Self-Control in Homeric Deliberations

The formal deliberations of Homeric characters in both epics have attracted a good deal of scholarly attention, particularly since the work of Bruno Snell (who challenged the ‘reality’ of Homeric decisions) and the useful structural analyses of Christian Voigt. Snell’s case has, I believe, been sufficiently discredited by more recent scholars such as Sharples, Gaskin and Williams, and perhaps little needs to be added to Voigt’s classifications; so it is timely now to explore related issues.¹ One of these is self-control or the problem of incontinence, which arises when irrational desire resists the implementation of a rational decision. For example, a Homeric warrior might commit himself to facing the enemy, as Hector resolves to confront Achilles in Iliad 22, only to find that his courage fails him.² Incontinence in Homer has a special interest for us because the Greeks were allegedly ‘cognitivists’ who spoke about feelings as if they


² Discussed below.
were a kind of knowledge. We shall consider then, among other things, how, if at all, this attitude affects the representation of self-control. For if, to take the extreme case, the Platonic Socrates could blame ignorance for what we would regard as a failure of the will, and tragedians such as Aeschylus consistently attribute immoral actions to a perversion of judgment, we might expect to find Homeric deliberators having more trouble actually making a rational decision than abiding by such a decision once made.

Now presumably what distorts rational deliberation is chiefly an irrational desire, whether attributed to psychic invasion by a god or described 'naturalistically'. In the cognitivist model the irrational desire will be seen as intervening before the completion of the deliberative process, so that the rational thinking of the deliberator is compromised before the desire can be recognised for what it is. This would tend to pre-empt or in a sense conceal incontinence—as will appear in the discussion of Menelaus below.

We shall now review a range of deliberative passages in Homer where the need for self-control might reasonably be expected to arise. We shall begin with the *Iliad* and the celebrated passage which marks the climax of the Quarrel in the first book. Achilles ponders two options: whether to draw his sword and kill Agamemnon or to restrain himself (1.188-92). But before his deliberations are formally concluded with the choice of one of the options, he begins to act on the first of these by drawing his sword from its scabbard (1.193-4)—an act which suggests that he is merely succumbing to his wrath rather than positively choosing to act in accordance with it. (The difference is clear if we contrast this with his decision to go with his *thumos* in the Embassy episode of Book 9 in the face of his acceptance of Ajax’ position.) But at this point a deity

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4 See Stephen Scully, ‘The Language of Achilles: the *ochthesas* Formulas’, *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 114 (1984), 11-27, 18: ‘the swiftness with which Achilles makes up his mind is atypical [of heroes]’. 
(Athene) intervenes and gradually Achilles backs down, a process that begins with his first statement to the goddess which is not ‘Have you come to see me kill Agamemnon?’, but ‘Have you come to see his arrogance which will probably cost him his life?’ (1.205). Athene bids him stay his hand and predicts a large compensation for Agamemnon’s outrage (1.210-14). Achilles yields, not because he agrees with her advice, but because ‘if any man obeys the gods, they are the more inclined to listen to him’ (1.218).

Achilles was unlikely to have practised self-control here without the overwhelmingly persuasive pressure of the goddess whose intervention should not be rationalised as either wholly or in part a projection of Achilles’ supposed better judgment or second thoughts—partly because, as we have seen, he does not express agreement with her or resile at all from the idea of killing Agamemnon, and partly because he is impulsive and wrathful by nature and thus unlikely to act on such second thoughts.6

5 9.643-55, and see Irwin (as in n.3), 185. This ‘decision’ is a failure of self-control, in that Achilles accepts Ajax’ arguments while virtually declaring that he will choose to act irrationally. It would surely be a kind of sophistry, though, to claim that one is not behaving incontinently because one has consciously chosen to act against one’s judgment, an attitude that evinces a sort of reckless desperation.

