

For Homer, and for the Greeks in general, the ultimate ethical boundaries are not mere rules of moral obligation, but fundamental laws of Being.³⁰ It is to this sense of ultimate reality, this deeper knowledge of the meaning of the world, beside which all mere 'realism' seems thin and partial, that the Homeric epic owes its overpowering effect.

"Homer sees life as governed by universal laws; and for that reason he is a supreme artist in the craft of motivation. He does not passively accept tradition: he does not relate a simple succession of events. He presents a plot which develops by its own compulsion from state to stage, governed by an unbreakable connexion of cause and effect. With the first line, the dramatic narrative of each epic begins to unfold without interruption towards its logical end. 'Muse, sing of the anger of Achilles and his strife with Atreus' son Agamemnon. Which of the gods set them to strive with each other?' The question flies straight as an arrow to the goal. Upon it follows the tale of Apollo's wrath, a tale which gives only the essential factors which cause the tragedy: it is set at the head of the epic like the aetiology of the Peloponnesian War at the beginning of Thucydides' history. And the plot does not develop in a loose chronological sequence. It is ruled throughout by the principle of sufficient reason. Every action has its roots in *character*.

"But Homer does not, like modern authors, see every action from within, as a phenomenon of human consciousness. In his world, nothing great happens without the aid of a divine power. The poet who tells a story is necessarily omniscient. Our authors must speak of the most secret emotions of each character as if they themselves had entered his mind. Homer, on the other hand, presents all human action as guided by the gods. It is not always easy to draw the line beyond which this narrative method becomes simply a poetic device; but it is certainly mistaken to hold that the intervention of the gods is never more than a trick of the epic style. For Homer does not inhabit a rationalized world, full of the banal and the commonplace, and disguised only by the painted scenery of poetic illusion. If we study the instances of divine intervention in the epics, we