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Guests, Hosts, Strangers

Xenia in the Archaic and Classical Period

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Introduction

The following investigation aims to study the concept of ξενία, a term usually translated as 'hospitality' or 'guest-friendship' (although not unproblematically, as we will see). In broad terms, *xenia* signifies for the ancient Greeks a social relationship between strangers, *xenoi*, i.e. persons who do not share any ties in the local community.

Representations of *xenia* relate to many aspects of Greek social life. First of all, *xenia* had a religiously sanctioned frame, and the Greeks considered interaction with strangers as holy, as manifesting a form of sacred bond. Under the formula '*Zeus Xenios',* they saw Zeus as the main guardian of the customs associated with hospitality.[1] This is exemplified by Odysseus' encounter with the cyclops Polyphemus: trapped in his cave, Odysseus orders the monster to treat him well. He tells him threateningly that "Zeus is protector of suppliants and strangers / a Xenios that accompanies respectful strangers", Ζεὺς δ' ἐπιτιμήτωρ ἱκετάων τε ξείνων τε, / ξείνιος, ὃς ξείνοισιν ἅμ' αἰδοίοισιν ὀπηδεῖ.[2]

So-called *theoxeny* is a recurring narrative device in mythological storytelling, not just in the Greek tradition, but in many cultures over the world.[3] In theoxenic stories an unknown foreigner arrives in a household or city, and this foreigner will later turn out to be a disguised divinity sent out to test the hospitality of his mortal hosts. If treated generously, the god will reward them; if treated inhospitably, they will be punished severely.

This motif can be seen in the Homeric hymn *To Demeter,* where Demeter, disguised as an old woman (γρηῢς), visits the household of Keleos, the ruler of Eleusis.[4] Her hosts at first treat her generously, and offer her to become the nurse of the queen's son Demophon. Because she uses her "immortal hands" to take care of baby, he grows in a godlike pace. But the queen mistrusts her guest; suspicious of her son's abnormal growth, she spies on him at night and discovers that Demeter secretly buries the baby in the furnace fire. She shouts out: "my baby Demophon, the

[1] For Zeus Xenios, cf. Plato, *Laws,* 729e-730a and 879d-e.

[2] Homer, *The Odyssey,* 9. 270-1. Works of primary literature will be referenced by author and title, works of secondary literature by author and (year). Translations from Greek are my own.

[3] Theoxeny is a recurring motive in many literary traditions. For theoxeny in the Bible, cf. Louden (2011), p. 30-56, who discusses theoxeny in *The Odyssey,* and compares it with the Sodom and Gomorrah episode of the *Old Testament*. For theoxeny in folk lore literature, cf Flückiger-Guggenheim (1984), p. 11-17.

[4] Homer, *Hymn to Demeter,* 90-309.

Stranger (ξείνη) buries you deep in fire, and puts me in grief and baneful mourning".[5] Angered at having been mistrusted, Demeter decides to punish the whole community of Eleusis with a famine. In stories such as this one, gods were thus represented as forces intending to protect, test, reward, and punish the customs associated with hospitality.

Xenia has been viewed as a phenomenon important to the economic culture of Ancient Greece. Interactions between *xenoi* are often represented as involving an exchange of gifts, so-called ξένια. Because of this, it has been considered to have important function within the economic and social structure of Archaic Greece. It has been compared to what anthropologists call *potlatch,* an economic system in pre-monetary societies where gifts and counter-gifts form a pillar of the communal life, and where clans and families established power and prestige by means of excessive giving.[6]

In the tradition of Greek moralistic literature, x*enia* also occurs as a an important topic. Hesiod, who is usually seen as the originator of this tradition, advises his readers to exercise moderation in the entertainment of guests: μηδὲ πολύξεινον μηδ' ἄξεινον καλέεσθαι, "be neither excessively hospitable, nor inhospitable".[7] Aristotle cites this line approvingly when discussing what number of friendships is proper to the good life, and Plutarch will later bring up the same topic in his text *On Having Many Friends*.[8]

Another phenomenon important to mention is the concept of *proxenia,* a precursor to modern-day ambassadorship. Two *poleis* would sometimes establish a formal relationship of friendship and appoint a *proxenos* in the other *polis.* The role of such a *proxenos* was to facilitate the interaction with the foreign community for his compatriots; a middle man between foreigners and the state. The widespread use of this interstate institution is attested by an extensive epigraphic material, and it was developed during the Classical period and used into the late Hellenistic period.[9]

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[5] Homer, *To Demeter,* 248-249.

[6] Mauss (2000), p. 6-7. Mauss (1921) discusses potlatch in relation to Ancient Greek culture, and mentions the scene between Glaucus and Diomedes in *The Iliad* (p. 390-391).

[7] Hesiod, *Work and Days,* 715.

[8] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* IX, 1170b, 22; Plutarch, *On having many friends.*

[9] Cf. Mack (2015). In Plato's *Laws* 642b-c, Megillos, who is from Sparta, reveals that his family serves as *proxenos* for the Athenian *polis,* and that he therefore has developed a friendly attitude to all Athenians.

Some initial questions present themselves: How did the spheres of personal relationships, gift-exchange, and mythology interrelate in the context of *xenia*? Were practices of *xenia* governed by rules and obligations, and if so, what were they? Why and in what way was the relationship to strangers seen as holy?

Clarifying the meaning and practice of *xenia* presents difficult interpretative challenges. In fact, even the Greeks themselves seem to have struggled to understand the concept. In his attempt as classifying the forms of friendship in book 8 of *The Nicomachean Ethics,* Aristotle writes:

> Ἐν κοινωνίᾳ μὲν οὖν πᾶσα φιλία ἐστίν, καθάπερ εἴρηται· ἀφορίσειε δ' ἄν τις τήν τε συγγενικὴν καὶ τὴν ἑταιρικήν. αἱ δὲ πολιτικαὶ καὶ φυλετικαὶ καὶ συμπλοϊκαί, καὶ ὅσαι τοιαῦται, κοινωνικαῖς ἐοίκασι μᾶλλον· οἷον γὰρ καθ' ὁμολογίαν τινὰ φαίνονται εἶναι. εἰς ταύτας δὲ τάξειεν ἄν τις καὶ τὴν ξενικήν.[10]
>
> Every friendship exists within a community, as was previously stated. But someone might here set aside friendship between family members and close companions. Friendships between citizens, tribe members, boat crew members, and similar, seem to be more community-like, since they appear to follow some type of agreement. One might also put friendship between strangers in this group.

This passage contains puzzles that will be crucial in the pages to follow. Aristotle seems reluctant to classify *xenia* as a form of φιλία καθ' ὁμολογίαν, 'friendship based on contract or agreement'. Much like an after-thought, he mentions φιλίαν ξενικήν in a separate sentence, isolating it from the other examples. These examples, such as tribal life and boat-rowing, seem to illustrate much more clearly the spirit of community. Why, then, would Aristotle see the need to bring up the concept of *xenia*, and why would he do seemingly with such hesitation?

Another puzzle: if a shared community (κοινωνία) is said to be necessary for φιλία*,* how could a φιλία-relationship possibly be established with a stranger? Would not affiliation to *distinct* communities be precisely what make them *xenoi* to one another? It seems clear that this sets *xenia* apart from the other personal relationships that Aristotle mentions. While tribe members and boat

[10] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* VIII. 1161b, 12-17.

crews are groups united from the outset, *xenia* would seem to concern an *initiation* of a stranger, a passage from the *outside* of the community to the *inside*. Needless to say, Aristotle was himself a foreigner to the Athenian community; so why does he seem to gloss over these difficulties?

The above passage from *The Nicomachean Ethics* is indicative of larger interpretative issues concerning Greek hospitality. The relation between *xenia* and the notion of a contract is one of the central matters of dispute in research on the concept. Using the terminology of Derrida, one might ask to what extent *xenia* represented an ideal of "unconditional hospitality", i.e. a welcoming of the foreigner without calculation or demands for gifts or services in return.[11] To what extent *xenia* was dependent on a *mutual* exchange? Were there predetermined rules and obligations that governed the practice of *xenia*? Did *xenia* result from a genuine concern for the guest by the host, regardless of the personal gains he might attain? Or was it a display of generosity only in so far it expected future counter-gifts and counter-favors? Was the help he provided nothing more than a strategy for creating a network of cross-city allies?

Generally speaking, social arrangements in the ingroup, such as those of citizenship, ownership, marriage, kinship, or friendship, provided for the Greeks the fundamental guarantees for livelihood and personal safety. Individuals located *outside* the ingroup, on the other hand, were likely viewed with either indifference or hostility. As such, it ought to have been a very risky and dangerous prospect to leave one's city in favor of another, foreign community. From the viewpoint of modern societies, when considering the lack of technological and logistical means of long-distance travel in ancient societies, one might presume that relationships with strangers were a fringe phenomenon engaged in only in exceptional cases, or only among certain professions such as tradesmen and mercenaries.

The documented material from the Archaic and Classical period suggests otherwise, however. *Xenia*-practices are described and thematized in various literary contexts and genres. This prevalence in the collective representations of the Greeks suggests that the question whether foreigners should be engaged with, trusted, or even welcomed into the own group, was a fundamentally important issue in their culture.

Another crucial aspect in understanding *xenia* is the Greek colonial movement. Starting from around the 8th century B.C., Greek colonial settlements (ἀποικίαι) were established all over the

[11] Derrida (2023), especially p. 1-99.

Mediterranean sea.[12] As argued by Malkin, works of poetry such as *The Odyssey* became closely tied to colonial efforts. He writes: "sailing experiences, the image of the traveling/returning hero, and Ithaca converged to create a powerful focus for articulating the protocolonial experience".[13] Ideas of colonial expansionism went hand in hand with mythical representation and storytelling, which were used to mediate the interaction with foreigner culture and to conceptualize group identity.