6 Voigt, Überlegung und Entscheidung (as in n.1), 52. On the psychological interpretation of Athene see, e.g., M.M. Willcock, A Companion to the Iliad (Chicago, 1976), ad 194: Athene ‘instigates, and in some sense represents, the self-control of Achilleus’. Cedric Whitman, Homer and the Heroic Tradition (Cambridge, Mass. 1958), 185, sees the epiphany as embodying Achilles’ ‘realization that there is something incommensurate between Agamemnon and himself, that the issue is larger than a sword thrust’. ‘The goddess is not an act of conscience, or a symbol of divine law, reproving violence or murder; she is the sudden realization of Achilles in the moment of stress, the visible symbol of the way he must, of his nature, conduct himself’ (231). W.T. MacCary, Childlike Achilles: Ontogeny and Phylogen in the Iliad (New York, 1982), 7, sees Athene as the ‘externalized process’ of Achilles’ ‘own thinking’, while Achilles feels this thinking as something ‘alien’. G.S. Kirk, The Iliad: A Commentary, Vol I: Bks 1-4 (Cambridge, 1985), ad 193-4, offers a finely balanced judgment: ‘In a way, Athene may be said to represent, or embody, his ultimate decision to go no further [which is better than having her embody his innate commonsense and restraint!] … although it is to her divinity rather than her arguments that he accedes at 216-18.
Admittedly, the divinities of Greek literature regularly inspire mortals with ideas which are actually in character, but this is by no means invariable, as the madness of Euripides’ Heracles demonstrates. It is also true that Athene’s epiphany to Achilles alone suggests a purely mental event, but again it does not follow that the intervention will not subvert the mortal’s normal attitudes. We have here then a doubly aborted deliberation. It is aborted first by Achilles who proceeds to act on his desire for revenge by drawing his sword and then by Athene who halts this action and makes the decision for him, but in accord with the option of restraint. This is not then strictly a case of incontinence, because Achilles never concludes his original autonomous deliberation with a rational decision (which his desire might then have resisted); nevertheless, he can be said to lack self-control in allowing his desire to begin to operate (as manifest in the drawing of his sword) before he has completed his deliberation. Homer has no formula or terminology for this feature of the deliberative process, but it can be inferred from the evidence, just as can the sense of the unity of the Homeric person, called into question by Snell.

Achilles’ deliberation resembles those of the Odyssey in which the hero on no fewer than three occasions (discussed below) debates whether to kill a personal enemy or to control his emotions. The formal

His violent and confused emotions are reduced to something like a formal debate [an important insight about these conventional debates in general], although in his own heart and mind. The goddess no doubt represents, to some degree, the orthodox code of behaviour—the principle of order which the gods encourage and support in men—to which he eventually adheres; but she also acts as an individual caught up in the actual course of events.’

At 5.676 Athene apparently invades Odysseus’ psyche to direct his attention in a particular direction in accordance with destiny, but there is, as far as we are told, no epiphany or verbal communication between them. At 10.507-14, which is more like our present passage, Athene stands by Diomedes and advises him, and he obeys without replying. The conversation between the goddess and Achilles may be seen as the most fully realised of these encounters. In the first, Odysseus’ choice of the easier option is explained as divine intervention in accordance with destiny, so that the goddess’s influence is not to be seen as reflecting the man’s character; whereas, in the second, as for Achilles, Athene’s warning offers the mortal information outside his knowledge.
deliberations in the *Iliad*, however, are usually concerned with whether to stand or retreat in battle. We turn now to four related passages from the earlier poem, all of which feature a warrior pondering whether to face the enemy or withdraw and which, viewed together, display a progression in structural and thematic sophistication.

The first of these (11.401-10) might be considered the *locus classicus* of Iliadic deliberations because it can seem the perfect illustration of how the ideal Homeric warrior thinks. Odysseus finds himself left alone to face the ranks of the Trojans; he debates whether to withdraw or to fight, and decides in favour of fighting because this is what a hero does for fear of dishonour. The speech seems to show how the warrior has internalised a code of conduct to the point where it virtually reflects his whole being. In contrast, the other three deliberators (Menelaus at 17.90-105, Agenor at 21.550-70, and Hector at 22.98-130) are more detached from the code, engaging in a kind of dialectic with it. Odysseus’ identification with the code is conveyed in the very manner of his formulation of his options of standing or retreating. He does not say ‘Will I run away because I am afraid?’, but rather ‘It will be a great evil if I run, in fear of their multitude’ (11.404-5). Like the Argives who have deserted him (11.401-2), he is certainly afraid, but his expression of his fear is simultaneous with a moral awareness that he must not play the coward (for the ‘great evil’, *mega kakon*, must in the context be understood as a moral evil). The alternative is survival: ‘... yet chillier [i.e. more likely to be fatal] if I am caught alone’ (11.405-6). There follows the formulaic ‘Yet still, why did my *thumos* debate these things?’ (11.407) and the decision to stay, ‘Since I know that it is the cowards who walk away from combat ... ’ (11.408). The moral imperative retains the ascendancy in his mind from its formulation during the stating of the first option, and he decides once and for all in its favour. This is a conscious decision, not a knee-jerk reaction.

