

Article

Considerations on Fate in the *Iliad* and the Remarkable Interventions of the Divine

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Abstract: By borrowing the metaphor of the ‘tapestry of existence’ to discuss the matter of fate in Homer’s *Iliad*, we selected four threads that are interwoven in the warp of each hero’s destiny—that of necessity/fatality, the relations between Zeus and the Moira, the plots and tricks of the gods, and fate and human actions—with the aim of inviting the reader to appreciate the texture of the work with the passages that most caught our attention, without the intention of exhausting the subject. To do so, we draw upon the origin of the word Moira in anthropology, as well as some of Heidegger’s ideas and those of other commentators to enrich the discussion.

Keywords: *Iliad*; Homero; Destino

1. Introduction

To begin our reflections on fate, we borrow two concepts from Heidegger. The first refers to a passage from *Being and Time*, specifically paragraph 29. “This characteristic of Dasein’s Being—this ‘that it is’—is veiled in its ‘whence’ and ‘whither,’ yet disclosed in itself all the more unveiledly; we call it the ‘thrownness’” (Heidegger 1962, p. 174). This statement leads us to a realm of uncertainties—not only regarding our origin but also concerning what happens after death. Heidegger starts from humanity’s ignorance of itself, as it is unaware of its origin and its destiny—here, interpreted in the metaphysical sense. It does not know where it comes from or where it is going. The man (húmus) belongs to the world—to the Earth, a mundane being who is thrown (geworfen) into the world.

The second idea we borrow is that man does not have time; he is time. And he recognizes himself primarily as time, given his understanding of his birth and death—the time that man is inscribed as an interval or the path to be followed between his becoming and his ceasing to be (Critelli 1985, p. 130, translation mine).

Such uncertainties resemble a vast ‘nebula’ because man cannot assert, if not through his belief, the true origin of the world and the creation of all things, as well as his own existence and what happens after death. In light of these uncertainties, it became necessary to create an interpretation that provides meaning, explaining the mysteries of the world and offering justifications for all the suffering.

In this sense, the first great interpretation of the world we encounter is the myth. In archaic societies, as it is explained to us by Eliade (1963), “‘myth’ means a ‘true story’ and, beyond that, a story that is a most precious possession because it is sacred, exemplary, significant” (Eliade 1963, p. 1).

Myth, whilst a sacred narrative, has the duty of providing meaning to existence in order to supply man a valid¹ and a truthful explanation, not only about the origin of the universe and everything within it but also about how each thing came into being. In



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general, myth also tells the causes of suffering and the fate of all existing things—their finitude. Everything that exists, sooner or later, must perish.²

Thus, in archaic societies, religion is not only the first great interpretation of the world, but it also

“maintains the ‘opening’ toward a superhuman world, the world of axiological values. These values are ‘transcendent,’ in the sense that they are held to be revealed by Divine Beings or mythical Ancestors. Hence they constitute absolute values, paradigms for all human activities. [...] these models are conveyed by myths. Myths are the most general and effective means of awakening and maintaining consciousness of another world, a beyond [...] which gives birth to the idea that something really exists, that hence there are absolute values capable of guiding man and giving a meaning to human existence.” (Eliade 1963, p. 139)

In this regard, all cultures have developed their own sacred narratives throughout their historical journey. In an exceptional manner, the Greeks also created for themselves a world filled with gods and supernatural beings, placing man between two realms: Hades, the world of the dead, and Olympus, reserved only for the immortal gods. This ontological constitution—its mortality—is such that not even the gods, with their powerful interventions, can overcome it.

In the ontic domain, the Homeric man is driven by beliefs and values that culminate in a certain concept of fate. In the ontic domain, Homeric man is driven by beliefs and values that culminate in a certain conception of destiny. The relationship between these first considerations and the plots of destiny must be understood as

“the constitutive condition of being, of each person’s lot. Moïra, being immanent to its own being, corresponds to the ontic limits of each entity. We can then understand why the gods themselves are subject to it, since it is immanent to the constitution of divinity itself. Moïra exerts its coercion over beings due to the impossibility of any being transpassing its limits, and, when they attempt to do so, the relentless Erinyes, who forget nothing, will be ready to punish them.” (Gorresio 1998, p. 159, translation mine)

In light of Greek mythology, the Homeric narratives present, above all, a warrior’s morality that elevates the importance of areté.³ However, in Hades, the deceased are deprived of their strength and vigor, fundamental elements in the composition of the Homeric hero that mourns its death. In Hades, the dead have no bones or flesh; they have a ghostly appearance, lacking any materiality. The Psyche (what can be referred to as the soul) is similar to an ectoplasm.

Such a conception of the world reveals the values by which these men were educated: the value of this life and this world and the incredible desire to make this interval between birth and death as beautiful as possible, which finds its most exemplary execution in the *Iliad*. Perhaps that is precisely why Nietzsche took the Homeric man as the measure for his critique of the values of Western culture. “The Hellenic will has never felt paralyzed by this force. Men fight Fate and if they fall defeated, it is after having fought” (Schützer 1956, p. 35; Macedo 1930, p. 20).

The *Iliad*, an epic attributed to Homer, consists of more than 15,000 verses, divided into 24 books, and narrates the battle between Greeks and Trojans following the abduction of Helen by Paris, brother of Hector, prince of Troy. The war culminates in the invasion of Troy, which finally falls after ten years of constant attacks. This narrative was transmitted orally and certainly underwent many changes over time before reaching its written form. It is made up of numerous shifts: In time, we often find the lineage of a particular hero at the same time as a bloody battle in which he takes part is told. It also moves in different

spheres—on the earthly plane, with the articulation of the cunning and strength of the leaders to carry out a plan and on the divine plane, with the direct and indirect intervention of the gods, who seek to favor their chosen ones, always taking sides. They are knowledgeable of fate and try to delay the end of their favorites as much as possible, although none of them can escape Hades.

