <i>Ariane Chebel d'Appollonia</i>	236

28	A Conversation with Hannah Arendt (1906–1975) <i>Kimberly Hutchings</i>	245
29	Interview with John Herz (1908–2005) <i>Andrew Lawrence</i>	254
30	Interview with Charles P. Kindleberger (1910–2003), the Reputed Progenitor of Hegemonic Stability Theory <i>Simon Reich</i>	263
31	Karl W. Deutsch (1912–1992) Interviewed <i>Andrei S. Markovits</i>	274
32	International Theory beyond the Three Traditions: A Student's Conversation with Martin Wight (1913–1972) <i>Ian Hall</i>	285
33	John Rawls (1921–2002) <i>Huw L. Williams</i>	293
34	The Spirit of Susan Strange (1923–1998) <i>Louis W. Pauly</i>	302
35	Questioning Kenneth N. Waltz (1924–2013) <i>Adam Humphreys and Hidemi Suganami</i>	313
36	Frantz Fanon (1925–1961) <i>Rita Abrahamsen</i>	322
37	Deep Hanging Out with Michel Foucault (1926–1984) <i>Iver B. Neumann</i>	329
38	Interviewing Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) about Pierre Bourdieu and International Relations <i>Anna Leander</i>	337
39	Hedley Bull (1932–1985) <i>Robert Ayson</i>	344
40	Jean Bethke Elshtain (1941–2013): A Women's Refuge, Baghdad, Summer 2015 <i>Caroline Kennedy-Pipe</i>	352
	Conclusions <i>Richard Ned Lebow, Peer Schouten and Hidemi Suganami</i>	361
	<i>Index</i>	386

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Introduction

Richard Ned Lebow, Peer Schouten and Hidemi Suganami

How would Kant or Weber respond to contemporary debates about epistemology? What would Hume say to critiques of his ‘constant conjunction’ and recent approaches that try to finesse causation? What would Hobbes, Machiavelli, Clausewitz and Morgenthau think about the quasi-integration of Europe or the rise of China, or Rousseau, Adam Smith and Norman Angell about globalization? How would any of these thinkers respond to positivism, constructivism, postmodernism, rational models and feminism? Could Plato and Aristotle have interesting conversations with Durkheim, Foucault or Bourdieu? Anyone who has had to struggle seriously with the work of dead theorists will have had moments when they would have liked to talk to these thinkers. Perhaps some have given into these musings and conducted imaginary conversations in the solitude of their offices or while on a walk through the woods. To write perceptively about these theorists we need to get inside their minds, and what better way than through imagined dialogues?

One of us – Ned Lebow – did a postgraduate political theory seminar with Isaiah Berlin in the mid-sixties. Berlin asked his students to write a course paper in the form of dinner party conversation with some prominent political thinker from the past. Ned chose Mozart and his librettist Lorenzo da Ponte as his guests and encouraged them to talk about their critique of the Enlightenment identity project. Prof. Berlin was amused, and told him how lucky he was that the statue of the Commendatore had not marked his paper.

In the decades since, Ned gnawed away at the prospect of imaginary conversations with great figures of the past. What fun it would be to ply them with good food and wine and prod them to hold forth on their works, how they have been interpreted since, and what they

think about the contemporary world. These fantasies remained unrealized until Hidemi sent Ned a paper he had written about an imaginary conversation with David Hume. In it, he assumes the role of Hume's professor, and he and 'Dave' discuss the latter's idea for a dissertation on causation. He offers 'Dave' avuncular advice and tells him how he should proceed. They have a second conversation years later, when 'Dave', now a recognized authority, reflects back on his earlier work.

Hidemi's piece is thoughtful and amusing, and encourages readers to think about the development of Hume's thought and the ways in which strands of it connect. It was the catalyst for Ned to suggest that the two of them edit a book in which they would ask colleagues to interview other thinkers. Ned took the next step and conducted an interview with Thucydides. Ned and Hidemi then began to sound out friends in the discipline and were amazed to discover how many identified theorists with whom they would like to have a dialogue. After having recruited some dozen participants, Ned received an email from Peer Schouten inviting him to contribute a chapter to a book he was planning. Peer had for years been toying with the idea of interviewing dead International Relations (IR) theorists as an extension of his *Theory Talks* project. This was indeed a remarkable coincidence. Hidemi and Ned promptly invited Peer to merge his project with theirs and become a co-editor. A dozen participants quickly turned into a few dozen.