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9 This monologue is one of ‘blank sobriety, spare and unembellished’ which
Self-control, if it applied here, would have to act against his fear and in support of this decision, but the structure of his inner debate suggests that his fear is under control throughout: he refers to the fear itself and to the object of his fear, but his mind is dominated by the demands of the code, so that to run away does not present itself as even attractive, so that there is no threat of incontinence. Furthermore, once the decision is made there is no time to reconsider it or need to find psychological strategies for continuing to adhere to it, because during the course of his actual debate the Trojans approach and pen him in (11.411-13), so that the choice of staying or fleeing is no longer open to him.

Menelaus in Book 17, facing a similar situation to that of Odysseus in the previous passage, debates whether to abandon the attempt to recover Patroclus' armour and corpse or fight against the odds when the Trojans close in on him en masse (17.90-6). First, through his fear, he recognises the moral evil or at least the shame\(^{11}\) in retreating (Patroclus fought for Menelaus' honour: 17.91-2), but then he rationalises withdrawal in terms of divine support of Hector (17.98-101). Formally, no self-control is required as he has decided on the more attractive option of withdrawal, but a closer examination will show how a kind of incontinence can be discerned. Scholars are divided on the validity of Menelaus' arguments.\(^{12}\)

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\(^{11}\) It is hard to distinguish the immoral from the shameful in a 'shame' culture.

\(^{12}\) Willcock, *Companion to the Iliad* (as in n.6), *ad* 17.90-105, sees the whole speech as 'almost a parody' of that of Odysseus, but Menelaus' decision as 'sensible, if unheroic'. M.W. Edwards, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, Vol. 5, Bks 17-20 (Cambridge, 1991), *ad* 98-101, maintains that 'overt divine aid to the enemy is an acceptable reason for retreat'. For a well argued indictment of Menelaus which
Does he (1) weigh the alternatives and decide quite sincerely (whether rightly or wrongly) that the normal obligation upon a warrior to stay and fight does not apply in the present situation when he is outnumbered and outclassed? Or does he (2) rationalise with a bad conscience the desire to save his skin? If (1), then clearly self-control is not an issue; but if (2), then Menelaus has been guilty of a failure of self-control inasmuch as he has allowed his fear to distort his reason, but not strictly guilty of incontinence, because he is not failing to abide by an actual decision—which is the context in which the term ‘incontinence’ is normally applied. Quite the contrary. Rather than making a decision to stay which would have to be enforced by the exercise of self-control, he makes one which rationalises his very lack of self-control.

In our third passage, Agenor debates whether to run from Achilles or fight him. This Trojan warrior is favourably characterised as sent and inspired with courage by Apollo and indeed as accompanied by the god himself—a warrior of such importance that without him the Greeks might well have taken Troy (21.544-48). There is no sense then that the man is a coward. Nevertheless, the sight of Achilles, excusably enough, stirs mental turmoil in him (21.551) and, in the familiar formula, he communes anxiously with himself (21.552). Despite our prior sense of his bravery, as he begins to formulate his options we gain a very different impression from that conveyed by Odysseus in the earlier passage. This is because Agenor’s first option is dominated not by the pressure of the heroic code, but by the desire to escape.\(^\text{13}\) Indeed the code figures only feebly: ‘If I run away ... he will still catch me and cut my throat like a coward’ (I can tolerate being a coward provided I can escape, but I don’t want the worst of both worlds, ignominy and death) (21.553-55). Now, on the pattern of Odysseus’ or Menelaus’ deliberations, we might have expected Agenor to proceed to formulate a second option of the form of standing and bravely confronting Achilles, but we find instead that the second option is a variant of the first (‘But if I leave these men to be scattered by Achilles ... and run ... in another direction’), another proposed plan of escape places the speech in a wider context and considers the influence of narrative patterns see Fenik, ‘Stylization and Variety’ (as in n.9), 85-9.