Thus, the narrative never becomes monotonous and is enhanced by vivacity and agility—as if we were watching a movie. It is in the *Iliad* that we “see a world at war: and war, we must assume, was incessant during the great wandering of the Greek peoples” (Jaeger 1946, p. 17).

Death hangs in the air; each moment may be the last, yet each man seeks to attain his immortality. The Homeric Greek, perhaps more than anyone, laments his finitude but does not abandon the actions that reveal his *areté*. He prefers a short, intense life over any other possibility, trying to embody “its beauty”. It is in the *Iliad* that we find numerous threads that weave the ‘tapestry of existence’. The first is found in what we call fate or destiny (Moîra), that which was prescribed before birth and what must inevitably happen.

The second thread is discovered in the relationship between Moîra and Zeus’ desires, which do not always coincide. There is still a third that weaves together this tapestry of existence with the successive divine interventions: rescuing their favorites from death, hiding them and even transporting them, breaking their enemies’ weapons or pushing them away, protecting them with a cloak, and so on.

Finally, a fourth thread prompts reflection regarding human actions. Is there such a thing as freedom, or are all actions influenced by divine forces? Is there truly room for action, as we see in Odysseus’ cunning plans, for example?

It is about this weaving that we wish to elaborate. First, we must make some considerations about fate, as it is conceived by the Homeric man and his life in Hades. Then, we address what is prescribed and the interference of the gods in the lives of the characters of the *Iliad*, including rescuing them, protecting them, and breaking the weapons of their enemies, using countless tricks to achieve their aims.

Finally, some passages demonstrating a degree of freedom among men are presented. However, as Jaeger reiterates, “But Homer does not, like modern authors, see every action from within [...] In his world, nothing great happens without the aid of a divine power” (Jaeger 1946, p. 51).

2. Some Clarifications on Fate in the Homeric Man: Moîra and Hades

The conception of destiny woven into the *Iliad* corroborates the two dimensions of Heideggerian categories: on the one hand, it reveals the ontological constitution of man—a finite being whose time is running out at every moment; on the other, it encompasses, within the innumerable possibilities of possible interpretation, a certain conception of destiny that underpins the ontic character and governs the value of life and death and the table of all other values of archaic Greek culture.

In light of these categories, destiny, for the Homeric man, is consummated in Hades—in the world of the dead. However, the tapestry of each story, individually speaking, is woven from Moîra—from what was already prescribed before his birth. In the poem, the author does not define the terms precisely. Homer sometimes uses the word Moîra or Aîsa.

“The word Moîra derives from the verb *meîresthai*, meaning to obtain or share, to obtain by luck, to divide, from which Moîra signifies part, share, or allotment—that which each person receives by fate, destiny. Associated with Moîra, as its synonym in the Homeric poems, is the Arcadocypriot, one of the dialects used by the poet, term Aîsa. It is noteworthy that both terms are feminine, which

evokes the idea of spinning, a task traditionally associated with women: fate is symbolically ‘spun’ for each individual.” (Brandão 1986, p. 140, translation mine)

Each man carries his share of pain, joy, possessions, and good fortune. There is a possibility of choice; however, the end is inexorable, as we illustrate below. The Homeric narrative, as reinforced by Rodrigues, presents the idea of a force that weaves the design of each individual’s life, irrespective of their will.

“There was the notion of the existence of a force or will understood as superior and that consisted of determining the map of each individual’s life in advance, as well as limiting their actions. Otherwise, it would be difficult to understand the meaning and the use of concepts such as Aîsa and Moîra, in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.” (Rodrigues 2018, translation mine)

Secondly, fate is never personified, so Moîra and Aîsa are not anthropomorphized: they remain sovereignly above gods and men, without being elevated to the category of distinct deities. In theory, Moîra (fate) is fixed and immutable and cannot be altered—not even by the gods themselves (Brandão 1986, p. 141, translation mine).

The author explains that some commentators reinforce the idea that *Moîra* overrides Zeus’ will, while others say that there is an identification of Moîra with Zeus, as the executor of his decisions. There are also those who argue that Homer, in order to continue the work, uses poetic license. Duffy corroborates these ideas:

“The question whether or not fate or destiny is an overruling power to which the gods must bow has been earnestly discussed. Some critics believe that in the poems fate is absolute and stands above the gods. One critic maintains that Zeus is at one time subject to Moîra, and that is another time he takes her place as he spins out to men their fortune. Others say that the will of Zeus and fate are the same. Still others believe that fate and religion in general are used by Homer to suit his poetic needs.” (Duffy 1947, p. 1)

After the Homeric poems, *Moîra* was projected into three figures: Clotho, the spinner who holds the spindle and draws the thread of life; Lachesis, the one who draws lots and determines the name of the person who will die; and Atropos, the inflexible one, the “unturning”. Atropos is the one who cuts the thread of life. Once again, we find here the idea of spinning and cutting the threads, from which one can sometimes escape, but each person must suffer all that Aîsa has spun for them (Brandão 1986, p. 231, translation mine).

Finally, in line with Greek religion and culture, Homer only attributes a psyche to a man at the brink of death or at death itself, for it only exists to abandon him at that moment.

“With the death of the body, the psyche becomes an eîdolon, an image, a semblance that reproduces, ‘like an astral body’, an insubstantial body, the traces of the deceased in their final moments [...] That is to say, in Hades, the psyche, the eîdolon, is a shadow, a pale and inconsistent image, apathetic, devoid of understanding, without reward or punishment.” (Brandão 1986, pp. 144–46, translation mine)

Robinson (2000) corroborates this idea: for the Homeric man, it is existence and, therefore, this life that must be cherished and hold greater value than the afterlife in Hades. What truly matters are the actions that make the hero’s life as beautiful as possible. What is important is distinguishing oneself from ordinary actions, increasing one’s power in order to be recognized and remembered by future generations.