Two premises firmly unite all contributions. First is the tacit agreement that contemporary IR is as much a conversation between the living and the dead as it is among the living. Contemporary debates on international politics are thoroughly rooted in and shaped by the thought of many bygone minds, ancient and modern. The commitment to knowledge in international relations is that of the fox, rather than the hedgehog, to speak with Isaiah Berlin and Archilochus before him. In lieu of any kind of unified, authoritative truths, the real voice of International Relations theory is a web of conversations and unresolved debates that span centuries and continents.

We did not interview Sir Isaiah, as he had little to say about IR. We think, however, that he would be pleased with our enterprise, although it is more a feast than a dinner. We have invited some forty thinkers to engage in dialogues with us. They run the gamut from Homer and Confucius to Hedley Bull and Jean Bethke Elshtain. They span almost three millennia of human history and include representatives of Western and Chinese culture, but, like IR theory, are heavily weighted towards the former. The 'us' consists of forty International Relations scholars and political theorists. They too cut across cultures, continents and almost three generations.

There is a method and madness in our selection. We were committed to framing International Relations broadly. We would include, as far as it proved feasible, thinkers, or their precursors, from multiple paradigms. We would commission dialogues not only with mainstream International Relations scholars, but also with political theorists, historians and others whose ideas had influenced the development of the theory and practice of international relations.

We tried to match thinkers with scholars, and *vice versa*. Some of the contributors we recruited were very keen to conduct dialogues with specific thinkers. Their interest led us to include some theorists not on our initial wish list, and to search for colleagues who would be willing to interview those theorists we had previously identified as central to the enterprise. Our final table of contents deviates in some ways from our original design. The table of contents is more than double our original draft. This expansion reflects the surprising interest in our project throughout the profession. People from all over contacted us asking us if they could participate, and we only said no when additional chapters would have made the book more difficult to sell to a publisher. We also permitted two interviews with Immanuel Kant. He is such a towering figure for modernity and two of the colleagues we contacted were keen to write about him in very different ways.

We insisted that every interview be with a dead thinker. This is a distinguishing feature of the volume, and is what makes our dialogues imaginary. More than a series of séances – in which the spirit invoked speaks with an authority unmediated by the invoking agent – we offer fictional dialogues, dialogues informed by intimate knowledge of the thinkers in question. Interlocutors attempt to elicit their views about their works and to probe ambiguities, tensions, connections in their writings and the evolution of their views. Some are asked what they think about subsequent readings of their works, a question that provoked more than a few angry replies. Some insist on talking about present day international relations. Almost all think their ideas are still relevant. Their words are, of course, those of our interviewers, and the way in which they interrogate, criticize and defend the ideas of the thinkers they engage tells us something interesting about them and our world. Many thinkers find our world depressing; some because their predictions have come true and others because they have not. Far and away the most enthusiastic response to the present came from Karl Deutsch when he learned about the internet.

The personalities of some of these thinkers come across strongly. Plato is arrogant, Kant is crotchety, Marx is confident and arrogant, John Herz is a soft-spoken gentleman and Bourdieu is touchy. We know this from their

writings and first-hand accounts of contemporaries. Some of our thinkers died in the recent past and were personally well-known to those who interview them. Ariane Chebel d'Appollonia was a student of Raymond Aron, Andy Markovits of Karl Deutsch. Their acquaintance lends verisimilitude to their dialogues, as does feedback from the two older editors who knew casually to well most of the recently deceased thinkers.

The second premise that sets this volume apart from other explorations of the firmament of classical and modern political thought is our commitment to dialogue. We believe it is a unique and necessary vehicle to understanding political thought. Since Plato, conversation has been a central philosophical method, and in presenting the forty dialogues we hark back to this method. To understand thinkers one must get inside their heads, so to speak. One way to do this is through imaginary dialogues, and we suspect that they have been conducted by many serious scholars in the course of their research and reflection. We make this process visible, and develop goals for our contributors who conduct them.