Although the travels of Odysseus depicted in the poem are about homecoming, and never about founding a colonial settlement *per se*, many of the narrated events came to be associated with experiences of oversea exploration and settlement. The imagery and figures found in the epic became important for the articulations of ethnicity, genealogy and social identity; in short, it became a tool for understanding one's relationship to the "others" that one would encounter during colonial expeditions.

Texts depicting colonial life are often expressed mythologically, both describing and prescribing a divine obligation to offer help to foreigners. Let us here look at an epigram found in manuscripts of the *Homeric Hymns*, and which is also included in Pseudo-Herodotus' *Vita Homeri.*[14] The title of the hexametric poem is εἰς ξένους, "To Strangers":

αἰδεῖσθε ξενίων κεχρημένον ἠδὲ δόμοιο,
οἳ πόλιν αἰπεινήν, Κύμης ἐριώπιδα κούρην,
ναίετε, Σαιδήνης πόδα νείατον ὑψικόμοιο,
ἀμβρόσιον πίνοντες ὕδωρ θείου ποταμοῖο,
Ἕρμου δινήεντος, ὃν ἀθάνατος τέκετο Ζεύς.[15]

Respect him who needs hosts and a shelter,
You all who inhabit the high city, the beautiful daughter of Cumae,

[12] For a historical account of the early Greek colonial movement and its causes, cf. Descouedres (2008).

[13] Malkin (1998), p. 2.

[14] Vasiloudi (2013), p. 119.

[15] The epigram was most likely not an original part of the *Hymns,* but a later addition in the manuscripts: cf. Humbert (1967) p. 254 n1. There were multiple Greek colonies by the name of Κύμη, the most well-known located in Campania (cf. Bérard, 1941, p. 47-78), but it is difficult to determinable whether this is the colony actually referred to in the poem.

At the foot of mountainous Saidene,
You who drink the ambrose water from the divine river,
From the whirling Hermos, that immortal Zeus created.

The context of this epigram is the colony of Cumae, which is described metaphorically as a κόρη, "daughter", in connection with the epithet ἐριώπης 'many-eyed', perhaps in reference to the scenic view from the city. Two relationships of dependence are described: on the one hand, a foreigner is dependent on the hospitality among the citizens. On the other hand, the citizens rely on the drinking water from the river Hermos, which is said to have been created or 'engendered' by Zeus, who, as we previously saw, had a special relation to strangers. The implication, it seems, is that guests and colonists are mutually dependent on each other.

Such an interpretation of the epigram is supported by the verb αἰδεῖσθαι, 'respect' or 'show compassion for', which also ties the text to the Homeric tradition. Αἰδώς 'respect' is a key concept in the Homeric epics; people and gods are frequently characterized as αἰδοῖος 'worthy of respect'. While this designation is usually given either to gods whom one devotes, as well to those with whom one shares a tie of φιλότης (i.e. someone from one's ingroup), it also occurs in the context of *xenia,* where it is used to show respect of vulnerable and helpless people.[16] Since these people were guarded by Zeus as their ἐπιτιμήτωρ 'protector' or 'avenger', they were likewise worthy of αἰδώς.

In Classical Athens before and during the Peloponnesian War, *xenia* also became important for the self-image of the Athenians. Athenian hospitality became a part of the state ideology, and was promoted in combination with an emphasis on territorial and cultural expansion. This phenomenon is expressed famously in Pericles' funeral oration as described by Thucydides. Pericles claims that: "we [Athenians] allow the city open (κοινὴν), and we never prevent anyone, using expulsion of foreigners (ξενηλασίαις), from learning or observing that which an enemy might be aided by seeing, should it not remain hidden".[17] Hospitality and openness to outside influence is in the speech presented as one of the major things that sets the Athenian citizens apart from other

[16] Cf. Cairns (1993) p. 87, 105-113.

[17] "τήν τε γὰρ πόλιν κοινὴν παρέχομεν, καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ὅτε ξενηλασίαις ἀπείργομέν τινα ἢ μαθήματος ἢ θεάματος, ὃ μὴ κρυφθὲν ἄν τις τῶν πολεμίων ἰδὼν ὠφεληθείη [...]". Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War,* II.39.

Greek cities, and especially Sparta, who had the reputation of being restrictive in letting foreigners visit the city, and could legally expel immigrants, so-called ξενηλασία.[18]

From this initial discussion, we see that representations of *xenia* display a remarkable complexity in relation to Greek social life. The multifaceted ways in which the concept appears in the preserved make it clear that a systematic account of the concept requires a multi-directional analysis: a method which combines philological, sociological, anthropological, literary, and philosophical approaches.

The investigation to follow will be concerned with expressions of hospitality from the Archaic to the Classical epoch. In the first half, I will be concerned with the most influential interpretations of *xenia* in classical scholarship. While x*enia* has traditionally been viewed as one of the moral "institutions" of the Greeks, it is not always clear what is meant by this term. In order to clarify the concept, I will attempt to approach it with sociological institutional theory. In the second half of the study, I will make a chronological analysis of the most significant texts that thematize *xenia*: the Homeric epics, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey,* Aeschylus' *Oresteia* tragic trilogy, as well as Plato's *The Sophist.* As we will see, the two later authors in important ways reorient or rethematize the Homeric concept of *xenia*.

A combined linguistic and sociological approach

I. The linguistic and anthropological model of xenia

This section will be concerned with *xenia* from the point of view of linguistics. What type of concept was *xenia* for speakers of Ancient Greek? What are the semantic properties of the word? What is its etymology? As we will see, one of the key disputes is the degree to which *xenia* denotes "friend" rather than "stranger", and which one of these that constitutes its original sense. Another debated question is whether *xenos* is an exclusively Greek concept, or if it has a common root with other Indo-European languages, and by implication, as some claim, a common root with Indo-European customs and "institutions" more generally.

The Greek vocabulary related to ξένια is rather extensive. The Liddell Scott Jones (LSJ) dictionary lists more than fifty simple or compound words that begin with the stem ξεν- or ξειν-.

[18] Cf. Aristotle's discussion of the Spartan constitution in *Politics,* 1272b17-23.

Examples include the already mentioned προξενία and ξενηλασία 'expulsion of foreigners', τὰ ξένια 'gifts of hospitality', as well as the verbs ξενόω and ξενίζω 'receive' or 'entertain as guest'. Some of this vocabulary is also related to mercenary warfare, e.g. ξεναγός 'commander of mercenary troops'.

Unlike languages such as English and Swedish, ξένος can mean both the *receiving* person and the person *being received*, i.e. both the guest and the host. This is similar to 'hospes' in Latin, or 'hôte' in French. This ambivalence between the person taking the role of guest and the other that of host is noteworthy and raises some questions. In a social relationship which is so obviously *asymmetrical,* one part at the mercy of the other, why are the parts referred to with *mutually interchangeable* terms?

A common translation of ξένος is the neologistic word "guest-friend". For example, the LSJ entry is separated into three main definitions which places (1) *guest-friend*, "applied to persons and states bound by a treaty or tie of hospitality", followed by (2) *stranger*, "especially wanderer, refugee (under the protection of Ζεὺς ξένιος)"; and (3) *stranger, foreigner*, as opposed to citizen (ἔνδημος or ἀστός).[19] Likewise, ξένια is often rendered as "guest-friendship". However, the terms "guest-friend" and "guest-friendship" raise more questions than they clarify: in what way is a "guest-friend" different from a "guest" tout court? How does it differ from "stranger"? On what basis have the LSJ authors placed it above the two other definitions, which both carry the sense of an unknown stranger, a person with whom one does not share friendship? Also, what is exactly does it mean to be "bound by a treaty or tie of hospitality"?

With these questions in mind, let us turn to etymology. The word ξένος is attested in various Greek dialects: apart from its Attic form ξὲνος, it occurs as ξεῖνος in Ionian, as ξένϝος in Doric, as ξέννος in Aeolian and (possibly) in Mychenaean *ke-se-nu-wo*. While Beekes says that the word "could be Pre-Greek", Frisk classifies the word as "isolated" to the Greek language.[20]

There have been several efforts within comparative linguistics to connect *xenos* to various words in Indo-European languages. Because of their semantic similarities, a commonly discussed approach is to link ξένος to the Latin words *hospes* and *hostis,* as well as to Gothic *gasts,* which both stem from the the Indo-European root *g^hosti-. Such proximity, the argument goes, could be

[19] LSJ s.v. "ξένος". The authors also mention a fourth sense, 'mercenary soldier'.

[20] S.v. "ξένος" in Boisacq (1950), Chantraine (1968), Frisk (1970) and Beekes (2010).

explained by positing a root etymology *g^{h}es- which would link *xenos* to *g^{h}osti- back to a common root.[21] A serious limitation to this theory, however, is that it is unsupported by etymological laws, i.e. it cannot be reconstructed using the mechanisms of word formation. Frisk thus criticizes it for being a result of a "merely mechanical and arbitrary analysis".[22] Chantraine agrees, claiming that "there is no way to establish a plausible connection".[23]

Schwartz argues for another etymological solution. Instead of relating ξένος/ξενία to the Latin/Germanic sphere, he traces the linguistic origin of the word in the opposite geographical direction, to the Iranian branch of Indo-European. By positing a Proto-Indo-European root *kwsen(-w)- "to give one thing for another", he relates the Greek root ksenw- in ξένος to the Iranian root xsnu-, from which the root cixsnusa- is derived, meaning "requite" or "provide hospitality" in the Old Iranian Avestan language.[24]

Another alternative has been proposed by Neri. Investigating the Indo-European expressions for 'hand' or 'grip by the hand' as formed by the root *ǵ^{h}es-, he argues that ξένος (in Archaic Greek *ksénuo-) can be interpreted as a locative 'in the hand', taking -uo- as a locative -en-. A *xenos*-relationship would then signify being placed in someone's hand, i.e. being placed under his or her protection.[25]

Lastly, counter to the criticism by Frisk and Chantraine, Watkins justifies keeping the root *g^{h}osti- in *xenos* and *hospes* by in turn relating it to two cognates in Vedic Sanskrit: the cognate *ghas- 'eat'* and the zero-grade *sm-ghs-ti- in *ságdhi-* 'eating together, communal meal'. If true, *xenia* would be etymologically tied to commensality, the sharing of a common meal.[26]

It is not easy to determine which one of these positions is the most plausible. In itself, this difficulty highlights the general uncertainty and speculative nature of root etymology. Common to all of the theories is an effort to locate the meaning *xenos* within the context of the Indo-European vocabulary of hospitality and gift exchange. This approach can be traced to Benveniste's influential

[21] C.f. Beekes (2010) s.v. ξένος; The *American Heritage Dictionary Appendix of Indo-European roots*, s.v. "ghos-ti-": https://ahdictionary.com/word/indoeurop.html .