\(^{13}\) ‘No question of honor: the chances for bare survival determine his choice’: Fenik, ‘Stylization and Variety’ (as in n.9), 78.
(21.556-61). But now the formulaic ‘Why do I debate all this?’ (21.562) intervenes, at which point the speaker would normally select one of the canvassed options. But Homer departs from this pattern by having Agenor select (though not formally) a third, hitherto unconsidered option, direct confrontation of Achilles (21.567-70)—an option that seems slightly more attractive because of the element of self-deception that accompanies it in the form of the idea that Agenor might slay Achilles. (In the event he escapes [21.596-8], but he has no way of knowing that Apollo will intervene.)

Agenor has now decided to act bravely, not because the alternatives are morally unacceptable, but because they are impractical. Therefore, although the possibility of incontinence remains, it is rendered much less likely by this impracticality. Nevertheless, loss of self-control can be irrational, especially when it is inspired by fear, and the very sight of Achilles’ approach is enough to make even the mighty Hector retreat in terror. Agenor, however, surprises us, if we have been hitherto impressed by his strong desire to run away. On the other hand, we know that Apollo has inspired him, and, although that is not referred to now, we do find Agenor surprisingly bold: ‘He spoke and gathered himself to await Achilles, and in him the fighting heart was urgent for the encounter of battle’ (21.571-2, trans. Lattimore) (an impression reinforced by the leopard simile of 573-80). Homer confounds our expectations with a subtler psychology of desperation, as the hunted casts aside his fear and throws himself entirely into the mode of aggressive self-defence. His courage is now borne out in his great voice and confident brandishing of his shield (21.581-2) and does not flag from that point.

Hector, in our fourth passage, begins resolved to face Achilles despite his parents’ pleas (22.90-2). Described by the narrator as possessing ‘unquenched fury’ (22.96) and likened to a wrathful snake fed on poisonous herbs (22.93-5), Hector is nevertheless afraid, as his ensuing monologue reveals. His deliberations begin somewhat in the manner of Odysseus in the Book 2 passage: that is to say he begins with the option

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14 As Petersmann, ‘Die Entscheidungsmonologe’ (as in n.10), 153 observes, Agenor never actually decides in the course of the monologue. He raises the third possibility and effectively adopts it.
of retreat implicitly dismissed as morally unacceptable. But Hector’s formulation differs from that of Odysseus in his preoccupation with the shame of retreat as imagined in a concrete situation and in his sense that he has already compromised his reputation by his ‘recklessness’ (22.104).\(^{15}\) And so he proceeds to his second option, which is, predictably, to confront Achilles to kill or be killed honourably (22.108-10). At this point we expect him to adopt this second, braver, option and thus move on to the stage where self-control will be required. But, against our expectations, a third option emerges, to bargain with Achilles, the details of which are explored at some length (22.111-21) until Hector pulls himself up with the familiar formula (22.122), having realised that he is deluding himself—another case of reason distorted by fear.\(^{16}\) This brings him back to the second and only eligible option: to confront Achilles (22.129-30).

Now Achilles advances, and it is too much for Hector. He is overwhelmed by incontinence and his nerve collapses; he cannot stay to

\(^{15}\) Fenik, ‘Stylization and Variety’ (as in n.9), 84 captures the difference between the two men: ‘Odysseus thinks within the categories of the heroic code ... Hector lives by the same precepts, but for him the imperative presents itself as specific ingredients, past and present, of his own life and dilemma. Poulydamas’ rejected advice of the night before comes back to haunt him. ... avoidance of disrepute has become shame already incurred that he cannot endure to face.’