Notoriously, for the early Greeks (as portrayed, for instance, in the works of Homer) the body, at least at death, constitutes one’s ‘real’ self. One’s life principle (literally ‘life,’ psyche) may have been held to be different from the body, and even to survive

the death of that body, but this was small consolation; what survived did so in a miserable and undesirable state in Hades, whatever the virtue of one's life on earth. By the sixth century, with the advent of Orphism into certain sectors of Greek thinking, the psyche started to be seen as having a better claim than the body to the title of one's real self. Not only was it held to survive the body, it was deemed to be that whereby we are both physically alive and also alive as rational, hence responsible agents (Heraclitus, 22 B 107 [DK I. 175. I–3] and 22 B 118 [DK I. 177. 4–5]). And its ontological status was such that it was the potential subject of eternal reward or punishment for the quality of life lived, bodily existence being relegated to the status of some sort of temporal way station. (Robinson 2000, p. 37)

These considerations on the fate of the Trojans and Greeks in the *Iliad* lead us to a comparative state between gods and mortals. While the former possess eternal beauty and immortality and dwell on Olympus (at its peak), the latter find themselves under the empire of becoming, assailed by constant pain and suffering and deprived of light in Hades.

Just as men are taken over by passions, which implies a lack of guarantee regarding what we traditionally call justice, the gods, endowed with great powers, exceed men in everything—in beauty, intelligence, and strength. Their powers can provoke actions in nature. “However, the epithet ‘godlike’ (θεοειδής: *Iliad* XXIV, 217), applied to man, sometimes merely for decorative purposes, appears in other passages with a more precise meaning and is attributed to the hero to whom a god has granted his strength” (Hernandes 2011, pp. 46–47, translation mine).

Hernandes makes a list of attributes that deserve our attention, explaining that they all come from the gods:

“the beauty of Paris (‘οὐκ ἄν τοι χρᾶϊσμη κίθαρις τά τε δῶρ’ Ἀφροδίτης—‘Your lyre would not help you at all, nor Aphrodite’s gifts’ *Iliad* III, p. 45—Trans. RIEU, 1950), the strength of Ajax (‘Αἶαν ἐπεὶ τοι δῶκε θεὸς μέγεθός τε βίην τε / καὶ πινυτήν, περὶ δ’ ἔγχει Ἀχαιῶν φέρτατός ἐσσι—‘Aias, [...], you are big, strong and able, and the best spearman on your side’ *Iliad* VII, p. 122—Trans. RIEU, 1950), or that of Achilles (‘εἰ μάλα καρτερός ἐσσι, θεὸς που σοὶ τό γ’ ἔδωκεν’—‘What if you are a great soldier?—Who made you so but God?’ *Iliad* I, p. 6—Trans. RIEU, 1950), as well as the qualities inherent in the superior man (the hero) or those which, occasionally, a god bestows upon his favorite, in battle.” (Hernandes 2011, p. 47, translation mine; emphasis added)

3. The Fate of the Heroes

When we revisit Heidegger’s ideas to understand the metaphor of the ‘carpet of existence’, we realize that, from an ontological point of view, the human being is a being for death—‘humus’, coming from the Earth and returning to it—and everything that exists will one day cease to be. Thus, we can see the life of each person or hero as a carpet full of colors, formed mainly by four plots—fatality or necessity, the relationships between Zeus and Moira, the plots and maneuvers of the gods, and human actions.

3.1. Fatality or Necessity

Achilles, at this point, serves as an example to illustrate Heidegger’s categories—ontic and ontological. The hero, the great protagonist of this epic, although of divine descent, will die, which reveals the ontological character of man. In other words, his finitude is linked to the first plot of this skein of the tapestry of existence: fatality. Achilles and all men, sooner or later, must die.

But within the framework of the possibilities of being—ontic character—Achilles is faced with two possibilities: either he leads an ordinary life, being forgotten after a few generations, or he becomes immortal, perishing in the Trojan War. By renouncing the other possibility—the two possibilities understood as ontic character—he receives his share as payment, and Moïra, sovereign, provokes the actions that lead him to fulfill his destiny:

“Mother tells me
the immortal goddess Thetis with her glistening feet,
that two fates bear me on to the day of the death.
If I hold out here and I lay siege to Troy,
my journey home is gone, but my glory never dies.
If I voyage back to the fatherland I love,
my pride, my glory dies. . .
true, but the life that’s left me will be long,
the stroke of death will not come on me quickly.”⁴ (Homer 1990, p. 265)

Thetis, a Titanide, mother of Achilles, warns him about the two possibilities regarding his fate, which is already foreseen. If he stays in the war, his fate will find him early, but he will attain immortality; otherwise, he will live a long life but will be forgotten after a few generations.

Further along in the narrative of the *Iliad*, Zeus utters the terrible fate of Achilles, confirming the prophecy of the goddess and corroborating what had already been foreseen.

“And let Apollo drive Prince Hector back to battle,
breathe power back in his lungs, make him forget
the pains that rack his heart. Let him whip the Achaeans
in headlong panic rout and roll them back once more,
tumbling back on the oar-swept ships of Peleus’ son Achilles.
And he, he will launch his comrade Patroclus into action
and glorious Hector will cut him down with a spear
in front of Troy, once Patroclus has slaughtered
whole battalions of strong young fighting men
and among them all, my shining son Sarpedon.
But then-enraged for Patroclus—
brilliant Achilles⁵ will bring Prince Hector down.”⁶ (Homer 1990, p. 389)

We can see, first of all, that Achilles’ destiny had already been traced, as revealed by the Titaness, and that it comes to pass in the course of the work (ontological dimension—every mortal must perish). Within the ontic dimension, that is, within the belief system of the Homeric man, there is the conception of a destiny that cannot be escaped. Each person has their share of pain, joy, and luck. When we return to the metaphor of the ‘carpet of existence’, this skein is the one that forms the basis of all the carpets of all beings—present from birth until the last breath of life.