[22] Likewise, Pokorny (1959) calls the reconstruction "kaum glaublich", s.v. "ghosti-s".

[23] Chantraine (1968), s.v. ξένος.

[24] Schwartz (1982), p. 188.

[25] Neri (2013), p. 185-186, 198-199.

[26] Watkins (1995), p. 246 n. 15.

chapter "Hospitality" in *Dictionary of Indo-European Concepts and Society.* Given the importance of this text for how *xenos* and *xenia* are commonly understood, it is worth taking a closer look at his analysis.

A central part of Benveniste's discussion is the notion of *potlatch,* an economical and social system based on gifts and counter-gifts. This is a form of social structure that stood at the center in discussion of early anthropological and sociological theory, eg. in Marcel Mauss' study on gift-culture.[27] Benveniste argues that remains of *potlatch* practices can be traced in the terminology of many Indo-European languages, which suggests that such a system formed a core part of the social structure of archaic Indo-European culture. This is also the case for the terms *xenia,* which was considered a holy and hereditary relationship which "consists of the exchange of gifts between contracting parties, who declare their intention of binding their descendants by this pact".[28]

The analysis of Benveniste centers around Latin *hospes,* which he takes as a compound **hosti-pet-s* consisting of the two components **hostis* and **potis.* He connects the second term **potis* to the Greek πόσις (a word used mainly in poetry) meaning 'husband' or 'master'. Interestingly, this is the same word from which δεσπότης, 'despot' or more originally 'master of the house', is derived.[29] As one part of the compound, then, **potis* is centered on social power, on being the leader of the community. This could be in reference to leading either the household or the city-state.[30]

Turning to the compound's initial component **hostis,* Benveniste takes note of the fact that the meaning of Latin *hostis*, though etymologically related, differs semantically from Gothic *gasts* and Old Slavic *gostĭ*. All three words can be used to refer to foreigners or strangers, but while *gasts* and *gostĭ* carry the sense of a 'guest', i.e. a friendly relation, Latin *hostis* has a sense of an 'enemy', 'intruder', i.e. a hostile relation to the other. To explain this inconsistency, he argues that the sense of enmity in the Latin vocabulary ought to have been a later development. Similarly to *gasts* and *gostĭ*, *hostis* had originally the sense of 'guest'; over time, however, this sense was lost. As evidence for this he cites a line from the Twelve Tables where the Roman law in relation to foreigners is proclaimed: in this text, *hostis* seems to refer to foreigners with no sense of hostility. At that

[27] Cf. Mauss (2000).

[28] Benveniste (2016), p. 67.

[29] Cf. LSJ s.v. "πόσις" and "δεσπότης".

[30] Benveniste (2016), p. 62.

moment, *hostis* signified "a bond of equality and reciprocity" between a foreigner and the Roman citizens, which amounted to an "institution of hospitality".[31]

Having argued for the close connection between *hospes* and practices of mutual obligation, Benveniste goes on to connect it to the Greek concept: "the same institution exists in the Greek world under a different name: *xenos* (ξένος) indicates relations of the same type between men bound by a pact which implies precise obligations".[32] Similar to the original signification of *hostis, xenos* carries in Homer the sense of 'guest', but this meaning was over time developed into that of 'foreigner' or 'stranger'.

Benveniste uses the episode between the two generals Diomedes and Glaucos in *The Iliad* as an example of such an institutional use of the term in Greek culture.[33] After discovering that their respective grand-parents once had an interaction as guest and host, which was considered a hereditary relationship, the two enemies on the battlefield decide to stop their fight and instead enter a friendly relationship as *xenoi.* They step down from their chariots to take each other by the hand, and in a display of their mutual bond, they also decide to exchange armors as gifts. The scene, according to Benveniste, shows that the obligations of *xenia* were often felt to be stronger than the interests of the ingroup, i.e. the army they were supposed to lead into battle.

Taken together, Benveniste presents a very optimistic view of the degree to which comparative linguistics can serve as evidence for the social structure of the archaic Indo-European societies. However, it is highly questionable whether the linguistic material allows for such conclusions. As we have seen, his method consists in comparing the semantical and etymological relations between words within the whole of the Indo-European language family. As he claims in the introduction to his work, his evidence is exclusively based on linguistic material: "the notion of 'Indo-European' is primarily a linguistic one, and if we were in a position to extend it so as to include other aspects of their civilization, this is again due solely to language".[34]

This approach is problematized by the fact that he weaves sociological concepts and arguments into his discussion without deriving them from the linguistic expressions. This becomes clear most of all in his use of the term "institution", to which he counts expressions such *xenia.* The

[31] Benveniste (2016), p. 65-67

[32] Benveniste (2016), p. 67.

[33] Homer, *The Iliad,* 6.120-236.

[34] Benveniste, (2016), p. xxi-xxii.

term "institution", he writes, "is understood in a wider sense: it includes not only the institutions proper, such as justice, government, religion, but also less obvious ones which are found in various techniques, ways of life, social relationships and the processes of speech and thought".[35] As we will see later, there are reasons to be skeptical on the extent to which linguistic analysis can provide evidence for the nature of such institutions.

The discourse centered around hospitality as a moral institution is repeated in the other etymological solutions mentioned above. For example, although Schwartz opposes himself to Benveniste in tracing the etymological origin of *xenos* to Iranian rather than Latin and Germanic languages, his vision of the social structure of the archaic is more or less the same. Following the *potlatch*-terminology of gift-exchange and alliance formation, he writes:

> The conceptual picture of archaic Proto Indo-European society that emerges from our study is that of individuals centered in circles containing their close possessions, family and friends; the outsider to these circles was viewed as a potential enemy. Alliances neutralizing or eliminating the potential threat brought about by the rapprochement of the two circles, with each penetrating the border of the other by means of alternating presentation of dear possessions from within each circle of intimacy upon the reciprocative entry into the respective households. This was Indo-European hospitality.[36]

The influence of the institutional discourse can also be observed in lexographies. As we saw earlier, the LSJ authors speak of "a treaty or tie of hospitality". Similarly, in *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque,* Chantraine claims that ξένος originally (i.e. in Homer) was a major institutional term ("un terme institutionnel capital") which had a meaning closely related to φίλος. Referencing Benveniste's analysis he sees the term as describing a reciprocal relationship that was practiced uphold through gift-giving. Over time, after practice of this custom had ceased, its meaning became degraded ("dégradée") from that of 'guest' to 'stranger'.[37]

[35] Benveniste (2016), p. xxiii.

[36] Schwartz (1982), p. 195.

[37] Chantraine (1968), s.v. "ξένος"

II. The historical model of xenia

We see a similar type of "institutional discourse" among historians who discuss *xenia*. One of them is the Homeric scholar Moses Finley, who in his work *The World of Odysseus* describes the social structure and moral values of the society painted in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey.* The two Homeric epics, he argues, can be read as historical documents that provide a consistent, although incomplete, model for the political beliefs and value system of tenth and ninth century BC Greek culture.[38] Finley places *xenia* as one of the pillars of this value system: He writes:

> "Guest-friendship was a very serious institution (…) Guest-friend and guest-friendship were far more than sentimental terms of human affection. In the world of Odysseus they were technical names for very concrete relationships, as formal and as evocative of rights and duties as marriage. And they remained so well thereafter".[39]

Finley identifies the practice of gift-giving, a phenomenon described at multiple times in the poems, as a key component in the social structure of the Homeric society. Gift-giving had the function of materializing and maintaining the relationship between people who were *xenoi* to each other. Through an ongoing relationship of gift and counter-gift, one could guarantee an enduring relationship and a trustworthy partner. Once a gift interaction had been established with a stranger, one could count on having a loyal protector, a sort of substitute for a member of the family. Gift-giving and *xenia* were thus closely related phenomena and a way to establish a network of powerful contacts across cities: "guest-friendship was the Homeric version, or forerunner, of political and military alliances".[40]

Gabriel Herman is another historian who emphasizes the institutional character of *xenia*. His analysis is focused on the social development from the Homeric age to the age of Xenophon. Before the *polis* was established as the center of the political and social structure in Greece of eighth

[38] Finley (1982), p. 153: from the Homeric poems "a model can be constructed, imperfect, incomplete, untidy, yet tying together the fundamentals of political and social structure with an appropriate value system in a way that stands up to comparative analysis, the only control available to us in the absence of external documentation".

[39] Finley (1982), p. 99-100.