\(^{16}\) ‘Here the suspension of the conditional clause is maintained over eleven whole verses, producing an effect of climax as Hektor’s offer grows progressively more extraordinary in value, until it reaches the point where he himself realizes that this is all just day-dreaming. At this point (122) he breaks off, without reaching an apodosis’: N.J. Richardson, The Iliad: A Commentary, Vol. 6: Bks 21-4 (Cambridge, 1993) \textit{ad} 22.111. Wolfgang Schadewaldt, \textit{Von Homers Welt und Werk} (Stuttgart, 1959), 302 describes Hector’s self-delusion about bargaining with Achilles as ‘eine Art Flucht in der Seele noch vor der Flucht in die Mauern Trojas’. Kevin Crotty, \textit{The Poetics of Supplication. Homer’s Iliad and Odyssey} (Ithaca and London, 1994), 85 observes that Hector’s imagined supplication of Achilles is ‘notable for its lack of a clear purpose ... he never articulates precisely what he hopes to accomplish by all his renunciation’. For the epanastrophe of 22.126-8 see R.P. Martin, \textit{The Language of Heroes} (Ithaca and London, 1989), 138 and Crotty \textit{Poetics of Supplication}, 86.
meet his adversary (22.136-7). So he commits the protracted incontinence of running around the walls of Troy assisted in his escape by Apollo (22.202-4). Eventually he stands firm, but his self-control depends at this point on the false belief that his brother Deiphobus has arrived to help him beat back Achilles (22.231). He is immensely encouraged by the active support he now appears to be promised by the disguised Athene (22.232-46), and this is sufficient to give him the courage to meet Achilles. ‘My thumos has driven me to confront you’, he tells Achilles (22.252-3), but his thumos is deceived. He faces Achilles bravely without the help of ‘Deiphobus’ whom he finally calls upon merely to supply him with a long spear (295). When, however, he finds ‘Deiphobus’ gone and realises the deceit, he nevertheless retains his self-control and dies with courage uncompromised by delusion.

At last then we have a clear case of incontinence, as can be inferred from Hector’s behaviour. Having decided to face Achilles, he abandons his resolve under the pressure of fear rather than through a distortion of rational judgment. That the decision remains is clear when he overcomes his terror and faces his dreaded adversary.\(^{17}\) It is after all a decision consistent with the respect for the code which he has displayed throughout.

It was remarked that Achilles’ deliberative monologue resembled in some respects the formal debates of the hero of the *Odyssey*, though this does not apply to those in which Odysseus makes a purely tactical decision, with no emotional commitment to either option and therefore no need to exert self-control.\(^{18}\) We turn now to those debates. The *locus*

\(^{17}\) Unless we want to say that he ‘forgot’ his original resolve under the stress of fear but ‘remembered’ it again later.

\(^{18}\) E.g. in debating how to supplicate Nausicaa at 6.141-8. At 18.90-4, when Odysseus prepares to meet the beggar Irus in single combat, he deliberates whether to hit him hard enough to kill him outright or simply stun him into a prostrate condition (and perhaps into concussed unconsciousness). He opts for the second alternative for fear that the suitors may become suspicious if he appears too strong for his beggar role (18.90-4). In this case it is not clear that Odysseus has any
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classicus of self-control here is the famous passage in Book 20 in which Odysseus chastises his heart in order to make it accept the rational option of postponing overnight the killing of the unfaithful maids. The hero is bedded down in the courtyard of his palace, already thinking murderous thoughts about the suitors (20.5) when he sees the maids going off to sleep with them (20.6-8). Naturally then his malice is extended to them, particularly since they are happy at his expense. Will he kill them now or let them live for one more day? (20.10-13). Now the formal deliberative pattern suggests that the deliberator will pose to himself two options and choose one of them, but Odysseus, like Achilles in the episode discussed above, does not actually reach the point of formally deciding, but, as his angry frustration assails him in the shape of his ‘barking heart’, he begins at once to exhort himself to accept the more prudent option (20.13-17).

Achilles did not reach the point of formal choice because his wrath got the better of him, whereas Odysseus’ failure to reach it is for quite a different reason (and the difference is typical of the two men): almost certainly because the tactically correct decision is obvious and has been made long ago. For ever since his return to Ithaca, the hero has been committed to concealing his identity and remaining more or less passive until the time comes to kill the suitors. There is no question of revoking this sensible strategy which in any case has the blessing of a goddess. In sum, deliberation here is unnecessary, and Odysseus is really indulging in a malicious fantasy rather than posing serious options for rational consideration: ‘Will I kill them now or tomorrow? Of course I cannot kill them now, but I would dearly love to.’ So instead of a formal decision to postpone his revenge he applies himself without further ado to restraining clear emotional preference for the first, rejected option, although he could hardly be expected to feel any moral or emotional resistance to it.