Moïra prescribes what should happen to each person in a completely arbitrary way: it has nothing to do with any moral relationship—that is, it does not matter whether they are good or bad; unhappiness or prosperity is determined by Moïra, even considering the interventions of the gods.

Now, if the first skein of this tapestry of existence concerns fatality—which must necessarily occur and in the case of man, death, in its ontological dimension. In the ontic

dimension, within the belief system of archaic Greek culture, Achilles will find glory by being killed in combat, something that had already been prophesied by the goddess and later reiterated by Zeus. However, we can see that the tapestry of existence within the narrative is not composed of a single skein. It will be necessary to consider the relationships between Zeus and Moîra.

3.2. *The Relationship Between Zeus and Moîra*

Zeus, in the case of Achilles, validates the designs of Moîra—that Achilles will fall in Troy. By determining the sequence of events, the lord of Olympus determines not only the fate of Achilles but also that of Hector and Patroclus. Destinies are traced and intertwined: the great Hector will kill Patroclus, and the furious hero will finally enter the war, despite all the outrage suffered when Agamemnon demanded Briseis, his war prize, in front of all the Achaeans. And so it happened.

The imperious fate is also confirmed in the lives of other nobles who take part in the war; this is the case of Euchenor. Paris, filled with wrath due to the death of his friend, Harpalion, shoots a bronze arrow at Euchenor, wounding him below the jaw and ear, closing his eyes almost instantaneously.

“aimed at one Euchenor, son of the prophet Polyidus,
a decent, wealthy man who made his home in Corinth.
Well Euchenor knew that boarding the ships for Troy
meant certain death: his father told him so. . .
Time and again the strong old prophet said
he’d die in his own halls of a fatal plague
or go with the ships and die at Trojan hands.”⁷ (Homer 1990, pp. 362–63)

These examples largely illustrate a strong correlation between fate and the will of Zeus, who weighs everything in his scales, corroborating the interpretation of many renowned scholars.

However, the case of Sarpedon, Zeus’ beloved son with Laodameia, allows us to see that this is not always the case, opening up another possible interpretation. Sometimes, Sarpedon is saved in battle, yet when it is determined that he would be killed by Patroclus so that the war’s outcome could unfold, the god wonders if it would be better to rescue him and weeps, mourning deeply.

Many commentators debate this episode. Certainly, as the sovereign of Olympus, Zeus could have intervened to save his son’s life whenever he wished. However, Zeus could not intervene indefinitely to save his beloved son, for as a mortal, Sarpedon must, at some point, perish.

Still, we must consider all the tension within Olympus, since the gods are not impartial. Hera reprimands her husband in such a way that warns him of a potential and heightened quarrel among the gods. Let’s look at the dialogue between Zeus and Hera,

“My cruel fate. . .my Sarpedon, the man I love the most, my own son—
doomed to die at the hands of Menoetius’ son Patroclus.
My heart is torn in two as I try to weigh all this.
Shall I pluck him up, now, while he’s still alive
and set him down in the rich green land of Lycia,
far from the war at Troy and all its tears?
Or beat him down at Patroclus’ hands at last?”
But Queen Hera, her eyes wide, protested strongly:

'Dread majesty, son of Cronus—what are you saying?
 A man, a mere mortal, his doom sealed long ago?
 You'd set him free from all the pains of death?
 Do as you please, Zeus. . .
 but none of the deathless gods will ever praise you.
 And I tell you this—take it to heart, I urge you—
 if you send Sarpedon home, living still, beware!
 Then surely some other god will want to sweep
 his own son clear of the heavy fighting too.
 Look down. Many who battle round King Priam's
 mighty walls are sons of the deathless gods—
 you will inspire lethal anger in them all.
 No, dear as he is to you, and your heart grieves for him,
 leave Sarpedon there to die in the brutal onslaught,
 beaten down at the hands of Menoetius' son Patroclus.
 But once his soul and the life force have left him,
 send Death to carry him home, send soothing Sleep,
 all the way till they reach the broad land of Lycia.
 There his brothers and countrymen will bury the prince
 with full royal rites, with mounded tomb and pillar.
 These are the solemn honors owed the dead.'"⁸ (Homer 1990, p. 427)

Hera then warns the sovereign, Zeus, about the instability that such an action could cause among the Olympian gods and assertively convinces the god to let him die as the true hero that he was.

Therefore, these heroes and many others who are present in the verses of the *Iliad* affirm the ontological character of man—his finitude. However, they also reveal the ontic character of the unshakable belief of the Homeric man and his survival in Hades, reiterating, at the end of the day, the value of this life and this world and a table of values that emphasizes the search for *areté*.

In this way, if the first strand of the 'carpet of existence' is constituted by fatality, we can infer that the second strand refers to the relationship between Zeus and *Moira*, which causes tensions, deviations, and interventions in the warp of this carpet for each hero, although without this strand overriding the first.

As a result, it is important to corroborate the idea that there is a true belief in the Olympian gods—on the one hand, in the systematic explanation of their origin and destination (where' and 'where to') and, on the other, of these presences that watch over the preservation of their lives, which are not restricted to the interventions of Zeus.

3.3. The Plots and Tricks of the Gods

If, on the one hand, we encounter the infallibility of fate, which leads all men to Hades, on the other, we are amazed by the tricks of the gods, whether in favor of the Achaeans or the Trojans and their allies. There are countless examples that we could cite here. At times, they save their loved ones from death, hiding them, transporting them to another place, or breaking the weapons of those who could harm them.