[40] Finley (1982), p. 102.

and seventh B.C., the power structure was ruled mainly by wealthy families. According to Herman, these elite families established and secured their position via networking with other elite families, especially those from other places than the local community. He thus classifies *xenia* as an instance of 'ritualized friendship', a term he defines as "as a bond of solidarity manifesting itself in an exchange of goods and services between individuals originating from separate social units".[41] Similar to Finley, Herman refers to such bonds using the term *institution*: it was "a social institution with clear boundaries, well-defined rules, and a remarkable degree of internal cohesion.[42]

By making contacts across the city-borders and establishing them in a continuous circulation of services and material goods, men among the elites could promote and cement their social position within their local city: "the elites of the ancient world were not confined to the boundaries of their immediate communities (...) on the contrary, they participated at one and the same time both in these networks [across cities] and in their immediate communities".[43] Their relationships across the city borders set them apart from less powerful actors: cross-city networking functioned as an instrument of social control.

During the expansion of the state-power in the following centuries, Herman describes a transition in social structure from the archaic warrior-society of the Homeric epics to a *polis*-based community of the classical period. This also meant a reduced importance of cross-city networks and of *xenia*-practices for maintaining social power. He exemplifies this structural change by contrasting the relationship between Diomedes and Glaukos, and the relationship between the Persian satrap Phranabazos and the Spartan king Agesilaos recorded in Xenophon's *Hellenica.*[44] As we have already discussed, the remarkable thing in the Diomedes and Glaukos scene is that they decide to value their relation as mutual *xenoi* higher than the loyalty to their respective kingdoms, despite them being in war against one another. This indicates that the political leader did not yet exert a particularly strong power on individuals in relation to the particular networks they found themselves in.

In Xenophon's text, written a few centuries later, a completely opposite value system is described. The city-state is now valued above *xenia.* During Sparta's invasion of Asia Minor, king

[41] Herman (2002), p. 10.

[42] Herman (2002), p. 7.

[43] Herman (2002), p. 8.

[44] Xenophon, *Hellenica,* 4.1.34-35.

Agesilaos has looted Phranabazos' private estates. The Persian considers this as a violation of their previous relationship as *xenoi*, during which they had once fought on the same side as allies against a common enemy. Defending himself against this accusation, Agesilaos claims that since the Spartans are currently at war with the Persian king, they are obliged to treat everything under his rule as hostile, regardless of previous alliances. Thus, while Diomedes and Glaukos treated *xenia* as a more important institution than the public conflicts of their respective state, Agesilaos values loyalty to the interest of his *polis* above his private relationships. This, according to Herman, is indicative of shift in social organization: from this new point of view, Diomedes and Glaukos were both committing acts of treachery in accepting each other as friendly *xenoi*. In Herman's words: "the community tamed the hero, and transformed him into a citizen".[45]

Taken together, Finley and Herman present a view of *xenia* which is based not so much on an ethical obligation to provide for needing strangers. They rather view it from a utility-based perspective where individuals seek to, via establishing powerful allies, consolidate their own personal power. Still, they clearly view *xenia* as a set of rules and as asserting a sense of obligation. The question is whether this is a justified view. We will thus turn our attention to a scholar who has questioned their view.

III. Challenges to the institutional theory

As we have seen in the two previous sections, *xenia* has been understood by both linguists and historians as one of the most important institutions of Greek archaic culture.

This institutional discourse has been challenged by David Konstan, who claims that "the sociological or anthropological model constructed around the notion of 'guest-friendship' is an illusion".[46] According to him, the word ξένος signifies in Homeric epic literature primarily a 'foreigner' or 'outsider', and never carries the sense of 'guest' or 'guest-friend'. Modern scholarship, he argues, has over-emphasized the contractual character of the relationship between ξένοι, and has therefore consistently misinterpreted and mistranslated passages where the term is used.

Konstan's argument rests on two main claims which explain why scholars have held this mistaken belief. Firstly (1), Homeric scholars and translators have misunderstood or ignored the

[45] Herman (2002), p. 2.

[46] Konstan (2022), p. 54.

meaning of words that occur in proximity with ξένος, words that would make it possible keep the meaning of ξένος exclusively to the sense of 'foreigner' or 'stranger'. He writes, "when a *xenos* is treated hospitably in the Homeric epics, he is designated as *philos* or some other comparable expression".[47]

Using the same example as Benveniste, the exchange between Diomefildes and Glaucus in *Iliad* book 6, Konstan argues that Diomedes' use of *philos* in combination with *xenos* has been overlooked. When Diomedes recognises Glaucus and decides to lay down his arms, he calls him a *xeinos philos*, which indicates that he is a *xeinos* that will be treated as a *philos*.[48] Konstan writes:

> There is no reason to strip the term *xenos* or *xeinos* of its common significance as "foreigner", that is, a person who is unknown and, by implication, an inhabitant of a different polis or country, as opposed to a member of one's own community […] On the contrary, the function of the modifier *philos* is to indicate precisely that a stranger is being treated as though he were one of the *philoi*, that is, those entitled by their status to proper consideration and not potentially an object of hostility or exploitation.[49]

In other words, being a *xenos* did not in itself carry any sense of obligation or moral responsibility. Without any additional qualification, Konstan claims, a *xenos* could be violated or exploited without the perpetrator being considered immoral. A x*enos* signifies the complete outsider to one's community, which makes him undeserved of any *prima facie* care or consideration.

Konstan also denies that the *xenos*-relationship between Diomedes and Glaucus would be established following from a hereditary bound from their respective grandparents. Rather, Diomedes suggests the idea of exchanging armor and offers Glaucus the choice of treating each other as *philoi,* despite being strangers: "Diomedes proposes the idea to Glaucus as a choice".[50] Because of this, Konstan believes, there are no indications of anything obligatory or ritualistic in

[47] Konstan (2022), p. 49.

[48] Homer, *The Iliad,* 6.224.

[49] Konstan (2022), p. 39.

[50] Konstan (2022), p. 40.

Diomedes' and Glaucus' interaction; they have simple decided "voluntarily" to set enter a relationship that mirrors the one that their ancestors once had.

Secondly (2), Konstan claims that etymologists have wrongly assumed that there must exist a link between ξένος and other Indo-European concepts related to an obligation to hospitality: "what all these derivations have in common […] is the premise that the original Indo-European root of *xenos* must lie within the general semantic sphere of hospitality or reciprocity".[51]

To illustrate the arbitrariness of this assumption, as well as the many uncertainties inherent in root etymology generally, Konstan tries to derive the etymology of *xenos* from the preposition *ex* with the adjectival termination -nos. He posits it from Proto-Greek **ksenwo-* from Proto-Indo-European **ĝʰs-en-wo*, which would signify 'being (**-wo-*) in the (**-en-*) outside (**ĝs*). The purpose of this proposed etymology is not to give a definite solution, but rather as a way to show the uncertain nature of etymological investigations generally, and that there are overlooked aspects to be found "once the fixation on the idea of 'guest-friendship' is abandoned".[52]

All in all, then, Konstan's argument poses challenges to the orthodox view of *xenia.* Rightfully, I think, he points at the textual limitations in the Homeric works for positing *xenia* in a clear-cut fashion as a rule-governed and morally sanctioned practice. Some of the terminology commonly used when discussing *xenia,* such as "ritual" and "contract" seem to be inherited from an anthropological tradition, lends itself to misunderstanding the phenomenon.

On the other hand, Konstan's own interpretation of *xenia* is questionable. First of all, his insistence on Diomedes' offering a "free choice" of entering a *xenia*-relationship is unconvincing: it begs the question what the motivations for this choice really are. A choice cannot itself be said to hold any explanatory value for an action, but must be explained by some further incentive. Since it is precisely *after,* not *before,* they discover their respective grandfather's friendly historical friendship that Diomedes offers the arrangement, whereby Glaucus accepts it, it seems very reasonable to think that their *xenia*-relationship was occasioned (if not fully, then at least partly) by this discovery.

Moreover, if *xenos* and *xenia* were not normative concepts that expressed some form of moral obligation to strangers, how else should the terms be understood? No doubt, a respectful

[51] Konstan (2022), p. 51.

[52] Konstan (2022), p. 52.

treatment of strangers is as an important theme in the Homeric texts, and it would seem to run counter to this theme to understand a *xenos* merely as an "object of exploitation". In the end of his text, Konstan seems to wager on this point:

> I am not denying that the Greeks had a strong sense of hospitality toward strangers. On the contrary, this was a core value, well illustrated in the Homeric epics. I am claiming that this disposition did not congeal into an institution or obligation, much less a hereditary one, with its own rites and rituals and the special name of "guest-friendship".[53]

It becomes clear from this quote that Konstan's argument depends on what is meant by a "core value" as opposed to an "institution" or "obligation". But what exactly is the difference? Konstan's text leaves us here at an impasse. Presumably, Konstan regards institutions as something more concrete and more explicitly stated than a mere "value". But as we saw previously, Benveniste understands "institution" in a sense that includes "less obvious ones [than institutions proper,] which are found in various techniques, ways of life, social relationships and the processes of speech and thought".[54] This raises the question if Konstan's objection arises not on substantial, but on primarily semantic grounds.

IV. Durkheim's and Mauss' sociology of institutions

To advance the discussion out of the impasse it is necessary to address the ambiguities that surround the term "institution". As we have just seen, a good deal of the scholarly disagreements that surround *xenia* seems to result from the unclarities that surround this term. Benveniste drew parallels between *xenia* and *potlatch,* the economical system studied by Marcel Mauss and other anthropologists of pre-monetary economy. Mauss himself defines *potlatch* as "this institution (…) where opposing clans and phratries compete against each other in spending, even in destruction of wealth, and which organizes all social, political, religious, aesthetical, and economical life (…).[55]

[53] Konstan (2022), p. 54.

[54] Benveniste (2016), p. xxiii.