his desperate desire for it, presumably either because he is afraid he will
act against his long settled and fixed resolve or simply because such a
discordant state of mind is physically and mentally uncomfortable (his
tossing and turning). The restraint takes the form of (1) striking his chest
above the heart (knocking sense into oneself is a powerful, if irrational,
imaginative device) and (2) a strong dose of rational argument (restraint
paid off in the Cyclops' cave\(^{20}\)) (20.17-21). His heart is described as
growling and raging to fight (like a bitch defending her puppies, 20.13-
16), and the result of his techniques of self-admonition is that his heart
endures and ceases to complain (the 'growling' ceases?), but Odysseus
himself continues to twist and turn, a psychosomatic correlative, as it
were, to his meditations upon how 'alone against many' he can defeat the
suitors (20.23-9). He is still troubled, but now at least his turbulent mind
is focussed constructively. This deployment of force and argument
against his impulse for revenge clearly indicates that Odysseus is fully
aware both of the need to restrain himself and of his reluctance to do so,
and the techniques he deploys are such that we can readily recognise. The
threat then is of incontinence, not distortion of rational judgment which
would be well nigh unthinkable in the case of Homer's Odysseus.

We have seen that Odysseus was not really engaged in a serious
deliberation about the fate of the maids, but quelling an obviously
imprudent desire. This is true also of his brief debate concerning the fate
of Melanthius who, after a tirade of verbal abuse, proceeds to kick him in
the hip on his way into town to beg (17.233-3). Odysseus does not flinch
either for physical or for mental discomfort but ponders whether to beat
Melanthius to death with his cudgel or smash his head on the ground
(17.235-7). As it is, he decides not to react at all ('He stood firm and
inwardly restrained himself', 17.238).\(^{21}\) This is because neither option is

\(^{20}\) See below.

\(^{21}\) As Russo \textit{ad} 235-8 observes in J. Russo, M. Fernandez-Galiano, A. Heubeck, \textit{A
Commentary on Homer's Odyssey}, Vol.III, Bks 17-24 (Oxford, 1992), 'both
alternatives are disregarded in favour of a third possibility, which is a unique
feature for such \textit{mermerizo}-scenes. Another unusual feature is that the new
alternative chosen is not action but the suppression of action, literally the
repression, by an act of will, of the normal impulse to act.'
serious, and Odysseus is simply engaging in murderous fantasising: 'What would be the most satisfying way of killing him?—not that I can afford the luxury, of course!' This is apparent in the fact that there is nothing, tactically, to choose between the options. The real but unexpressed options might appear to be either (1) 'Shall I retaliate in some form (and he considers two possibilities)?' or (2) 'Shall I restrain myself so as not to attract attention?' But really no deliberation is required, as Odysseus has long ago decided how to handle this sort of situation.

Our final example of Odysseus' rejection of desired but premature homicide is taken from Book 9 (299-306) where the hero plans to kill the Cyclops, but is restrained by another impulse (thumos, 302), or 'second thoughts'. This is not, however, an instance of formal deliberation in which two options are pondered before a decision is made. Here what seems to be a reasonable plan is adopted only to be rejected almost immediately when a major flaw appears (if Odysseus kills the Cyclops now, escape from the cave will be impossible), and minimal self-restraint should be required once an option is rejected as impractical rather than immoral (in which case a clash between self-interest and right may arise). Nevertheless the cost of waiting is considerable, though unavoidable.22

Let us consider two final passages. The first is another case of Odysseus choosing to practise concealment and to control his emotions; the second features Penelope in a similar situation.

When Odysseus goes to visit his father in his orchard, his original plan is to test him to see if he will recognise him after so much time (24.216-18). As Stanford comments ad loc,23 there is no further need for such tests, but it would seem that Odysseus enjoys them, 'and he rather selfishly does not spare his father now'. On the other hand, perhaps theme takes precedence over characterisation here, so that the audience is invited to enjoy another 'craftily delayed recognition scene'. However, Odysseus, it would seem, is unprepared for his own emotional reaction to his father's degraded state (24.226-33, 249-55), and yet he decides against an

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22 Odysseus loses two more men at breakfast (9.311).

