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Exemplification with Causal Analysis: The Greek Pantheon Are Not Morale Exemplars

Virtue is attained through human experience; without it people cannot live a fulfilling life. In **Homer's** *The Odyssey*, the main character undergoes many trials in his attempt to return to his family. Odysseus begins as a prideful and violent man, which causes him to endure the consequences of his actions. Yet there is a point when he learns human morals by his interactions with other fellow Greeks. This becomes heart breaking when Odysseus returns to his old ways by the end of the story. The fault lays with the gods, who needlessly complicate his journey simply because they have the power to. **Odysseus is then prevented from evolving as a human being through the interference of Poseidon, Circe, and Athena.**

First, Odysseus manages to incur the murderous wrath of Poseidon, whose influence over the sea causes many casualties. It is one of the worst mistakes he makes when he reveals his true name to Polyphemus in a moment of prideful rage. Blinding the Cyclopes was undoubtedly unavoidable; however, it was not wise to taunt a giant who is much stronger simply because he cannot allow "Nobody" to receive credit for such a masterful defeat. Without stabbing him, everyone would have been eaten alive. Polyphemus acted like a monster and was treated as one. Yet, Poseidon never attempts to understand the desperation of a human fighting for their life. He assumes that his son is the sole victim of the encounter. Polyphemus cries out "if I truly am your son and if you are my father, as you claim, grant that Odysseus, sacker of cities, a man from Ithaca, Laertes' son, never gets back home" (**Homer**). Prior to this event, Poseidon had not been

a part of his son's life. This is not unusual as the gods refuse to take responsibility for their numerous offspring. He is not personally affected until his child questions his legitimacy. Only then does the sea god act in a manner he believes to be fatherly. As a result, Poseidon becomes the root cause of their suffering for the entire voyage. Unable to control the might of a vengeful god, Odysseus has no choice but to endure violent shipwrecks. The god of the sea utilizes every opportunity when they are within his realm of power to strike. Instead of targeting Odysseus, his men are the prime victims. While illogical to punish the subjects of a leader who has failed at prioritizing their safety over his personal benefits, it serves as a reminder that deities act according to their own principles.

Second, Circe serves as a complication when she refuses to let Odysseus leave her island.

However, with Hermes' elixir, he becomes immune to her spells causing her to believe he is worthy of her assistance. He then follows Circe's instructions without question. She first sends him to visit the underworld to learn his fate. Not surprising is that he would eventually come to die in a strange land, demonstrating that he is incapable of changing completely once the poem ends. Circe, however, is not even keen on the idea of allowing Odysseus to leave her home. She holds him prisoner, providing him with food and lodging, because she is enamored by his renowned reputation. While not considered a god, she is also not relatable to humans. With nowhere to belong, Circe's lonely island is her only solace. Having a Trojan war hero in her bed offers her a sense of thrill. In addition, it gives her a feeling of importance. Circe never had a purpose beyond turning unfortunate men into swine. Without the main character serving as her entertainment, she becomes irrelevant to the story. While she is unquestionably the most helpful of all the immortals, she ends up becoming too helpful. Odysseus never learns anything; instead, he is warned of the dangers he would face and his destination. As **Homer's** audience learns,

Odysseus cannot simply learn from a mentor; he must continuously fail in order to understand his mistakes. Thus, Circe's attempt to show him his faults falls on deaf ears.

Most importantly, the goddess of wisdom, Athena, intervenes on behalf of Odysseus throughout his journey in Homer's *The Odyssey*. Through manipulation and deception, she creates optimal situations for him to receive assistance. At one point when the hero returns to Ithaca, Athena disguises him as an old beggar, treating him like her own personal doll. Her affection, due to him being the most tactical man in Greece, is her sole motivation for helping. Yet, Athena's indifference towards the lives of the crew members, which their king is responsible for, speaks volumes of her priorities. Even when she decides to support Odysseus, she fails to appear when he needs her guidance most. It took seven years on Calypso's island before Hermes was sent with a message to free him. As a goddess, Athena will never be considered equal to the males of Olympus, in addition to being the daughter of the God of all gods. There is so much pressure in her position that she even feels the need to prove herself, hence why Odysseus becomes a perfect opportunity to show her intelligence. Athena needs him to succeed as his achievements reflect on her. While she is the only Olympian advocating for Odysseus' survival, her actions seem as if he is invincible so long as he has divine protection. Does Odysseus even deserve this level of consideration? In the moments when he assumes that he will receive help in the event he fails only serves as an excuse for performing appalling deeds. This is also contradictory. Odysseus cannot take credit for these successes and condemn the gods when it is most convenient. Without taking responsibility for his actions, he can never grow as a husband or father.

Overall, these three gods treat Odysseus as a chess piece rather than a person, influencing his decisions by giving him little options. Essentially, he is cast aside as the hero of the story.

The ancient Greeks worshiped these deities as beings more powerful than mortals. There are many myths in which these immortals were unfaithful to their partners or had rivalries amongst themselves; a common example would be the king of gods. While this sounds like human behavior, the way they chose to disregard human life does not follow the modern idealism of a merciful god. Odysseus can even be compared to Zeus, as both are prone to use violence as a solution. It becomes clear to the reader why he is considered godlike. To the Greeks of Odysseus' era, he is the standard image of a strong king. In the twenty-first century, however, righteousness is an important quality for a person to have. Moral exemplars in *The Odyssey* is an aspect that the story severely lacks. How can the reader expect Odysseus to learn virtuous behavior if his role models exhibit bad conduct? Like a human, he has the capacity to become righteous, but it is only when his experience is interrupted by the whims of higher beings that he reverts to his old ways. It results in Odysseus not being able to continuously make ethical decisions.

Odysseus problem is serious because in Homer's *The Odyssey* the theme is how to be virtuous. The Greeks were the founders' of democracy; however, they also made progress in discovering how to become a better person. Many of these philosophies were passed on to modern society. Learning from the mistakes made by Odysseus can teach the audience how choosing the righteous path will lead to a rewarding life. Crash Course's video on "Aristotle and Virtue Theory" explains Eudaimonia, which roughly translates into the pursuit of a well lived life, is complicated in nature. Yet, the idea of striving for a more fulfilling life is simplistic. The concept of human behavior is the repetition of failing and succeeding. Without failures, Odysseus can never hope to understand his errors. But divine intervention prevents this very process from occurring. The main character has many faults. However, he is treated as if he is an

immortal, which is a being who usually never receives proper punishment. It is the reason why Odysseus returns to his normal habits. His entire life is in the hands of unpredictable gods.

Nevertheless, Odysseus' tale can be a lesson for the reader.

To conclude, the Greek pantheon kept Odysseus from attaining the human experience gained through hardships. He is not godlike by any means. Odysseus is simply a person who struggles with learning good morals. Poseidon who killed the sailors out of anger, Circe who stole his control of the situation, and Athena who is unreliable were all unnecessary to the development of Odysseus. If the gods had left him alone, he might have remained the better version of himself that the reader glimpsed during his interactions with other humans. Rather, their involvement only served to complicate his story. He is subject to their temperament and could only return home if the circumstance allowed it. Had the Olympians been good morale exemplars, the hero might have returned to Ithaca a better man. Instead, the audience is left to wonder why the Greeks would choose to worship these flawed deities.

Works Cited

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