In book 3, we find the narrative of the terrible clash between the Greeks and the Trojans. Aphrodite saves Paris from Menelaus' attack, transporting him safely back to his home:

“So now Menelaus drew his sword with silver studs
 and hoisting the weapon high, brought it crashing down
 on the helmet ridge but the blade smashed where it struck—
 jagged shatters flying-it dropped from Atrides’ hand
 and the hero cried out, scanning the blank skies,
 ‘Father Zeus-no god’s more deadly than you!
 Here I thought I’d punish Paris for all his outrage—
 now my sword is shattered, right in my hands, look,
 my spear flew from my grip for nothing-I never hit him!’
 Lunging at Paris, he grabbed his horsehair crest,
 swung him round, started to drag him into Argive lines
 and now the braided chin-strap holding his helmet tight’
 was gouging his soft throat-Paris was choking, strangling.
 Now he’d have hauled him off and won undying glory.
 but Aphrodite, Zeus’s daughter quick to the mark,
 snapped the rawhide strap, cut from a bludgeoned ox,
 and the helmet came off empty in Menelaus’ fist.
 Whirling it round the fighter sent it flying
 into his Argives scrambling fast to retrieve it—
 back at his man he sprang, enraged with brazen spear,
 mad for the kill but Aphrodite snatched Paris away,
 easy work for a god, wrapped him in swirls of mist
 and set him down in his bedroom filled with scent.”⁹ (Homer 1990, pp. 140–41)

Paris, owing to Aphrodite, was saved. A little further in the narrative, we find Diomedes chasing Phegeus and Idaeus, the sons of a priest of Hephaestus, Dares. They were experts in various arts of war. In battle, Diomedes kills the first. Idaeus flees, managing to escape, thanks to Hephaestus, who protected and saved him, “shrouding the man in night” (Homer 1990, p. 165).¹⁰ Diomedes also confronts Aeneas, throwing an enormous stone that hits the Trojan hero’s thigh, but is then saved by Aphrodite.

“Just as Diomedes
 hefted a boulder in his hands, a tremendous feat-
 no two men could hoist it. weak as men are now,
 but all on his own he raised it high with ease,
 flung it and struck Aeneas’ thigh where the hipbone
 turns inside the pelvis, the joint they call the cup-
 it smashed the socket, snapped both tendons too
 and the jagged rock tore back the skin in shreds.
 The great fighter sank to his knees, bracing himself
 with one strong forearm planted against the earth,
 and the world went black as night before his eyes.
 And now the prince. the captain of men Aeneas
 would have died on the spot if Zeus’s daughter

had not marked him quickly, his mother Aphrodite
 who bore him to King Anchises tending cattle once.
 Round her beloved son her glistening arms went streaming,
 flinging her shining robe before him. only a fold
 but it blocked the weapons hurtling toward his body.
 She feared some Argive fast with chariot-team
 might hurl bronze in his chest and rip his life out.”¹¹ (Homer 1990, p. 174)

In book 12, we encounter a similar stratagem after the destruction of the wall that served as protection for the Achaeans. In the midst of the fierce battle, Ajax kills Sarpedon’s companion, Epikles, crushing his skull. Sarpedon wounds Alcmaeon but ends up being struck by Ajax and Teucer, “and though Zeus saved him from destruction (not wishing that his son should meet his doom by the sterns of the ships), Aias now came charging down on him and struck his shield. Again, the weapon failed to penetrate [. . .].”¹² (Homer 1950, p. 219).

Soon after, in book 15, Further on, in Book XV, Teucer attacks Hector, but Zeus, who watches everything, steals his glory, causing the bowstring to break, because it was not Teucer’s destiny to kill Hector, only Achilles could do so:

“But Teucer-
 quick with his next shaft the archer aimed at Hector,
 at Hector’s brazen crest, and would have stopped
 his assault on Argive ships, hit him squarely
 and torn his life out just as his courage peaked.
 But he could not dodge the lightning mind of Zeus-
 standing guard over Hector
 Zeus tore the glory right from Teucer’s grasp,
 he snapped the twisted cord on his handsome bow
 just as the archer drew it taut against his man
 and the weighted bronze shaft skittered off to the side,
 the bow dropped from his hand and Teucer shuddered,
 calling out to his brother, ‘Oh what luck-look,
 some power cuts us out of the fighting, foils our plans!
 He’s knocked the bow from my grip, snapped the string,
 the fresh gut I tied to the weapon just at dawn
 to launch the showers of arrows I’d let fly!’”¹³ (Homer 1990, pp. 402–3)

If there is deliverance, there are also impediments: Apollo pushes Patroclus off the walls of Troy three times.

“Three times he charged with a terrific cry, like the wild god of War, and every time he killed nine men. But when he leapt in like a demon for the fourth time [. . .] In the heart of the battle Phoebus encountered him, Phoebus most terrible. Patroclus had not seen him coming through the rout: the god had wrapped himself in a thick mist for this unfriendly meeting. But Phoebus Apollo stood behind him now, and striking his broad shoulders and back with the flat of his hand. . . .”¹⁴ (Homer 1950, p. 305)

Failing to understand it was not his destiny to take the city, Apollo intervenes directly:

“Then at Patroclus’ fourth assault like something superhuman,
the god shrieked down his winging words of terror: ‘Back-
Patroclus, Prince, go back! It is not the will of fate
that the proud Trojans’ citadel fall before your spear,
not even before Achilles—far greater man than you!’”¹⁵ (Homer 1990, p. 435)

It is noticeable that, although it is men who fight, bleed, and die, the battle also unfolds within the divine plane. At times, the gods stand alongside the warriors; send messages; and, like Poseidon and Apollo, directly engage in the conflict. These same gods, deceptive in nature, delay the inevitable end for their favorites. In other words, the work reveals a relation of complementarity between the divine and the human, which cannot be dissociated.

These deliverances and impediments are isolated actions, but in the work, beyond that, interferences of another kind can be found: schemes that also involve the tricks and snares of seduction, relying on lies and deception.