23 Stanford, Odyssey of Homer (as in n.19).
immediate and emotionally satisfying reunion in favour of testing Laertes (24.232-40). The verb of testing is the same as before,24 but the purpose of the testing seems to have changed. Odysseus is no longer intent on discovering whether his father will recognise him, but now decides to question him thoroughly (exereoitó, 238) by means of provocative bantering, despite his own manifest sorrow for his father (24.232-4).25 Now it seems reasonable to presume that there is a constructive purpose behind this; the method, at any rate, is clearly to confront Laertes with his apathy and degradation, and the consequence is to rouse him.26 Here, unlike in the passages from Bks 17 and 20 discussed above, deliberation is meaningful and important, for it is no longer obvious that concealment must be maintained. We know that the hero has been deeply affected by his father's condition which is described in detail and that he is moved to hug and kiss him. Nevertheless, he suppresses this desire and embarks on an elaborate deception in line with his rationally chosen option. (We are not told that he finds this stressful, and we might imagine that the momentum of the deception would aid self-control, banishing his desire from the forefront of his mind.) This goes on for some time until he evokes an extreme reaction of grief from Laertes (24.315-17), at which point 'the spirit rose up in Odysseus and now in his nostrils there was a

24 peiresomai at 24.216, peiresaito at 238, peirethenai or diaperethenai at 240.

25 Stanford, Odyssey of Homer (as in n.19), ad 235-8, finds Odysseus' distress reflected in the 'uneven' syntax of his deliberation—the construction with the infinitives followed by the optatives: 'it is a sign of the conflict between love and craftiness in O.'s heart. At first feelings of affection monopolize the construction; then, abruptly, O.'s habitual caution and craftiness break in—and prevail.' Contrast Voigt, Überlegung und Entscheidung (as in n.1), 36-7, who would delete 238.

26 For a detailed discussion of this scene and of Laertes in general see Agatha Thornton, People and Themes in Homer's Odyssey (Dunedin, 1970), 115-19. Every item in Odysseus' speech 'is such as to harass the old man profoundly' (117). Laertes is brought to weep and mourn. 'This means that his deadly apathy is broken; he is alive again even if he is stricken with sorrow ... It seems evident that through being tested Laertes is brought back to life and to a passionate concern for what is happening' (118).
shock of bitter force as he looked on his father. He sprang to him and embraced …’ (24.318-20, trans. Lattimore). Clearly Odysseus can control his feelings no longer, but by this stage he does not need to.

When Penelope descends from her chamber to see her son and look on the dead suitors and their killer (23.83-4) she ponders whether to keep away and question her husband or go up to him and kiss his head, taking his hands (23.86-7). She makes no formal decision, but ‘sat across from him in the firelight, facing Odysseus, by the opposite wall, while he was seated by the tall pillar …’ (23.89-90, trans. Lattimore). She remains ambivalent about his identity (23.93-5), and when Telemachus accuses her of perverse stubbornness she explains her perplexity (23.96-110). Is this a case of self-control? Insofar as Penelope wants this man to be her husband but is not sure that he is, she must exercise self-control against embracing him at once, but this desire to embrace him is surely weakened by her paralysing confusion.

Self-control is a significant feature in a number of Homeric deliberations. It is not, however, reducible to a formula or even to variations on a formula, but appears in a variety of individual and sometimes quite subtle forms, thus contributing to the rich diversity of these deliberative episodes. Of course, we might have expected some such formula as the following: the deliberator is faced with two options, the pleasurable and the appropriate; he chooses the appropriate and then exerts (or fails to exert) self-control in order to defeat continued pressure from the rejected pleasurable option. But this pattern is found in this pure form in a single passage, Odysseus’ encounter with Laertes, and there only approximately. With the maids and Melanthios, Odysseus has already chosen a prudent course of action, so that the choice is not serious, though self-control must be exerted. In the case of the maids he does not even explicitly select the appropriate option but simply applies self-control. In the Iliad Achilles begins to act on the pleasurable option before he makes a decision, an action which is aborted by an external force which effectively compels self-control. There is much variety also in the four stand-or-retreat episodes from the Iliad, with Menelaus evincing failure of self-control perhaps through self-delusion, Agenor displaying a surprising self-restraint and Hector struggling through to a final, controlled valour.

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