Some Final Notes on the Odyssey:

Hermes / Athena / Zeus:

Zeus as the Father and Head of the family of the Olympian Gods illustrates how different moods/ways of being can coexist and share the Pantheon. The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein introduces in his work *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) the notion of *family resemblance* to characterize some notions which describe and group together phenomena with overlapping, but not with a set of identical properties (his example: games); we can think of the Olympian Gods as a ‘family’ of moods/ways of being in this way.

Zeus is the God who assures safe passage from one world into another, he protects guests and strangers from other worlds. His two favorite children are Athena and Hermes. Athena stands for multi-world adaptability (she shines on Odysseus), Hermes is the messenger god, he stands for cross-appropriation of practices from one world into the next (example: he shows Odysseus the plant which protects him against Kirke’s poison).

Unified Life (The Two Olive Trees):

If there is a pantheon of moods/gods and each can shine on a situation, how can life be unified for the Greeks?

Life is unified beyond the anecdotal, it has coherence and continuity - that might be the most remarkable fact about Odysseus’ travels and homecoming. However, Homer does not describe ‘serial monotheism’ (first king, then war hero, then traveler, then lover, then avenger, then husband), but a plurality of being and a cross-world passage.

In the polytheistic culture all worlds/ways of life are interconnected: The great heroes only die the heroic death in the battlefields to be sung about at the great banquets, the guests at these banquets only attend because they want to hear epic poems about the great heroes and their heroic deaths. In this way the singer (Homer’s alter ego) is the real unifier of the worlds and the most important person!

The image of background/foreground nicely illustrates how the different parts of Odysseus’ life hang together: How can he unify his life-style as adventurer and his life-style as father/husband/king? When he is in one world, the other becomes the background, giving meaning and seriousness and contour to the way of being that is emphasized. When Odysseus comes to shore and struggles to survive, he makes his bed under an olive tree (p. 94/95); when he comes home he is recognized by Penelope because he knows of their bed: the safe and secure and irremovable trunk of an olive tree in the center of the house (p. 435). We see how the adventurer’s bed as a background to this story gives his homecoming more depth and meaning.

Moods, Choice, Psychology:

Some moods can be characterized as psychological, they are fleeting and not caused by ‘a god shining on the situation’ (for example: happy, sad, sulky, giddy, vengeful, frivolous etc.; they cannot be the basis for a whole life). People who act on these ‘inner inclinations’ (like the servant girls, like the suitors) are typically punished. Homer does not deny that
free will exists, but it is important for him that an appropriate response (such as the heroes/heroines can display) is made possible by getting in sync with the situation to which one is attuned by a world-disclosing mood/god. Free choice is therefore marginal for Homer, while it is central for us.

Some Questions to think about in relation to the Odyssey:
- What do we mean by Tolerance, today?
- Why do we describe certain commitments as fanaticism or addiction? How could the Greeks describe such behavior?
- Contrast Polytheism with Binary Monotheism and with Monotheism and think of the relevance of each concept today.

Some Introductory Notes on the Oresteia:
- Aeschylus describes how the Greek culture becomes what it is for the viewers of his time; his play is a documentation of the foundation of civilization.
- New: the chorus. The chorus sometimes conveys the truth behind the events (which is telling us of the darkness of the times and the tragically conflicting values); sometimes the chorus is the people of Argos who don’t understand the events around them. (Both times it can be hard for the contemporary reader to understand them.)

How has the relationship Gods/Mortals changed?
- Gods don’t help mortals anymore. The Gods are no longer exemplars or the attuning ones. They don’t take on the guise of friends to help heroes transition and get in sync with a situation.
- Gods represent different values in the cultural practices of the people; since Aeschylus is describing a transitional period, some of these practices come into conflict.
- Each set of values (Furies, Olympian Gods) claims absolute authority over the others.
- This can be called binary monotheism, because each ‘god’/way of life/set of values claims to be the ‘only truth’ and therefore superior to the others.

Example: Artemis:
She is the one who demands the sacrifice of Iphigenia (Agamemnon is supposed to sacrifice his daughter to allow the fleet to travel onwards to Troy, and he does.) How can the protectress of the young and innocent demand the killing of another innocent creature? We must assume that she does not expect Agamemnon to go through with the sacrifice. She does not expect Agamemnon to act on reason, rationality, his oath, and against his feelings. Agamemnon faces an impossible choice: his feelings/blood ties vs. his rationality, oath, role as king.

300 years after Homer was written down, in Athenian Greece, we now hear from Aeschylus the story of how the two value systems were made compatible:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Old Gods</th>
<th>vs.</th>
<th>New Gods:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Furies</td>
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Aeschylus sees that both of these side need to be reconciled in his society. That’s what he writes about.

**Ontological vs. Psychological Tragedy:**

In the ontological tragedy, the conflict of practices is played out by the entire culture; in this sense, there is no focus on personal suffering and personal agonizing over decisions.

In the psychological tragedy, the single individual is suffering from the consequences of a decision which is due to his or her character and a tragic flaw that they have (Oedipus Rex). Some Aristotelian terms of the psychological tragedy are hubris (pride), mistakes and catharsis (the cleansing effect the learning process has for hero and audience).

In the tragedy of Aeschylus, the ontological tragedy, individual choice and motives do not matter much, neither does character. The action is not seen, because in a sense it is already determined and ‘done’. The past and future dominate the present of the stage-play.

Yet, this is not determinism and not fate (as it will be in Virgil); Agamemnon can chose and the space in which people can act/chose changes. (It changes through suffering.)

Although Agamemnon is free in his choice (should I sacrifice Iphigenie or not?), his choice is limited to the two conflicting value-systems struggling in his culture.

**Question:** Is it really Agamemnon’s hubris (a character flaw) that justifies Clytemastra’s murder? Is the murder justified? Clytemastra believes she, as an individual, has stopped the senseless bloodshed that runs in the family; yet, she was only a tool of the furies.

**Question of Audience for Libation Bearers:**
In whose name will Orestes kill those who killed his father?