[55] "Le 'potlatch' est cette institution, jusqu'ici crue spéciale au nord-ouest américain, où clans et phratries affrontés rivalisent entre eux de dépenses, même de destructions de richesse, et qui règle toute la vie sociale, politique, religieuse, esthétique, économique des Kwakiutl, Haida, Tlinkit, etc.", Mauss (1969), p. 29.

What is then meant by "institution" here? In the tradition of Durkheim and Mauss, institutions are understood a bit differently from the everyday use of the word, examples of the latter being schools, hospitals, church, i.e. organizations established for a certain societal function, tied to certain buildings etc. Durkheim writes:

> In fact, without doing violence to the meaning of the word, one may term an *institution* all the beliefs and modes of behavior instituted by the collectivity; sociology can be defined as the science of institutions, their genesis and their functioning.[56]

For Durkheim and Mauss, institutions are first and foremost *collective representations,* i.e. a law-governed system of mental categories that have a reality independent of individuals.[57] Collective representations are established and maintained when individuals interact in groups, especially in larger communities. In short, they emerge from social life itself. According to Durkheim, when individuals act in a group there occurs a "synthesis" which establishes an inter-individual level of reality, i.e. a level of "social facts" that are independent of the consciousness of each and every individual person: it is a synthesis that "institutes outside ourselves".[58]

As an instance of social facts, institutions are characterized by three main qualities: they are *obligatory, pre-established,* as well as *exterior* in relation to the individual. As Mauss formulates it, since individuals in a society unavoidably find themselves confronted with institutions, they more or less "impose themselves (s'imposent)" on them; they appear in the form of an imperative.[59] Institutions must also considered pre-established: individuals who are initiated in them are at the same time inscribed in a tradition: this traditions forms a set of rules, and habits that structure the possibilities for action among individuals, and these possibilities cannot be decided spontaneously

[56] Durkheim (1982), p. 45.

[57] Durkheim (1898) p. 293-294.

[58] "As this synthesis occurs outside each one of us (since a plurality of consciousnesses are involved) it has necessarily the effect of crystallising, of instituting outside ourselves, certain modes of action and certain ways of judging which are independent of the particular individual will considered separately", Durkheim (1982), p. 45.

[59] "Qu'est-ce en effet qu'une institution sinon un ensemble d'actes ou d'idées tout institué que les individus trouvent devant eux et qui s'impose plus ou moins à eux?", Mauss & Fauconnet (1969), p. 150.

on an individual basis, but always have a pre-history.[60] Lastly, institutions must be considered *external* to individuals, in the sense that they are essentially *collectively shared.* They need not necessarily exist externally in the sense of existing as physical realities. It is possible for institutions to exist primarily as mentalities and manners of thought – but they cannot exist privately.

For Durkheim and Mauss, institutions are of central importance to the system of beliefs of individuals in a given society. They assert a formative influence on them by shaping their values and customs: they represent the culturally acquired manners in which individuals act and think. While some institutions express themselves very concretely in the form of explicit rules and laws, others take the form of *duty* or *sense of obligation* within individual consciousness. Therefore, institutions are tied just as much to the inner life of individuals, as to the organizations and social structures which are located outside of them.

However, the coercive force expressed by institutions is not absolute. Although *felt* as a binding obligation, individuals may not always act according to institutionalized practices; for example, there might occur a conflict between two institutions, in which case one must be valued over the other. Additionally, Durkheim emphasizes that the values and modes of action expressed by institutions are never received passively by individuals, but are always adapted and "individualized" by each specific person. As such, when assimilating the collective representations tied to institutions, individuals at the same time modify them. "Every type of social conformity carries with it a whole gamut of individual variations".[61] At the same time, in his view, the room for such variations and modifications must be considered rather limited, since individuals that deviate in too obvious manners, will be considered immoral or criminal, and will be punished with various forms of sanctions.

V. The question of the authority over institutions

There is one aspect of institutions which somewhat left out in Durkheim's and Mauss' model. This is the role of authority and punitive action within institutions. Given that institutions exist in the form of obligations, what are the mechanisms that enforce and punish those who violate them? Who was the authority responsible for observing and punish institutional transgressions?

[60] Cf. Laval (2021) p. 236-240.

[61] Durkheim (1982), p. 47 n. 6.

In the context of hospitality in Archaic literature, one can notice two models of institutional sanction and punishment. On the one hand, there was the model of *theoxeny.* Gods are believed to disguise themselves as strangers, so the stranger himself may act as a punishing agent if treated badly, and once he is revealed to be a god. As seen already, this model is to be found in *Hymn to Demeter,* and (as we will see in the next chapter) it also occurs at multiple instances in *The Odyssey.*[62]

In *The Iliad,* however, vengeance on *xenia*-abuser is acted out differently. Instead of disguised, divine agents, it is here the *political ruler,* i.e. Menelaus, who takes on the role of delivering the punishment. The underlying cause of the war between the Greeks and the Trojans is what the Greeks consider a violation of the rules of *xenia*, namely Paris' kidnapping of Helen, the king's wife. Menelaus regards this offense as the most extreme form of wrongdoing, and therefore claims himself justified to "utterly destroy" (διαφθείρειν) the city of Troy in an act of vengeance.[63] He also believes that he has a divine permission to do so, since *Zeus Xenios* has been violated on his account. This suggests that *The Iliad* is a representation of a certain secularization of *xenia,* where the punitive role is transferred to the sphere of human action.

[62] It is true that, despite being a mortal, Odysseus is the one to deliver the brutal punishment against the suitors. But this should not be interpreted as a departure from the theoxenic model: Athena permits him to act as avenger, and his disguise is created by her divine powers. In the final showdown with the suitors, one could say that Odysseus has become a demi-god that fulfills the punishing function. Cf. Homer, *The Odyssey,* 13.392-403.

[63] Homer, *The Iliad,* 13.620-625. Obviously, the fact that Helen herself seems to have agreed to being abducted by Paris has no moral relevance in Menelaus' eyes.

Textual analysis

We saw in the previous chapter that there are challenges to the common belief that *xenia* was an "institutional concept" within the Archaic and Classical period, and that it was centered around reciprocal obligations of exchange. Konstan expressed the worry that there is not enough textual evidence for such a view, and that, consequently, the tradition has consistently misunderstood and mistranslated the word. The purpose of this section is to take a closer look at the text passages related to *xenia,* and study how it is represented and thematized as a social practice. My account will be chronological, and will move from the Homeric epics to Aeschylus and Plato. I will argue that, as long as "institution" is understood in the sociological sense of Durkheim and Mauss discussed in the previous chapter, there is in fact a good deal of textual evidence that the relationship between *xenoi* must be understood as an institutional concept, i.e. as related to what the Greeks called *themis*.

I. Homeric xenia

Whenever Odysseus arrives on new land, he wonders whether the natives will be hospitable towards him and his crew. He expresses this worry using a formula that reoccurs at multiple occasions of the text: ἦ ῥ᾽ οἵ γ᾽ ὑβρισταί τε καὶ ἄγριοι οὐδὲ δίκαιοι, / ἦε φιλόξεινοι καί σφιν νόος ἐστὶ θεουδής; ("are they violent, savage and without customs, or are they friends of strangers who keep the gods in mind?".[64] The opposition between these poles is fundamental to the narrative of *The Odyssey.* To be a ὑβριστής means to have no sense of hospitality, to commit offenses against guests and hosts for personal gains. The adjective ἄγριος 'savage' relates to ἀγριότης 'wildness', and is derived from the noun ἀγρός, 'field', in reference especially to uncultivated fields. The word thus signifies lack of civilization by reference to beastly, wild animal as opposed to a tame one, as well as to a lack of agricultural refinement.[65]

There are two groups of characters which represent such beastly and uncultivated behavior in *The Odyssey*: the suitors and the cyclops. The two are also mirrored by vocabulary such as ἀθέμιστοι, 'lacking *themis*'.[66] Another example of a word used describe both of them is ὑπερφίαλοι

[64] Homer, *The Odyssey,* 6.120-121; 9.175-176; 13.201-202.

[65] Beekes (2010) s.v. "ἀγρός".

[66] Homer, *The Odyssey,* 9.196, 17.363.

‘arrogant’, an expression possibly constructed from φιάλη ‘bowl’, in which case the expression would mean literally ‘excessive in bowl’, i.e. ‘over-eating’.[67] This is a fitting expression since one common aspect of their inhospitable behavior relates to eating.

When arriving at the land of the cyclopes, a people who Odysseus refers to specifically as ἄγριον, οὔτε δίκας, he adds a short ethnographical characterization of their people.[68] It is often pointed out that he describes their society first and foremost according to what it does *not* have, and that he contrasts them with civilization generally. As Cook formulates it, his description is a “negative catalog” of Greek customs, and his image of them is by conception “a negation of culture”.[69]

First, Odysseus blames the cyclops’ lack of religious devotion: despite their reliance on the immortal gods, they “take them for granted”, θεοῖσι πεποιθότες ἀθανάτοισιν, and never care to worship them.[70] He then calls them out for their lack of agricultural customs: “they neither plant seeds with their hand, nor plow”, οὔτε φυτεύουσιν χερσὶν φυτὸν οὔτ’ ἀρόωσιν. This connects them to the motif of savageness and uncultivation mentioned earlier. Finally, Odysseus describes their lack of political organization:

> τοῖσιν δ’ οὔτ’ ἀγοραὶ βουληφόροι οὔτε θέμιστες,
> ἀλλ’ οἵ γ’ ὑψηλῶν ὀρέων ναίουσι κάρηνα
> ἐν σπέσσι γλαφυροῖσι, θεμιστεύει δὲ ἕκαστος
> παίδων ἠδ’ ἀλόχων, οὐδ’ ἀλλήλων ἀλέγουσιν.[71]
>
> They have no counsel-bearing assemblies, nor established rules,
> instead they live at the peaks of tall mountains,
> in hollowed caves, and each one of them establishes their own customs,
> for his children and wife, without regard for anyone else.

