

**Satiety and Empathy: A Research Note on the Moral Psychology of
αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ πόσιος καὶ ἐδητύος ἐξ ἔρον ἔντο**
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Abstract

This paper explores what the Achilles-Priam scene at *Iliad* 24.469-676 – often called one of the most moving in all of literature (Weil 1940, Richardson 1993, Nagy 2023) – can tell us about the moral psychology of empathy. A close reading of these lines delineates the principal features of what I propose to call “empathesis,” the human achievement of a godlike empathic perspective. The analysis yields a five-fold model of humane understanding, comprising (1) morality; (2) epiphany; (3) proximity; (4) similarity; and (5) solidarity. While all five elements catalyze Achilles’ compassion for Priam, the scene follows Homeric patterning in presenting empathy as a special correlate of what Nagler (1974) and Lynn-George (1996) have called the “creatural” aspects of humanity. Strikingly, epic empathy typically emerges just after ritual feasting marked by the phrase αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ πόσιος καὶ ἐδητύος ἐξ ἔρον ἔντο, “when they had put aside their desire for eating and drinking.” This phrase appears twenty-one times in Homeric poetry – seven times in the *Iliad*, fourteen times in the *Odyssey* – and each occurrence is followed by a representation of empathy. In the *Iliad* empathy is induced, on the average, 7 lines after the satiety phrase, and in the *Odyssey*, 9 lines after it. For Homeric humans, the quickest way to a kind θυμός is through the γαστήρ. Carrying forward the researches of Pucci (1987) and Bakker (2013), who found an ineluctable link between θυμός and γαστήρ, this paper argues that the archaic Greeks knew implicitly what neuroscience has only recently proven: A meal shared to satiety induces empathy (Tuulari, et al., 2017). The cross-cultural importance of this creaturely solidarity brings Homeric empathy into dialogue with recent philosophical and psychological research (Coplton 2011, Bailey 2022), and bears special relevance to contemporary initiatives for intergroup understanding (Mousa 2020, Paluck 2021). By sublimely leveraging the creaturely solidarities common to humans at all places and times, *Iliad* 24 induces what Virgil’s Aeneas, contemplating Achilles and Priam, calls “tears that connect with the universe” (*Aeneid* 1.462, tr. Nagy 2020).