

John Protevi

Please cite only the published work: *Political Affect* (Minnesota, 2009), 153-55.

EXCURSUS: ON THE WARRIOR BODY. Homer is the greatest of all students of the warrior body. Recall that Hector refuses to fight from the walls of Troy, explaining to Andromache that he would feel "great shame" at doing so (*Iliad* 6.440). To understand his reluctance, consider "trash talking" in the *Iliad*. The physiology of fighting is that to overcome an inherited and universal intra-species inhibition on close-range killing warriors need rage. Rage will release endorphins, which are anxiety-reducing and analgesics, pain-killers. The repetition of such rages however is traumatic: they produce chronic high endorphin levels, which set a high threshold for new endorphin release. Putting yourself into danger, and the trash talking that accompanies it, thus has to escalate: you need more and more stress, more and more danger to get the same rush. "Normal life" triggers will then not be able to push body past threshold of endorphin release. Thus outside of battle—think of Achilles' sulking when he deprives himself of battle throughout most of the *Iliad*—the warrior feels "dead": there's no *joie de vivre*. In fact, he (I am using the masculine pronoun here, but let's not forget the Amazons) is "objectively" deprived of endorphins. There's a lot to think about here in terms of affect and experience, physiology and consciousness, affect and cognition: was Achilles "thinking straight" when in his depression he allowed Patroclus to fight in his stead?

High intensity training is needed for noble single combat: consider the relative "capital investment" for an agricultural society to produce an aristocratic warrior. To produce such warrior bodies you need to traumatize them by lots of intensive hunting and fighting as boys: think of Odysseus's scar from his adolescent rite of passage, the boar hunt (*Odyssey* 19.549-552). Phalanx training was intermediate between aristocratic single combat and naval rowing; it is less intense than single combat, because of teamwork, that is, emergence. In the phalanx, you stand by your comrades rather than surge ahead. Recall Aristotle's definition of courage as the mean between rashness and cowardice: in concrete terms, rashness for the phalanx is standard behavior for the warrior, while phalanx courage—staying with your comrades—would be mediocrity if not cowardice for the warrior.¹ And this standing together is the key to the *eros* of the phalanx as ecstatic union with an emergent body politic. McNeill 1995 and Freeman 2000b allow us to account for this human bonding in terms of resonance and "entrainment" of asubjective physiological processes triggering endorphin release. Remember the discussion in the *Symposium* about Homer's not being explicit about sex between Achilles and Patroclus. Later Greeks, soaked in the *eros* of the phalanx, assumed sex between them, the only question is who was lover and who was beloved.

Homer is the great ancestor of all students of political affect in his treatment of Achilles, Hector, and Odysseus. Achilles' rage triggers include insult to honor. But "honor" is not a sentiment for Homer's Greeks. *Timé* is stuff: tangible and visible signs of esteem, usually in the form of women and gold, but also the best cuts of meat and wine. Recall the dialogue between Sarpedon and Glaucus: "Why do we fight? For the meat, the wine, and the land" (*Iliad* 12.320-342). In materialist terms, the meat is for muscle-building, the wine is for coming down off of high of battle, and the land is to produce these inputs. Homer's portrayal of Hector's dilemma concerning glory is great. When asked by Andromache in Book 6 (and later by Priam and Hecuba in Book 22 [40-114]) to

fight from the walls, he replies "I would feel a terribly great shame before the Trojan men and the Trojan women, with their flowing robes" (6.440-442). We might even say Homer has what Damasio would call a "somatic marker," a flashing scenario of what it would be like for his body to experience the removal from his bathing in the positive feedback of admiring glances, which keep his pleasure flowing. Without the reinforcement of those glances, he has no triggers for his positive emotions and would become depressed. He flashes onto this future, this way in which he would "die of shame." (Just as we have a "folk ontology" of complex systems I think we also have a "folk political physiology": we've always known you can die of shame or of a broken heart, that is, that the social and the somatic are intimately linked; it is just the Cartesian dualist ontology, the folk ontology of mechanistic medicine, that overlooks this or is troubled by it.) Thus Hector's choice to fight is really the choice of form of death. He does not have Achilles' choice: a short glorious life or a long dull one. Hector's choice is a short glorious life or a short depressed and inglorious life. The problem is that his warrior body would need a long reprogramming to be a soldier and fight from the walls. Soldier fighting is poietic: done for the sake of something greater outside the action: that is, the safety and glory of the polis. Soldier fighting done in the phalanx is of a lower intensity: group eros versus the high of warrior fighting done in a rage. Warrior fighting is praxis: it is done for its own sake, or more precisely, it is done in order to deal with the traumatized warrior body, to get the next endorphin fix: its necessity is immanently produced rather than transcendently imposed.

In his voyages Odysseus undergoes just the sort of long de-programming Hector couldn't. In crying on the beach of Calypso's island for 7 years he's mourning his death as a warrior, that is, he's reprogramming his joy / endorphin triggers, which are set at a very high level due to the intensity of battle. This is what all mourning is, finding new endorphin triggers. This is why "breaking up is hard to do": love is an intense state in which high levels of endorphins are released only in the presence of the beloved. This sets your endorphin release threshold very high. Thus everyday life is boring (its triggers can't push you past that threshold of endorphin release) and you neglect your friends. "You never call since you met him / her!" But when the love trigger is disengaged, then you have no triggers at all that can reach the high threshold for endorphin release. That's why your friends always recommend a hobby, meeting new people: you have to form new triggers. And Ares and Aphrodite are a couple because love and war can both be intense, erotic-ecstatic, physiologically traumatizing and addictive experiences. Madonna showed her pop-culture genius in 1991 when she called General Schwartzkopf "the sexiest man in America," thereby positing herself as Aphrodite.

ⁱ This is, by the way, an excellent example of the Deleuzian distaste for essentialism:

you've never going to be able to come up with a set of necessary and sufficient conditions to define "courage": much better to investigate the morphogenesis of warrior and soldierly bodies and see if there are any common structures to those production

processes. The Deleuzian question must be: how are the warrior and the soldier different actualizations of the virtual multiplicity linking political physiology and geopolitics?