Hera, from the peak of Olympus, contemplating the massacre wrought by the Trojans, seeing the Greeks defeated, craftily devises a plan to seduce Zeus in order to buy time so that Poseidon can personally participate in the battle.

“She began to wonder how she could bemuse the wits of aegis-bearing Zeus; and she decided that the best way to go about the business was this. She would deck herself out to full advantage and visit him on the mountain. If he succumbed to her beauty, as well might be, and wished to fold her in his arms, she would benumb his busy brain and close his eyes in a soothing and forgetful sleep. [...] She began by removing every stain from her comely body with ambrosia, and anointing herself with the delicious and imperishable olive-oil she uses.”¹⁶ (Homer 1950, pp. 250–51)

Homer tells us that she dressed richly; adorned herself with golden brooches; and braided her hair, earrings, and belt, ensuring her beauty with a lovely white veil and sandals.

All these adornments, in the eyes of the goddess, would not be enough, so in a cunning way, she tricked Aphrodite, a supporter of the Trojans, with the excuse that she was going to visit Oceanus and Tethys, who were at odds, in order to calm their spirits:

“‘Give me Love and Desire,’ she said, ‘the powers by which you yourself subdue mankind and gods alike. I am going to the ends of the fruitful earth to visit Ocean, the forbear of the gods, and Mother Tethys, who treated me kindly and brought me up in their home after taking me from Rhea, when all-seeing Zeus made Cronos a prisoner under the earth and barren sea. I am going to see them and bring their interminable quarrels to an end. They have been estranged for a long time now and in the bitterness of their hearts have ceased to sleep with one another.’”¹⁷ (Homer 1950, pp. 251–52)

The narrative continues with Aphrodite’s naivety, handing over the embroidered sash that carried all the charms: love, passion, and words of persuasion—all necessary elements for a conquest.

Before heading to Mount Ida, where Zeus was, Hera tries to convince Sleep to follow her orders. Initially, he refuses, but after Hera’s generous offer, he can no longer resist: “Come, do as I wish, and I will give you one of the young Graces in marriage. She shall be called the wife of Sleep”¹⁸ (Homer 1950, p. 253). Sleep then proposes to Pasithee, and the pact is sealed with an oath.

When Zeus set his eyes on Hera, he was overcome with passion, declaring he had never experienced such intense love. Hera achieved her goals: the son of Cronos forgot

what was happening and spread a golden cloud, like a cloak, to cover them so no one would see.

Sweet Sleep closed Zeus' eyes, and he slept peacefully, allowing Poseidon to incite the bravery of the Achaeans.

3.4. Fate and Human Actions

Finally, we are left to ask whether, in the *Iliad*, there is a fourth skein that makes up 'this tapestry of existence'—whether there is, in fact, in this weaving, a space for human agency. That is, although we can safely affirm divine intervention through whispers, words, dreams, and the effective presence in the War, we ask ourselves whether there would be a space for the heroes' autonomy in their plans and actions?

We believe that in the weave of this tapestry of existence, there is a space reserved for human actions. It can be argued that within the tapestry of existence, there is a space reserved for human actions. Odysseus' cunning should not be overlooked.

In book 10, Agamemnon and Menelaus, unable to sleep due to their concerns, convene a secret meeting in the dead of the night with Ajax; Nestor and his son, Meriones; Odysseus; and Diomedes. They decide to spy on the enemy camp. Diomedes selects Odysseus, one of Athena's favorites, as his companion. After preparing themselves, they set out. Before departing, however, the protagonist of the *Odyssey* prays to the goddess, who sends a heron as a sign of approval for his request. On this same night, when Hector had ordered the Trojans not to sleep, Dolon appeared, volunteering to spy on the Argives. Diomedes notices a figure off the road and, uncertain of who it is, decides to follow him, accompanied by Odysseus. Once the heroes realize Dolon is an enemy, they hastily pursue him, eventually catching him. Dolon falters, trembling with fear. Clever as ever, Odysseus persuades him to tell the truth, convincing him to reveal in detail the position of the Trojan soldiers.

After that, Diomedes "fell on him with his sword, and struck him full on the neck. He cut through both the sinews, and Dolon's head met the dust before he ceased to speak"¹⁹ (Homer 1950, p. 178). As if that were not enough, Odysseus and Diomedes ferociously kill many of the Trojan allies and release their horses. Athena, who accompanies them, advises Diomedes to return safely to the hollow ships.

This particular episode reveals not only the divine protection over the figures of Diomedes and Odysseus but also the human actions motivated by great courage.

"If the sense of inexorability is an essential element of the Homeric poems and especially of the *Iliad*, yet it is not allowed to exceed its natural limits. Events may be predetermined, but not human reactions to them—or at least those reactions are often unpredictable. [...] It is this combination of divine determination and vivid human response, of arbitrariness and involvement, that allows these poems to be at the same time heroic and humane." (Kirk 1962, p. 380)

In light of Heideggerian categories, we can understand Rodrigues' statements, which we agree with. Firstly, fatality (the ontological dimension of man)—that all men will die one day—does not exceed natural limits. No hero who was destined to die in battle was saved or transported to another place that was absolutely safe, escaping death unharmed.

Secondly, the commentator reinforces the idea of an articulation between the sphere of the divine and human reactions that are unpredictable, which make it possible to think of a share of agency. Rodrigues reiterates the inseparable composition in the work between what was determined by Moira and human actions. It is worth noting, in the passage mentioned above, the courage of the heroes in spying on the enemy camp, their boldness in invading it, and Dolon's fear and cowardice—something human (all too human) that implies the terrible outcome of this episode. Although Athena was at the front, safeguarding the Greek heroes, there was no guarantee at that specific moment that they would be victorious.

On the one hand, we can infer that there is a fourth skein in this tapestry of existence—there is a portion of human agency that gives the Homeric narrative a special touch. However, on the other hand, it is worth revisiting Jaeger’s words when he states that in the Homeric universe, nothing is done without the presence of the gods. Schützer states that these actions are not devoid of divine interventions: “there is no possible action—or at least no possible success—without divine help and against Destiny” (Schützer 1956, p. 26).

