

THE TEARS OF ACHILLES IN HOMER'S EPIC  
(WITH SOME REMARKS ON HIS FOLLOWERS)\*

by

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ABSTRACT: This article aims to offer insights into the psychological profile of the greatest hero of the *Iliad*, Achilles, with particular reference to the passages in which the hero responds to specific events in the story by crying. I attempt to contribute to the current debates on the matter by contemplating three reasons for Achilles' emotional responses: (1) his youth and the sense of his lack of authority among his comrades in arms; (2) the awareness of his impending death; (3) his status as a demigod, which is seen by the Achaeans as belittling the merits of the hero.

Tears are a particular form of non-verbal communication<sup>1</sup>. It is commonly believed that crying brings relief<sup>2</sup>. Although some scientists are sceptical about the veracity of this assumption, the debate continues<sup>3</sup>. The characters of Homer's

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\* I would like to thank the anonymous reviewer for her or his valuable remarks and suggestions for improving this paper.

<sup>1</sup> The nonverbal character of crying poses insurmountable challenges to theatrical actors. Since crying is too spontaneous an emotion to be rendered faithfully on stage by an actor, it is described verbally by another character on stage. This device has its origins in the epic tradition. Cf. STAMM 1975: *passim*.

<sup>2</sup> For this reason, it is often considered that such strong emotions should not be suppressed, especially by boys, who are expected to control their feelings. Didactic scholars argue that this may entail far-reaching and negative consequences, such as an inability to deal with stressful situations in adult life. Cf. VON GLAHN 2006.

<sup>3</sup> See BOSWORTH (2019), who is sceptical about the claim that tears are capable of easing the sufferer's mind. VON GLAHN (2006), on the other hand, persuasively makes a case for the therapeutic function of weeping. A therapist can help the patient release the healing powers of crying by showing respect and patience towards this natural process by which tears help one recover from traumatic experiences, much like wounded flesh that heals naturally. In order to achieve this the therapist must foster a positive relationship with the patient based on trust and a sense of safety to encourage them to share their painful experience, no matter how excruciating it may be. VON GLAHN argues that the therapeutic function of tears is the most effective form of treatment. However, this kind of crying is different from the fear-induced form of crying. The therapeutic form of crying occurs when someone feels that the other person shows an interest in them personally rather than only in their feelings. This, however, provokes the question of whether tears can appease the