Our book is an amusing *jeu d'esprit*, but also a serious contribution to the scholarly literature in political theory and international relations. In this regard, the current volume should be seen as extending the ambition of such efforts as Harry Kreisler's *Conversations with History* and Peer Schouten's *Theory Talks*, both of which share a commitment to knowledge production in International Relations by making public conversations with some of the foremost thinkers in and around the discipline, to the past.

Texts inevitably speak beyond the intentions of their authors as they are read in novel contexts and against the works of their predecessors, contemporaries, and successors. Our dialogues permit great thinkers to reflect upon – albeit through the medium of our interviewers – subsequent readings of their works and the concerns that led to them. It allows these thinkers to participate, and possibly help shape this process, through the questions and imagined answers of their interlocutors.

Dialogues are not necessary to identify tensions, contradictions or other problems in important texts. However, they do provide a vehicle for the thinkers we interrogate to respond to these criticisms, many of which may not have been apparent at the time they wrote. Fritz Kratochwil's discussion with Immanuel Kant, Hidemi Suganami's with David Hume and Josh Simon's with Karl Marx are cases in point. This kind of interrogation is also useful for probing the imagination, openness and closure of thinkers, and styles of reflection and argument.

Dialogues bring dead thinkers into our world in ways that are otherwise impossible. They are compelled to address a context many could

not possibly have imagined, or extensions of their world in the case of those only recently deceased. Even some of these thinkers must contemplate new worlds, as Hans Morgenthau would the end of the Cold War. So too would earlier thinkers who expired on the eve of major changes in politics and international relations – for example, Max Weber, who died as Weimar was born and thirteen years before Hitler's dictatorship. Familiarizing great thinkers with events that post-date them and the new questions they generated about the past provides new and important challenges to them. It allows us to explore novel features of their thought, or features we know about in novel ways, and allows them to participate, albeit vicariously, in contemporary debates.

Finally, dialogues that pose similar questions to diverse thinkers encourage comparisons. They are an excellent way of drawing out the ways in which these thinkers agree and disagree, and just as importantly, what features of the world strike them as important. Political theorists and historians of political thought invariably approach the latter question by looking at what these thinkers have chosen to write about. Another method, and one that has the potential to elicit different answers, is to think about how they are likely to respond to the present.

For all these reasons, we believe that this collection of dialogues will be of interest to scholars and students. For the former, it raises new questions that can be addressed by more traditional modes of research. For the latter, it provides straightforward and engaging introductions to diverse thinkers and encourages them to think about their relevance to our world. It has the potential to open new horizons for all those students of International Relations who have been exposed only to works by acknowledged IR scholars and not to those thinkers who provided the intellectual foundations of our enterprise.

We thought at length about the appropriate format for the conclusion. An academic-style summary followed by some 'lessons' for IR seemed inappropriate and ill-fitting. Instead, we settled on an imaginary panel at the 2016 annual meeting of the International Studies Association. The real one is in Atlanta, and ours in Atlantis. The panel is entitled: 'Has There Been any Progress in International Relations Theory since Thucydides?' The presenters are Thucydides, Thomas Hobbes, Hans Morgenthau, Karl Deutsch and Hedley Bull. There are questions from the audience, which includes some of the thinkers interviewed in the book and a graduate student.

We hope you enjoy our book and find it provocative and intellectually stimulating in equal measure.

1

Homer (c.850 BCE)

Richard Ned Lebow

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me, even if it is so early in the morning that not even Starbucks is open.

Rosy-fingered dawn is the best time of day.

It also seems to be your favourite epithet. If you are blind, how can you appreciate a sunrise?

Ah, you are a breaker of poets, not of horses. For ancient Greeks, blindness is associated with seers and wisdom. Think of Tiresias in *Antigone* or Oedipus after he pokes out his eyeballs. They bring light to deathless gods and mortal men.

But what about you? Are you really blind as legend has it? Does everything look like the wine dark sea?

Careful how you use my lines, young man.

Sorry, but I'm curious to know if you are really the blindest of Achaeans.