In our understanding, given this opposition, we opted for the interpretation offered by Rodrigues, which emphasizes the idea of articulation between human actions that may or may not be inspired by the Olympian gods. However, human reactions are not predictable and, therefore, can determine different outcomes in the episodes of battles. Such articulation does not exclude divine presence and interference, corroborating research carried out by renowned experts.

4. Conclusions

In this research, we seek to analyze the conception of destiny in the Homeric narrative in light of Heideggerian categories, although without exhausting the issue. From the work *Being and Time*, we extract two ideas. The first concerns the ontological dimension of a man who ignores his origin and destiny, that is, he does not know where he comes from and where he will go after death, revealing not only the question of human temporality but also his own ontological constitution. The ontic dimension comprises all the possibilities of being that his way of being allows him. In other words, each culture will create for itself an interpretation of the world that gives meaning to existence, explaining in its own way the ‘whence’ and ‘where to’, justified by its belief. The fact that Heidegger presents the idea that man is ‘humus’ can also give us a clue about the value of our existence and what we can do with the time that remains to us.

The great contribution of anthropology to these initial lines of our conclusion reinforces the relationship between the sensible and the supernatural world, which we also find in the *Iliad*. Fate, for the Homeric man, culminates in his death—the ontological condition of any mortal. However, it is full of meaning: despite the horrors of existence, the pains, the suffering, and violent deaths, the Homeric hero seeks to attain glory by being remembered for his incredible deeds by future generations, thereby becoming immortal. These values, which offer meaning to existence, awaken in us, modern men, great admiration and serve as an example for facing the adversities of life.

A second point to be emphasized in our final considerations is that we will not find in Homer the same systematization that we find in works from later periods, where there is a logical chain of ideas. There are no definitive answers to the problem of fate; we have presented an interpretation in the light of renowned commentators who have also developed divergent interpretations. According to Jaeger, the oral or written transmission of the Homeric poems extolled values consistent with the prevailing warrior morality and, in the light of mythology, uniquely revealed the value of existence and making it something worth remembering, instilling these values from the childhood of the Greek man. Therefore, these values answer the question of the ontic dimension of the Heideggerian category. Furthermore, the Homeric man, using the Nietzschean interpretation, promotes an ‘aesthetic of existence’ insofar as he praises the actions of the heroes.

In our interpretation, the choice made by the heroes in opting to take part in the war leads them to fulfill one of two possibilities that will inevitably be fulfilled because man is time. And this is the fate of all mortals, which implies consideration of the ontological dimension of man. In this interval of time between birth and death, man is under the yoke and play of divine interference.

We find four skeins that make up the warp in the metaphor of the ‘carpet of existence’. As an ontological dimension, we consider fatality or necessity, which shapes the final fate of men and heroes in Hades.

A second thread, which reveals the ontic character—the belief system of the Homeric man—points to the relationship between Moira and the will of Zeus. In our understanding, Zeus’ will does not always correspond to the designs of Moira, as illustrated in the case of his son, Sarpédon. However, this in no way diminishes his power. We agree with Rodrigues when he says,

“it must not be forgotten that the Homeric gods are not omnipotent—which, by the way, seems to be inherent to pantheons or polytheistic systems. It must also be considered that an eventual acceptance of the idea of Zeus’ subordination to fate does not necessarily imply the recognition of a lesser power of the god, for, as Schützer further notes, in this fate ‘one must understand Zeus’ own will, which, once revealed, will always remain the same” (Rodrigues 2018, p. 34, translation mine) (emphasis added)

In other words, although Zeus tries to postpone death as long as possible for his loved ones, in the end, fatality, the determinations of Moira, will always prevail.

We also recognize a third thread in the composition of the metaphor of the ‘carpet of existence’, which is the responsibility of divine interventions. Between birth and death, in the *Iliad*, there is great interference from the Olympian gods, delivering their favorites from death, helping them in every way possible until death can no longer be avoided, and decisive impediments. These interventions also make use of lies, deceit, seduction, and alliances that ultimately reveal man to himself, driven by his sometimes petty and cruel passions.

Finally, covering the ontic dimension, we infer the presence of a fourth skein in the composition of this metaphor, although we find divergent opinions among many renowned commentators. We cannot help but be intrigued by the fourth and final skein of this tapestry of existence when it comes to the question of fate. After all, is there or is there not a small portion of human agency? For most commentators, what prevails in the Homeric narrative is the consent and assistance of some god in each great action performed, corroborating the idea of absolute fatalism. However, as we saw at the beginning of this article, the work has gone through numerous versions over time and has certainly undergone modifications. These prevent us from asserting with absolute certainty that there is no possibility of agency, although it is a recurring opinion found in many commentaries.

One of the examples concerns the capture of Dolon by Diomedes and Odysseus—strangely, on the same night, Dolon set out to spy on the enemy camp, and the Argives did the same. In the narrative, there is no mention that Dolon was incited by a god to take such action, nor did he receive any prohibition against doing so. On the other hand, we know that Athena assented and confirmed the attack with the appearance of a heron. This passage itself does not determine the end of the Trojan War; it had already been foretold by Moirai that the Argives would win. Now, this effectively leads us to an impasse: if the Trojans were to fall defeated, would the episode of Dolon already be part of the determining destiny and would everything happen as previously predicted or can we suggest a small part of human agency, as Rodrigues indicates?

