

## Homer's *Odyssey*

Homer's *Odyssey* is epic tale of how Odysseus of Ithaca had endured a decade-long hero's journey on his return home after the Trojan War.



## Ten Odyssey Questions

- 1) In his *Odyssey*, Homer promotes a certain custom (ἡθός) of hospitality (ξενία). According to him, it is a *virtue* to be hospitable to strangers or foreigners. According to Homer, if a stranger or foreigner comes to your home or your country, then the hospitable thing for you to do would be to welcome the stranger as your guest by providing them with something to eat, something to drink, somewhere to rest, and safe passage home. Accordingly, a *good* host is a *hospitable* host.

(a) How was Penelope of Ithaca *hospitable*?

(b) How was Aeolus of Aeolia *hospitable*?

(c) How were the Phaeacians of Scheria *hospitable*?

- 2) According to Homer, it is a *vice* to be inhospitable to strangers or foreigners. According to him, if a stranger comes to your home or your country, then the inhospitable thing for you to do would be to turn them away, hold them captive, harm them, or kill them. Accordingly, a *bad* host is an *inhospitable* host.

(a) How was Polyphemus *inhospitable*?

(b) How were the Laestrygonians *inhospitable*?

(c) How was Calypso *inhospitable*?

3) Based on Homer's distinction between hospitable people and inhospitable people, answer the following two-part question.

(a) Were the Lotus Eaters *hospitable* or *inhospitable* to foreigners? Explain.

(b) Was Circe *hospitable* or *inhospitable* to foreigners? Explain.

4) Hospitality involves some risk of danger for the host, and every hospitable host must place some degree of trust in any foreigner or stranger whom they host as their guest.

(a) How does hospitality involve some risk of danger for the host?

(b) Why must every hospitable host place some degree of trust in any foreigner or stranger whom they host as their guest.?

- 5) The word ξενία (hospitality) is a cognate of the word ξένος (foreigner/stranger), and the word “xenophobia” comes from combining the words ξένος (foreigner/stranger) and φόβος (fear). (Even though it has been explained in class, if you don’t know what “xenophobia” means, look it up. After looking it up, if you *still* don’t know what “xenophobia” means, ask me to explain it to you.)

(a) According to Homer, is xenophobia a *virtue* or a *vice*?  
(According to him, is it *virtuous* or *vicious* to be xenophobic?) Explain.

(b) In your opinion, is it *courageous* to be xenophobic? *Why* or *why not*?  
Explain.

(c) In your opinion, is it *cowardly* to be xenophobic? *Why* or *why not*?  
Explain.

(d) In your opinion, is it reckless *not* to be xenophobic? *Why* or *why not*?  
Explain.

6) Along with how Homer distinguished good hosts from bad hosts, he distinguished good guests from bad guests.

(a) According to Homer, it is a *virtue* to be a good guest (such as by *not* overstaying one's welcome).  
What is an example of this in the *Odyssey*?

(b) According to Homer, it is a *vice* to be a bad guest (such as by overstaying one's welcome).  
What is an example of this in the *Odyssey*?

7) Part of Odysseus' ἦθος (character) was his μῆτις (cleverness). What are two examples of this in Homer's *Odyssey*?

- 8) Odysseus' patron deity was Athena, who was the goddess of wisdom, but Odysseus had a complicated relationship with wisdom.
- (a) When was it *wise* for Odysseus to have told a *lie*?  
Provide an example from the text. (Hint: Think of Homer's pun.)
  - (b) When was it *unwise* for Odysseus to have told the *truth*?  
Provide an example from the text. (Hint: Think of Homer's pun.)
  - (c) When Odysseus and his men sailed their ship through the narrow straight between Scylla and Charybdis, why did he have his men sail closer to Scylla? (Hint: Think of the 'trolley problem'.)
  - (d) ~*Opinion Question*: When Odysseus and his men sailed their ship through the narrow straight between Scylla and Charybdis, was it *wise* or *unwise* for him to have had his men sail closer to Scylla? Explain.

9) On the island of the sun god Helios, Odysseus' men ate the cattle of Helios.

(a) Was it *wrong* for them to do so? *Why* or why *not*? Explain.

(b) What might be a counterargument to your answer to the previous question?



10) According to Homer, *hospitality* was not the only *virtue*, and *inhospitality* was not the only *vice*.

(a) How did Homer try to teach us that loyalty is a *virtue*?  
Provide examples from the text.

(b) How did Homer try to teach us that greed is a *vice*?  
Provide examples from the text.

(c) Consider the expression “curiosity killed the cat”. Even though the expression has been explained in class, if you’re still unsure about what it means, look it up. (After looking it up, if it *still* doesn’t make sense, ask me to explain it to you again.) What gusty event in Homer’s *Odyssey* aptly would be described by the expression?

(d) In light of how you have answered the previous question [*i.e.* 10(d)], how does the *Odyssey*’s example of ‘curiosity killed the cat’ pertain to Homer’s belief about loyalty as a virtue and greed as a vice?