There you go again!

Do you really need those shades in Hades?

Next are you going to ask me if I am really Homer?

You really are a seer. You read my mind. The consensus among classical scholars is that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are the product of multiple bards, composed over the course of centuries until a final version was committed to writing sometime in the classical era. I hesitate to say this, but some scholars doubt if there ever was a Homer, and a conveniently blind one at that.

Then why did you appeal to Apollo the far shooter to ferry you across the Styx to meet with me?

I think you're Homer, all right. I credit you with these epics but I would like to know how your versions differ from what follows, and whether the *Iliad* is based on a real war. And those are just the beginning of my questions.

It really doesn't matter if there was a Trojan War, or a swift-footed Ahkileus (Achilles), Agamemnon, a brave man at close-fighting, Odysseus, much beloved by Zeus, or Penelope, the most faithful of wives. It's what we think about sacred Ilios that counts, and our thoughts are shaped by stories that make an impression on us. My epics shaped a culture because the war caused by Ares, breaker of cities, and its sharp-speared heroes were real for generations of Greeks. Their 'facticity' – to use one of your fancy terms – is irrelevant. Consider your own so-called factual events. They too are only known through stories told by politicians, journalists and your intellectuals. They create reality, not represent it, and, unlike my epics, never rise to the level of poetry.

Surely your stories have changed in their telling?

Indeed. It wasn't until proud-hearted Nietzsche that you moderns came to the realization that authors don't own texts; they take on a life of their own. We Greeks always knew this truth. Texts are like gifts, they pass from giver to receiver in a long, perhaps even endless, chain. Each time they change hands they assume a new context and come with stories of their previous owners and why they gave them away. So it is with my poetry. I created a gift for my companions, which subsequently passed through many other mouths to become a treasure for all god-fearing Greeks. Am I troubled that others changed and added lines, adapting these epics to the needs of the merging polis? No, my words remain an endless spring that trickles down a rock face to be lapped up by the thirsty below.

I know you moderns think writing a great advance. Plato, student of the splendid Socrates, had his doubts and I remain unconvinced. Stories stagnate when they are committed to writing. You and your colleagues argue endlessly about what they mean rather than assimilating them and using them to give purpose and direction to your lives and helping you live them wisely and honourably. A text is a living resource, not a mud-encrusted fossil to be carefully brushed off and studied under a magnifying glass.

I'm conducting this interview for a book on International Relations theory, so I hope you won't mind if I focus my remaining questions on that subject?

Feel free, but understand that your interstate relations are markedly different from those of so-called Bronze Age Greece. And the *Iliad* offers a different kind of account of them than your modern historians or theorists. It offers what the far-seeing Max Weber would call an ideal-type representation of warfare, its causes and consequences.

You've read Max Weber?

No, I can't read. Never learned how. But I chat with him now and again, although it is not easy.

Why is that?

For a start, all his talk about a 'place in the sun' for Germany. And here he is in Hades. He doesn't appreciate the irony, but then he has no sense of humour. He speaks in long and convoluted sentences not connected or held together by metre or signifiers. I'm told his writing is worse. He's a profound but sloppy thinker, a breaker of concentration, not of horses.

If I can return to the *Iliad*?

Of course.

War in the *Iliad* is between Menelaus of the long-shadowed spear, supported by his revenge-seeking Danaans, and the honourable Priam of Dardanus's line and his Trojans. Each has numerous allies duty-bound to support them, but happy to do so because they see the war as a means of gaining *aristeia*, or honour, on the battlefield. This is why individual combats feature so prominently and why combatants proclaim their lineage and accomplishments to each other. *Aristeia* is won by defeating an equally honourable adversary, and more so if they are invited to throw the first spear. Real war was never like this, but there were elements of it in ancient Greek and Roman warfare and in Europe up to the First World War. In the *Iliad*, there is no distinction between the honour of the individual warrior and that of the *ethnos*, which today you might describe as the state or nation. Honour remains alive at the platoon level, however, modern wars are not started by warrior-kings intent on upholding their personal honour, but by leaders moved by national honour and interests.