For him, what marks this issue in the narrative is precisely the possibility of articulation between divine interferences and human reactions that are not predictable and can determine different outcomes in the episodes of the battles. When we recall the passage of Dolon being captured by Odysseus and Diomedes, his cowardice significantly altered the fate of many Trojans that night. If he had been brave, he would not have revealed the location, and many deaths would have been avoided (they would have happened in

another way). He should have intuited that he would not be spared in any way. In this way, in our understanding, we can affirm that there is a share of human agency concerning the actions and reactions of the heroes, who, with courage, cunning, and audacity, risked their own lives in the name of their areté to achieve immortality.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

DK Diels and Kranz (1951)

Notes

- ¹ In Nietzsche, the notion of perspectivism corroborates this idea. Every explanation provided by religion, philosophy, and science is valid yet necessarily false, as each is merely an interpretation. The German intellectual emphasizes that his interpretation is not more true than any other but that it stands above them because it acknowledges itself as an interpretation, whereas the others claim to be true.
- ² About that, we find an enlightening passage in Nietzsche: “All great things bring about their own demise through an act of self-sublimation: that is the law of life, the law of *necessary* ‘self-overcoming’ in the essence of life,—the lawgiver himself is always ultimately exposed to the cry: ‘*patere legem, quam ipse tulisti*’ (submit to the law you have yourself made)” (Nietzsche 2006, p. 119). If, on one hand, the author of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* asserts that everything that exists must perish, as an inexorable law of life, on the other hand, for life to continue, it is necessary for man to constantly overcome himself.
- ³ *Areté*. This concept warrants clarification, as the values presented in the Homeric narratives are foundational to the Greek *Paideia*. Above all, it is the “combination of proud and courtly morality with warlike valour”. (Jaeger 1946, p. 5). It is the exploits of the nobles that are the focus of the narrative in the *Iliad*—these men are bearers of *areté*. This concept is closely related to vigor, strength, and their abilities, “his heroic valour. But such valour is not considered as a moral quality distinct from strength, in the modern sense; it is always closely bound up with physical power” (Jaeger 1946, p. 6). The ‘good’ of the noble is not related to a “moral virtue” (Jaeger 1946, p. 6) but, rather, tied to certain rules of conduct that embody a sense of duty towards ideals. *Areté* is, above all, honor—its value is ensured by deeds that are recognized by one’s peers. The main heroes of the *Iliad* are the very personification of this concept: they do not shy away from action, and they are strong and determined, even knowing that any moment could be their last. Their deeds are manifestations of great self-esteem and pride, which are the source of *areté*; what drives them is the overcoming of themselves in every action, aiming for self-glorification and that of their ancestors, embodying ‘their beauty.’ Immortality is tied to the idea of an existence that can be remembered by future generations. Jaeger emphasizes: what is at stake is not the physical self in the ultimate sense, “but the ideal which inspires us, the ideal which every nobleman strives to realise in his own life. If we grasp that it is the highest kind of self-love which makes man reach out towards the highest *areté*: through which he ‘takes possession of the beautiful’” (Jaeger 1946, p. 12).
- ⁴ Homer. *Iliad*, book 9, pp. 498–505.
- ⁵ In this same passage, we understand why Zeus does not determine the end of the war: with a nod, the powerful god confirms Thetis’ claim before Achilles is exalted. Let us examine this in detail—“But now as the twelfth dawn after this shone clear the gods who live forever marched home to Olympus, all in a long cortege, and Zeus led them on. And Thetis did not forget her son’s appeals. She broke from a cresting wave at first light and soaring up to the broad sky and Mount Olympus, found the son of Cronus gazing down on the world, peaks apart from the other gods and seated high on the topmost crown of rugged ridged Olympus. And crouching down at his feet, quickly grasping his knees with her left hand, her right hand holding him underneath the chin, she prayed to the lord god Zeus, the son of Cronus: ‘Zeus. Father Zeus! If I ever served you well among the deathless gods with a word or action, bring this prayer to pass: honor my son Achilles!—doomed to the shortest life of any man on earth. And now the lord of men Agamemnon has disgraced him, seizes and keeps his prize, tears her away himself. But you exalt him, Olympian Zeus: your urgings rule the world! Come, grant the Trojans victory after victory till the Achaean armies pay my dear

son back, building higher the honor he deserves!’ She paused but Zeus who commands the storm clouds answered nothing. The Father sat there, silent. It seemed an eternity. . . . But Thetis, clasping his knees, held on, clinging, pressing her question once again: ‘Grant my prayer, once and for all, Father, bow your head in assent! Or deny me outright. What have you to fear? So I may know, too well, just how cruelly I am the most dishonored goddess of them all.’ Filled with anger Zeus who marshals the storm clouds answered her at last: ‘Disaster. You will drive me into war with Hera. She will provoke me, she with her shrill abuse. Even now in the face of all the immortal gods she harries me perpetually, Hera charges me that I always go to battle for the Trojans. Away with you now. Hera might catch us here. I will see to this. I will bring it all to pass. Look, I will bow my head if that will satisfy you. That, I remind you, that among the immortal gods is the strongest, truest sign that I can give. No word or work of mine—nothing can be revoked, there is no treachery, nothing left unfinished once I bow my head to say it shall be done’” (Homer 1990, p. 94–95) (Book I, pp. 587–631).

⁶ Homer, *Iliad*. Book 15, pp. 75–86.

⁷ Homer, *Iliad*. Book 13, pp. 764–70.

⁸ Homer, *Iliad*. Book 14, pp. 514–43.

⁹ Homer, *Iliad*. Book 3, pp. 419–41.

¹⁰ Homer, *Iliad*. Book 12, p. 525.

¹¹ Homer, *Iliad*. Book 15, pp. 336–51.

¹² Homer, *Iliad*. Book 12.

¹³ Homer, *Iliad*. Book 15, pp. 535–50.

¹⁴ Homer, *Iliad*. Book 16.

¹⁵ Homer, *Iliad*. Book 16, pp. 824–28.

¹⁶ Homer, *Iliad*. Book 14.

¹⁷ See Note 16.

¹⁸ See Note 16.

¹⁹ Homer, *Iliad*. Book 10.

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