[67] Homer *The Odyssey,* 1.134, 2.310, 9.106. Cf. Bakker (2025). p. 126

[68] Homer *The Odyssey,* 9.106-115.

[69] Cook (1995), p. 103.

[70] Taking the perfect form πεποιθότες to mean ‘rely on’, ‘take for granted’, cf. LSJ s.v. ‘πείθω’, III.

[71] Homer, *The Odyssey,* 9.112-115.

Odysseus here characterizes their culture as one of isolationism, morally as well as intellectually. Their lack of respect towards others, οὐδ᾽ ἀλλήλων ἀλέγουσιν , literary 'lack of *logos* in relation anyone else', goes hand in hand with their lack of collective organization. Instead of gathering themselves in a society, each family lives separately, inventing private rules of conduct. Using the terminology of Durkheim and Mauss, one could say that there are for the cyclopes no *social facts*, no collective action and thinking, but only the *brute facts* of nature. Their world is fundamentally *unsocial*.

Importantly, this aspect of Odysseus' characterization of the cyclopes will later be put to question, when Odysseys tries to escape from his cave. After being injured in his eye by the pole, Polyphemos cries for help to his Cyclops brothers. They show up, wondering why someone is screaming in the middle of the night. As Bakker comments: "when the Cyclops' neighbors briefly appear, their behavior is at odds with the contention that in Cyclops land everyone fends for himself".[72] However, the narrative in the passage is ambiguous on the reason why they appear: do they come in sincere aid of their relative, or are they merely annoyed at being woken up in the middle of the night? They ask: ἀύπνους ἄμμε τίθησθα;, "[why] do you make us sleepless?".[73] There is possibly a word-play to be found here. *Themis* is derived from the verb *tithenai* 'set', 'put', 'place', which is here is used in the sense of "making sleepless".[74] As we will see, this is not the only example of word-play using *tithenai*.

It is important to note that many of the violations against *xenia* committed by transgressors are not simply *neglecting* and *ignoring* the obligations, but in fact *invert* them.[75] I will refer to this phenomenon as "*xenia*-inversion*",* by which I mean that the inhospitable actions are structured in ways that at the same time *project the corresponding hospitable action*, which they have corrupted. In other words, the two corresponding actions, the one morally proper, the other violating, will include the same or similar elements or objects, but the violating action will include some type of abuse of these elements. One example is the cannibalism of Polyphemos: rather than welcoming his guests by making them a meal, he eats his guests, making *them* the meal.

[72] Bakker (2025), p. 124.

[73] Homer, *The Odyssey,* 9.404.

[74] Beekes, s.v. 'τίθημι'.

[75] For a formalized interpretation of the hospitality scenes in *The Odyssey,* including their many elements of variation, cf. Reece (1993) pp. 5-46.

Another inversion occurs at a later point in the cave, when Odysseus desperately offers some wine to Polyphemos, and then asks him to give him a ξένιον, a 'gift of hospitality' in return. The monster answers him mockingly that he will be eaten as the last person among his men, "that will be my gift of hospitality to you", τὸ δέ τοι ξεινήιον ἔσται.[76]

The violations by the suitors are also best described as inversions. Generally, their violations stem from the fact that they behave as if they were hosts of the castle, despite being its guests. In short, their abuse consists in inverting the roles of guest and host. This is exemplified by their relationship to food: every night they arrange feasts, consuming the castle's cattle, *as if they were hosts*. But they are in fact guests, despite their ignorance of it. This is one of the things for which Odysseys will, later in Book 22, reproach the suitors before slaying them: "you dogs, you thought that I should never again come home from the land of the Trojans, so you wasted my house (ὅτι μοι κατεκείρετε οἶκον)".[77] The suitors had assumed that host would never come back, so they maliciously took it upon themselves to become the new hosts.

Another instance of *inverted xenia* is related to chairs.[78] When Odysseus returns to the palace of Ithaca disguised as beggar and stranger, Antinoos, who is the rudest and most offensive suitor, hurls a chair at him.[79] The chair (θρόνος) is here given a symbolic value of a *themis,* of moral conduct. Again, an expression with τίηθμι is used. In fact, a chair is for Homer the archetypic object for τίθημι: the expression κλισίην θρόνον τιθέμεν τινί 'set a stool for someone' occurs many times in *The Odyssey,* and is also an act which signifies a proper treatment of a *xenos.*[80]

After Antinoos' chair-toss, one of the other suitors calls him out for this violent action, and tells him: "Antinoos, it was not good that you hit the poor beggar, it will be the end of you if he is some heavenly god (τις ἐπουράνιος θεός) and gods disguise themselves as strangers from foreign lands (καί τε θεοὶ ξείνοισιν ἐοικότες ἀλλοδαποῖσι), becoming all sorts of people, and visit cities

[76] Homer, *The Odyssey,* 9.370.

[77] Homer, *The Odyssey*, 22.35-37.

[78] Hosts offering a chair as a marker of hospitality is not unique to *The Odyssey:* it occurs for example in *Hymn to Demeter,* 191-196.

[79] Homer, *The Odyssey,* 17. 462-463.

[80] Homer, *The Odyssey,* 4.123, 8.65, 20.387. Cf. LSJ s.v. 'τίθημι' A.1.

(ἐπιστρωφῶσι πόληας), observing both offenses and good behavior among people (ἀνθρώπων ὕβριν τε καὶ εὐνομίην ἐφορῶντες)".[81]

We see here how Homer ties *themis* to the theme of *theoxeny.* One of the main functions of theoxeny as a narrative device is to separate those who are respectful, i.e. those who give αἰδώς to *xenia,* and those who do not. In book 1 of *The Odyssey*, Athena arrives at the gates of the palace in Ithaca "in the guise of a stranger", εἰδομένη ξείνῳ, namely as the old man Mentor, who was once a friend (ἑταῖρος) of Odysseys.[82] Telemachus is first to notice his arrival, and rushes to open the door since "he felt ashamed to make a guest wait at the door for a long time" νεμεσσήθη δ' ἐνὶ θυμῷ ξεῖνον δηθὰ θύρῃσιν ἐφεστάμεν.[83] Without asking questions of who the visitor is or why he visits, he offers him a meal and a "beautiful and decorated chair" (θρόνον καλὸν δαιδάλεον) to sit on. Telemachus' hospitable mindset and *themis* is contrasted to the suitors, who are too distracted by their relentless feasting to even notice the newcomer.

It is well-known that the Homeric epics heavily inspired Athenian tragedy. Taking up the same mythical material it reworks, modifies or expands their plot, themes and conflicts. This holds true also for the motive of *xenia,* which occurs in several plays.[84] In the next section, we will see how this comes to expression in Aeschylus' *Oresteia.*

II. Xenia in Aeschylus' Oresteia

Aeschylus' trilogy is commonly understood as a meditation on family and kinship relations. The plays stage a series of murders committed by members of the House of Atreus, with every new murder leading to demands among the victim's next of kin for vindication in the form of new violations. This results in a never-ending vendetta which is interrupted only by a *deus ex machina,* by the help of Athena who establishes a legal-based justice system emphasizing an unbiased and rational trial procedure. Paul Roth has shown convincingly that, although the issues of crime and punishment dramatized in *The Oresteia* can correctly be interpreted as violations of the rules of kinship, they can just as much be interpreted as violations of the rules governing *xenia.*[85]

[81] Homer, *The Odyssey,* 17. 483-487.

[82] Homer, *The Odyssey,* 1.105, 2.225.

[83] Homer, *The Odyssey,* 1.119-120.

[84] Cf. Regenos (1955) and (1956).

[85] Roth (1993).

In the opening half of *Agamemnon*, we learn that Agamemnon is returning victoriously from his ten-year old campaign in Troy. Several references are made to *Zeus Xenios* and to Paris' offenses which was the initial cause of the war.[86] The purpose of these references is not only expository, i.e. explaining the context of Agamemnon's homecoming, but is just as much a thematic indication of how the murder to-come will be a violation against hospitality, repeating the guest-host-relationship as a cause for conflict. At the moment of arrival, Agamemnon assumes the role of guest, while his wife Clytemnestra the role of hostess.

Before Agamemnon arrives, Clytemnestra informs his herald that she intends to treat her "honorable husband" (τὸν ἐμὸν αἰδοῖον πόσιν) with the best possible welcome (ἄριστα δέξασθαι).[87] She compares herself to a watchdog of the house (δωμάτων κύνα) who has been waiting faithfully for her master, ready to open up the gates for him. These lines are ironic. Far from an honorable husband, Agamemnon has during the course of his campaign sacrificed his and Clytemnestra's daughter Iphigenia. As it will later turn out, he is also bringing home a new wife, Cassandra. Clytemnestra has also taken a new lover, Aegisthus, and together they are plotting to overthrow Agamemnon and seize political control over Argos. As Cassandra will later remark, the gates which Clytemnestra guards are just as much the gates of Hades, and she has taken the symbolical role of Cerberus, who will first "cheerfully lick", then "hatefully bite" her target.[88]

Similar to what we saw in *The Odyssey,* the transgressions against *xenia* are dramatized as *inversions* of the proper code of conduct. When Agamemnon arrives she keeps him waiting for an extended time outside the gates. This is contrary to the good host Telemachos, who rushed to the gates in order to let his guest inside. As Clytemnestra finally allows Agamemnon to enter the house, she offers him a bath and fresh clothing. These customary hospitable acts turn out to be a set-up for murder: lying in the bath, Agamemnon is stabbed, and Clytemnestra then wraps his body in the garment. It is important to understand this context of the scene; the details of the murder make clear that in addition to a violation to their marriage in the form of mariticide, Clytemnestra at the same abuses the customs associated with *xenia.*

[86] Aeschylus, *Agamemnon,* 61-62, 362, 399-402, 525-526, 748.