On the subject of other goals, security never appears to be a motive in the *Iliad*, except perhaps where the Greeks are desperate to prevent the Trojans from setting their ships on fire. Following the advice of the Geranian horseman Nestor they devise an appropriate strategy. In contrast, Hektor and other Trojans reject the sensible advice that they wage a defensive war behind their walls once Ahkileus has rejoined the fighting.

This is correct. Honour trumps other considerations in this war, security included, for the Trojans. You have many modern examples. At the end of World War I, Ludendorff wanted the German army to conduct a suicide offensive in the West to preserve its honour, and his naval counterpart wanted the German fleet to do the same. Honour among combatants was only possible when they regarded one another as equals, as did the Greeks and Trojans. This survived in your culture up until, and even

through WW I, where class solidarity among aristocratic officers often trumped national differences. Officer prisoners of war were invited to dinner and sometimes given paroles. In World War II, a kind of camaraderie between some Luftwaffe officers and their RAF counterparts – although the latter were largely middle class – was maintained through the Battle of Britain. German ace Adolf Galland notified the British that their ace Douglas Bader had lost his prosthesis escaping from his burning aircraft and offered safe passage for the RAF to drop a replacement. It is reminiscent of Glaucus, son of Hippolochus, and Diomedes, master of the war cry, exchanging their armour.

Today, adversaries are not equals. Leaders and complicit media demonize the other side to mobilize public opinion and sustain combat morale. The inevitable outcome is mass bombings, Abu Ghraibs, mutilation of prisoners and beheading of journalists. This is not unlike the wars the Greeks fought against local tribes where no quarter was asked or given. In the modern era war has become more institutionalized and legalized, but, alas, more barbaric.

Aren't you forgetting what happened to broad-streeted Troy and its people once it was defeated, or to the peaceful villages where Ahkileus and his friends killed the men and made off with women and booty?

True. This is one important reason why I end my tale with the return by Ahkileus, son of the lovely-haired Thetis, of Hektor's body to Priam, noble king of Troy. He regains his humanity, and Trojans and Greeks show respect for one another when Priam breaks his fast and dines with Ahkileus. I agree that the theft of Briseus, the killing of her husband and brother and levelling of her village are acts of barbarism, but her father, with the help of Mars, is able to retrieve her in the end. This doesn't happen with hostages today, unless vast ransoms are paid.

How did either side feed themselves during ten years of war? Karl Marx was amazed that there is no mention of commerce or logistics anywhere in the *Iliad*.

Yes, he used to pester me about these omissions. I countered with the observation that there is no mention of honour in *Das Kapital*. This is in sharp contrast to Schumpeter, whose words are like honey-sweet wine and who believes that entrepreneurs are driven by honour, not profit. They seek to achieve immortality by this means, as Ahkileus did through warfare.

Let's turn to the rage of Ahkileus and his conflict with Agamemnon, which quickly equals, if not replaces, that between Greeks and Trojans as the focus of the epic. Drawing on the language of modern social science, I would describe their conflict as the inevitable product of

the divergence of ascribed and achieved status. Agamemnon is *wanax*, something like a king, and therefore at the top of the ascribed hierarchy. He is supposed to be the bravest and best leader, but he is not. He's selfish, gives in to the wrong instincts, and does not set a good example for his fighters. Ahkileus, whom you frequently describe as 'the best of the Achaeans', is the best warrior and most admired Greek, and at the top of the achieved hierarchy. This is signalled by the decision among the Greek warriors to reward him with Briseus. Agamemnon wants her for this reason, and in the false belief that he can impose himself at the top of both hierarchies, thus restoring their expected unity.

You could put it this way, if you must. In a more general sense, ambitious men – ambitious people – in your era, will always find grounds for resenting one another. However, it is certainly true that swift-footed Ahkileus had no chip on his shoulder and would have accepted Agamemnon's leadership if he had not behaved in such an insulting manner.

As you were careful to use gender-free language in your last reply, could I close with a question about women?

Why not? After fighting and horses, they are men's favourite pastime. In my day they talked endlessly about the first two and little about the last. Lovely-cheeked Helen was the exception, and nobody had anything good to say about her, in contrast to Andromache and Penelope, loyal wife and mother of Telemachus, who was greatly admired, but never mentioned in conversation.