[87] Aeschylus, *Agamemnon,* 600-601.

[88] Aeschylus, *Agamemnon,* 1229-1231, 1291.

In *The Libation Bearers,* a similar dynamic is repeated when Orestes, son of Agamemnon, visits the house together with his cousin Pylades. They are both looking to avenge the murder of their father and relative. Clytemnestra, who now lives in the palace together with Aegisthus, again takes the role of hostess. However, it will now be the guest's turn to violate the customs of *xenia.*

Arriving at the palace gates disguised as travelers from the city of Phocis, they knock impatiently at the door, three times. They shout at the doorkeeper, urging the house to "be friendly of guests", φιλόξεν' ἐστίν.[89] When eventually allowed inside, Orestes delivers a false report to Clytemnestra of his own death, news which he claims he had to share since he was "bound by hospitality" (κατεξενωμένον).[90] Thankful for receiving the information, Clytemnestra offers them to stay the night as guests of the palace.

Having now gained access to the inside of house, Orestes goes on to first slay Aegisthus, then Clytemnestra. Again, the acts of murder must be considered in correlation with the corruption of the hospitality customs: it is on false pretenses that Orestes and Pylades have entered the house, and the pretense is even a lie about the death of the hosts' family member. Commenting on the murders, the chorus compares this act of retribution with the retribution of Menelaus and Agamemnon against Paris and the city of Troy.[91] However, the chorus fails to notice the similarities between Paris' violation and that just committed by Orestes: both are clear cases of the guest role being exploited.

In the final play of the trilogy, *The Eumenides,* the discussion of *xenia* is drawn to a head. The play's chorus consists of Erinyes, goddesses of vengeance, who represent the values of honor (τιμή), and stand on the side of those who have fallen dead to moral transgression. The values that the Erinyes seek to uphold are not only those of the family, but also those of *xenoi.* They sing, "be someone who respects (αἰδόμενος) both the holiness of parents (τοκέων σέβας) and the honor of *xenia* (ξενοτίμους).[92] Since it is precisely these values that Orestes has disrespected, they hunt him in demand for retribution. They continue:

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[89] Aeschylus, *The Libation Bearers,* 655-656.

[90] Aeschylus, *The Libation Bearers,* 706.

[91] Aeschylus, *The Libation Bearers,* 935-937: "ἔμολε μὲν δίκα Πριαμίδαις χρόνῳ, βαρύδικος ποινά· ἔμολε δ' εἰς δόμον τὸν Ἀγαμέμνονος".

[92] Aeschylus, *Eumenides,* 545-546.

ὄψῃ δὲ κεἴ τις ἄλλος ἥλιτεν βροτῶν
ἢ θεὸν ἢ ξένον τιν᾽ ἀσεβῶν
ἢ τοκέας φίλους,
ἔχονθ᾽ ἕκαστον τῆς δίκης ἐπάξια.[93]

You will see that if a man violates
either a god, a *xenos*,
or his dear parents,
he will receive every sort of punishment that he deserves.

As indicated by the two verbs ἥλιτεν and ἀσεβῶν, both meaning 'to sin' or 'to commit sacrilege', the Erinyes regard violations against the three victims (god, *xenos,* parents) as deserving of the most severe form of punishment. To let Orestes go unpunished, the Erinyes believe, would mean the end of *xenia* as an institution; it would be "the downfall of the established laws" (καταστροφαὶ νόμων θεσμίων), and the same as "letting a horse trample down the ancient laws" (παλαιοὺς νόμους καθιππάσασθε).[94]

At the beginning of the play, we learn that Orestes has fled to Athens from Argos. Desperate to escape the punishment of the stalking Erinyes, Orestes calls upon Athena by supplicating her image in a temple. When informed about the goddesses' demand for vengeance on Orestes, she asks that someone first "make a clear account" (εἰ λέγοι τις ἐμφανῆ λόγον) of the situation.[95] She appoints good men of the city to act as impartial judges to the case, and she thus founds the court of Athens. The play in this way develops into a trial drama, where both parties of the conflict are allowed to present their side of the story, and the jury will vote for a final verdict.

Orestes defends his matricide on two lines. First, he points at Clytemnestra's dishonorable killing of Agamemnon in his bath, and presents his action as a "counter-murder in return for my dear father" (ἀντικτόνος ποιναῖσι φιλτάτου πατρός).[96] Secondly, he blames Apollo for being co-responsible in the murder. Since he had foretold that Orestes would receive painful suffering if he

[93] Aeschylus, *Eumenides,* 269-273.

[94] Aeschylus, *Eumenides,* 490-491, 778-779.

[95] Aeschylus, *Eumenides,* 420.

[96] Aeschylus, *Eumenides,* 464.

did not avenge his father, the god must too be considered involved in the murder, and Orestes not fully to blame.

At this point Apollo himself appears as a witness in the court, and he confesses his involvement: he indeed gave the oracle message to Orestes. He explains, however, that the message was originally on behalf on Zeus (κέλευσε Ζεύς), not on himself.[97] He also adds that Orestes should go free, since he thinks that a murder of a woman is a less serious crime than that of a man. While Agamemnon was "a commander of the fleet honored by everyone", παντόσεμνος στρατηλάτης νεῶν (an ironic nod at Iphigenia's death), Clytemnestra was a cunning and *xenia*-violating conspirator who first "welcomed him with a bath" δεδεγμένη δροίτῃ, and then "committed a slaugther", κόπτει.[98]

To this the Erinyes counter-argue: if Zeus considers the death of a father to be such a serious crime, why would Zeus have imprisoned his own father Cronus?[99] The Erinyes' reply reveals a certain hypocrisy inherent in the theoxenic model. Given that the gods and goddesses in the Pantheon engage in similar transgressive behaviors as men do, and are just as liable to poor moral reasoning, why should be responsible to judge and punish them? When Apollo himself is put to the test in a trial, he turns out to be not only a misogynist, but also far from an unbiased observer of the dealings of men. On the contrary, he favors one side of the conflict over the other, failing to see that both have committed blameworthy acts.

To bring an end to the cycle of revenge depicted throughout the trilogy requires that *xenia* undergoes an *institutional change* from the theoxenic model. The codes of hospitality need to be respected, but cannot be enforced by divine punishment. Instead, violations must be rationally investigated and atoned for in a civil society, by means of legal procedures.

After the trial procedures, the votes on both sides are evenly numbered. Orestes is therefore acquitted. Before the end of the play, however, two important outcomes that relate to *xenia* are discussed. First, Orestes' arrival in Athens offers the chance for a military alliance, συμμαχία, between Argos and Athens. Apollo tells Athena that he sent Orestes to become a partner and ally

[97] Aeschylus, *Eumenides,* 614-621.

[98] Aeschylus, *Eumenides,* 632-637.

[99] Aeschylus, *Eumenides,* 625-643.

that "all posterity will feel affection for this loyalty" στέργειν τὰ πιστὰ τῶνδε τοὺς ἐπισπόρους.[100] As Roth writes, συμμαχία was the state level equivalent of a *xenia*-relationship, and can be seen as a reward for Athenian hospitality, which patriotically draws a parallel to the Athenian-Argive military alliance of 462 B.C.[101] *Xenia* is thus developed and raised from a relationship between individuals into a political, interstate institution.

Second, the Erinyes are at first outraged at the results of the trial, fearing that it would be the end of justice. But Athena manages to pacify them by inviting them to live in the city as *metoikoi.* This, the goddess claims, would allow them to restore their honor and "gain new friends".[102] The chorus are persuaded and accepts the offer, and so their vengeful ways are abandoned, and the rules of *xenia* inscribed into the legal sphere of Athenian civility.

In this way, the trilogy illustrates an *institutional development* of *xenia.* As Roth formulates it: "the trilogy closes with the validity of the Greek code of hospitality re-affirmed, its relevance expanded into the civic arena".[103] What was before a concept related to the domestic sphere, and uphold by mythical beliefs, has now emerged as a legal concept that regulates public life. A new moral order is thus established. Speaking in Hegelian terms, Athenian hospitality has been *aufgehoben,* i.e. negated and raised to a higher level of reality, but in a way that at the same time preserves its principle content. As Hegel himself writes when discussing the emergence of Athenian civil society, "what in the world of the ethical order (*die Welt der Sittlichkeit*) was called the hidden divine law, has in fact emerged from its inward state into actuality".[104] He also writes, implicitly referencing Aeschylus' trilogy: "instead of the injured party, the injured *universal* now makes its appearance, and it has the distinctive actuality in the court of law".[105]

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[100] Aeschylus, *Eumenides,* 625-643. See also 762-74, where Orestes at the moment of his departure promises that no army should never be allowed to assault Athens.

[101] Roth (1993), p. 14.

[102] Aeschylus, *Eumindes,* 901-916, 1011.

[103] Roth (1993), p. 16.

[104] Hegel (1964), p. 368; English translation Hegel (2004) p. 290. For a discussion of hospitality in relation to Hegel's philosophy of right, cf. Derrida (2023) p. 52-62.

[105] Hegel (2012), p. 252 §220.

III. The institutionalization of philosophy in Plato's *Sophist*

Plato's *The Sophist* is traditionally understood as a dialogue devoted mainly to metaphysics and ontology, and especially the problem of being and non-being (as witnessed for example from the subtitle given by the anonymous ancient editors: περί τοῦ ὄντος).[106] However, as I will try to show, hospitality is a major motif in the text, and is also fundamental to how it presents philosophy in contrast to sophistry.