Do you think women are inferior to men?

Certainly not. Nor were Greeks superior to Trojans. Both races are equally commendable and the differences in character, intelligence and bravery are not between the well-greaved Achaeans and the Trojan breakers of horses but among them. Hektor of the glinting helmet, and Priam, and Menelaus and the huge Aias, are truly admirable, whilst god-like Alexandros (Paris) and Agamemnon are reprehensible. So it is with women. Alexandros and the Argive Helen together – not just Helen – are the cause of the Trojan War and suffering, just as Clytemnestra and Aegisthus are in the War's aftermath. Andromache and Penelope – like Electra and Medea for the later playwrights – are intelligent women. The first two pursue their ends by acceptable means. Indeed, Penelope uses those practices to keep her suitors at bay and remain faithful to the crafty Odysseus, the sacker of cities. She is in every way his worthy counterpart. In my day it was convention, not anything essential about women, that relegated most of them to inferior positions, just as it was for men not of aristocratic birth.

You realize your *Iliad* has been used to sustain misogyny over the ages?

It is an illustration of the truth to which I earlier referred. People turn to my epics for varied purposes over which I have no control. Sometime they are used sagaciously, but often stupidly. *Xenia* – guest friendship in your language – is the oldest and most honoured of customs, and the father of the gods is frequently described as Zeus Xenios. Guests must be housed and fed and they in turn must honour, not abuse their hosts. Paris violates guest friendship by running off with Helen and her jewels, and Priam makes war inevitable by honouring this deed, that is by giving refuge to Paris and Helen. He had no choice but to offer refuge as Paris is his son. The other Trojans treat them well although they fully recognize that they are the cause of war and their loss and suffering. What can I do if some readers single out Helen and ignore Alexandros, or for that matter, invent out of whole cloth a lowly trade dispute to explain war between the Greeks and Trojans?

Are you suggesting this is yet another way in which warrior-based honour cultures generate tensions that threaten to destroy them?

It is self-evident that first the abuse and then the forthright practice of *xenia* were responsible for the Trojan War, just as the intense competition for standing among warriors was an underlying cause of the conflict between Agamemnon and the swift-footed Ahkileus. In a deeper sense, war is a boon and a curse. It allows young men to distinguish themselves and gain honour, but wars that are not quickly resolved threaten to undermine the structure of the society that enables honour and its recognition. This is most apparent in the character of Ahkileus, who rages like a lion, mistreats Hektor's body, sacrifices young Trojan boys, and only adheres to *nomos* again when he meets Priam and imagines his father grieving over his body.

Would it be fair to say that Ahkileus and Priam both recognize their imminent deaths and struggle to find a discourse that would allow them to create new selves that would free them from their responsibilities and known fates? In this sense, one could read the epic as the first anti-war literary work.

Ahkileus and Priam struggle to reconcile themselves to their fates rather than to escape them. This heightens the poignancy that brings the epic to a close, and is another reason why it had to end here, *before* either hero dies. To the extent that there is a search for a new language, it is a task left to listeners – today, readers. Indeed, some of the bards who followed me, who tried to adapt the epic to the polis, strengthened this implicit plea in their treatment of Ahkileus and Agamemnon. There is a parallel here to Aeschylus's *Oresteia*, which makes explicit

the need to give the city a monopoly over violence to stop, among other things, family feuds. Shakespeare advances a similar argument in *Romeo and Juliet*, and hints at the connection to the *Oresteia* by naming the prince of Verona, who outlaws feuds, Escalus. Max Weber would practically equate the state with violence. As when the sea's swells hurl on the booming shore, wave after wave of the West wind's stirring, his definition of the state shouts out from every International Relations text.

I'm limited to 3,000 words so I must end here. I am very grateful to you for giving me your time and promise to represent your words as accurately as I can.

No need to do that, as I've explained. But why am I limited to 3,000 words? Greeks would sit around heart-warming fires after sending the smoke from fat-wrapped loins of sheep to the gods and listen to my words for hours.

I'll try telling that to my editor.

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