The text marks a fundamental point of departure within Plato's corpus, since it features not Socrates, but a new character as the dialogue's main speaker: namely the so-called "Stranger", ὁ ξένος. The dialogue takes place the day after the conversation presented in *The Theaetetus,* and begins when Theodorus from Megara arrives to a group of men which includes among others Socrates and Theaetetus. Theodorus announces that he has brought along with him a *xenos* from the city of Elea, who is "no doubt a philosophical man" (μάλα δὲ ἄνδρα φιλόσοφον).[107]

After a brief but evocative exchange, the Stranger is tasked by Socrates to investigate the nature of sophistry in dialogue with the young student Theaetetus. Since sophists, philosophers, statesmen, and madmen, are all foreigners who "roam around cities" (ἐπιστρωφῶσι πόληας), how can these group identities be held apart from each other?[108] Is it possible to define the sophist in a way that makes him distinct from those other *xenoi*?

Shortly after bringing up this question, which will develop into a long and laborious investigation for the Stranger and Theaetetus, Socrates disappears from the discussion. The character portrayed in so many of Plato's other dialogues, thus becomes silent, his voice replaced by that of a *xenos*.

Just before relegating himself to the role of listener, however, Socrates brings up *theoxeny.* He alludes to "the word of Homer", τὸν Ὁμήρου λόγον, more specifically to the passage where Antinoos tosses a chair at Odysseus. As we saw, one of the suitors warns Antinoos about the importance of respecting strangers, since they might be disguised gods visiting to test the hospitality of the hosts. Now, Socrates raises a similar suspicion of the Stranger: is he perhaps more than a mortal being? If it is the case (ἆρ' οὖν), he says, that the Stranger is a philosophical man, then

[106] Cordero (1993), p. 19-20.

[107] Plato, *The Sophist,* 216a4.

[108] Plato, *The Sophist,* 216c5-217a4.

maybe he is not a stranger (οὐ ξένον), but rather some god (ἀλλά τινα θεὸν). He might even be a powerful being (τις οὗτος τῶν κρειττόνων) and a refuting type of god (θεὸς ὢν τις ἐλεγκτικός). Perhaps he has arrived to observe and test him and the others (ἐποψόμενός τε καὶ ἐλέγξων), since they are poor in their reasoning (φαύλους ἡμᾶς ὄντας ἐν τοῖς λόγοις).[109]

But also the Stranger has something to say about *xenia.* After agreeing that the upcoming discussion about the nature of sophistry should be held not using "long speech", μακρῷ λόγῳ, but "by questioning", δι' ἐρωτήσεων, Socrates advises the Stranger to use the young Theaetetus as his interlocutor.[110] The Stranger accepts Theaetetus and adds that "to not show compliance with you and everyone here", τὸ δὲ αὖ σοὶ μὴ χαρίζεσθαι καὶ τοῖσδε, "seems to me something inhospitable and savage", ἄξενόν τι καταφαίνεταί μοι καὶ ἄγριον.[111]

The mention of ξενία here is made in the negative, τι ἄξενον, and is also coupled with the word ἄγριος, "savage". As we saw earlier, "savageness" is one of the characteristics that Odysseys uses describe the cyclopes. In contrast to the cyclopes, then, the Strangers respects the values of his *xenoi.* The passages I have cited thus indicate that *The Odyssey* is an important subtext to the dialogue, and especially the notion of theoxeny.

But looking carefully at the situation, we must note that Socrates in important ways *adjusts* the theoxenic principle. Firstly, he changes the object of divine observation and testing. While the gods in Homer test the "*hubris* and *eunomia* of men", Socrates presents them as looking for faults in reasoning, for correct and incorrect use of *logos.* Needless to say, the notion of a test or cross-examination, ἔλεγχος, is central to the Socratic way of life, as well to his his motto that the unexamined life is not worth living.[112] In *The Apology,* Socrates explains to the Athenian citizens that he to find someone who was in fact wiser than him, so that he could "refute the oracle message", ἐλέγξων τὸ μαντεῖον. However, this would turn to be an impossible task. Instead of the oracle, he would always end up refuting the wisdom of the other person, and cause hatred toward him.[113]

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[109] Plato, *The Sophist,* 216a5-b6.

[110] Plato, *The Sophist,* 217c3-5; 217d6-7.

[111] Plato, *The Sophist,* 217e5-218a1.

[112] "ὁ δ' ἀνεξέταστος βίος οὐ βιωτὸς ἀνθρώπῳ", Plato, *The Apology,* 38a5.

[113] Plato, Apology, 21b-23b.

Secondly, while in the Homeric version the test is issued *by* the stranger/disguised god, it seems as if the test mentioned by Socrates might as well be regarded as conducted in the opposite direction: in asking him about the nature of sophistry, it seems as if it is rather the host, i.e. Socrates, who puts the Stranger to the test. Socrates seems to question whether Theodorus is right in saying that the Stranger is a philosophical man. Does he in fact intend to lead Theaetetus towards philosophical insight in the upcoming discussion? Or is he in fact a sophist who will try to deceive and corrupt the young man? The outcome of this test would seem to reveal whether the Stranger is worthy of joining Socrates' group of philosophically interested men: a sort or rite of initiation.[114]

In this way, the use of theoxeny in the exchange between Socrates and the Stranger highlights what might be called the *institutionalization* of philosophy. As argued by A. Nightingale, Plato's dialogues should be read as attempts to legitimize philosophy as a discourse vis-à-vis the traditional forms of discourse in Athenian society, e.g. rhetoric, drama and poetry. This struggle for recognition and legitimization concerns not only philosophy as a *way of life,* but also requires the founding of philosophy as a new literary *genre.* In Nightingale's argument, Plato created a specialized discipline of philosophy, and a particular philosophical type of text called "dialogues". He created the dialogue form using the technique of intertextuality, i.e. the mixing of literary elements from various pre-established genres: epic, tragedy, comedy, so-called *sokratikoi logoi,* etc. She writes: "Plato uses intertextuality as a vehicle for criticizing traditional genres of discourse and, what is more important, for introducing and defining a radically different discursive practice, which he calls 'philosophy'".[115]

To successfully institute philosophy into a field of already established disciplines and modes of inquiry required that it positioned itself in contrast to the same disciplines. The old authorities had to be challenged. This explains why many of the Platonic dialogues, including *The Sophist,* are at such pains to separate the philosophers from other professional producers of

[114] A comparison can be made with Pitt-Rivers' description of the arrival of a stranger (1997), p. 96. He writes: "the entry of an outsider into any group is commonly the occasion for an 'ordeal' of some sort, whether among British public schoolboys, freemasons or the initiates of the secret societies of Africa, but in these instances the character of the ordeal as a test of worthiness is less important than its character of an initiation rite. They might all be considered as 'rites of incorporation', a variety of the rites of passage through which an old status is abandoned and a new one acquired. In this case it is the status of stranger which is lost and that of community member which is gained".

[115] Nigthingale (1995), p. 5.

discourse: sophists, poets, politicians, rhetoricians. It also explains why the Stranger, later in the text, confronts and criticizes the Greek ontological tradition in such violent wording: Parmenides' doctrine must according to the Stranger be "fittingly interrogated by applying torture", μέτρια βασανισθείς, in what might appear as a "parricide", πατραλοίας of father Parmenides.[116] For these older figures, "philosophy" denoted merely intellectual cultivation, not a specialized discipline. In opposition to them, Plato sought to carve out the contours of a new institutionary practice, a practice which includes not only the founding of a new school, but also a new system of thought production. This system does not produce knowledge claims using "long speech", but rather using questioning in the form of a dialogue between characters.

In summary then, Plato picks up the concepts of *theoxeny* and *xenia* from Homer and from myth, but transforms them into something new: a philosophical concept. From now on, each and every person that Socrates encounters in the streets of Athens presents the opportunity for a test. But the test is no longer, at least not primarily, about respect for the gods, αἰδώς, but about respect for conversation, for joint intellectual inquiry, for *logos*. Like the case of *xenia*, a successful test requires that the test subject stay patient to the many pecularities of his guest. To lose one's temper and display *hybris*, like Callicles does in *Gorgias,* means to fail Socrates' test – possibly incurring the punishment of ironical treatment.[117]

Conclusion

The purpose of this investigation has been to clarify the Greek concept of hospitality - *xenia.* The concept has been shown to encompass a remarkable width. Not only was it a complex phenomenon already during the Archaic period, but it went through important developments during the Classical, where it was expressed in multiform representations and genres.

I have tried to show, contra Konstan, that *xenia* should in fact be viewed as an institutional concept, given that the term "institution" is understood in a particular sense which takes into account the notion of "social facts" in the early French sociological theory of Durkheim and Mauss.

At the same time, and here I agree with Konstan, one must be careful to equate *xenia* with the Greek view of friendship, *philia,* as some historians do when they, in an unreflexive fashion,

[116] Plato, *The Sophist,* 237b2, 241d3.

[117] Plato, *Gorgias,* 481b-488b.

render the concept as "guest-friendship" or "ritualized friendship". From the ways in which *xenia* is represented in the material that have been analyzed, it seems clear to me that the relationship between *xenoi* should be considered a social practice *distinct* from friendship, and one that was acted out in relation to (but not necessarily stricly following from) distinctly different rules of conduct. More specifically, the term is represented as closely connected to the concept of *themis,* which marks what the Greeks consider correct, organized, as well as morally just behavior.

The above discussion leaves doors open for further investigations. Firstly, there are other tragedies in which *xenia* also acts as an important motif, e.g. Sophocles' *Philoctetes* or Euripides' *Bacchae.* Secondly, there are elements in *The Sophist* that remain to be interpreted in relation to *xenia,* such as the Stranger discussion of Otherness (τὸ ἕτερον). Finally, and more generally, it remains to explore more thoroughly than was possible here how *xenia* and *theoxenia* fit together with what I have called the institutionalization of philosophy.

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