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– Torbie Phillips
CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL 
THE NOMINATED WRITERS

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20th
ANNUAL
NEWMAN
AWARD
WINNERS

GREEK THOUGHT
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CAMILLE MASSARO
LANIE PETERSON

19TH & 20TH CENTURY THOUGHT
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In Homer's epic *The Odyssey*, mortals worship, praise, and fear the immortal gods because the gods are perceived to be omniscient and all powerful. Worldly phenomena that are inexplicable in the mortal world are attributed to the power of Homer's Olympian gods. When Zeus throws down bolts of lightning from the sky and Poseidon sends violent storms on the sea, humans are continually amazed. Even though the mortals, like Odysseus, accept the gods' immense powers, the gods themselves speak of a fate beyond their control. Although
earthly beings revere the gods’ supremacy, does fate embody a power that even the gods must obey? What power do the gods have in determining the future? How does the will of mortals come into play?

Homer’s Greek gods seem to be capable of manipulating all aspects of life on earth. When Odysseus and his shipmates blind Poseidon’s son, the Cyclops Polyphemus, Poseidon, the god of the sea, demonstrates his authority over the open waters by sending wild storms to thwart Odysseus’ journey home. The veteran Odysseus endures physical pain, hunger, and harsh sea conditions, as well as the emotional pain of losing his crew and missing his native land. Despite Odysseus’ determination to reach home, he is rendered helpless by Poseidon who “raged on, seething against / the great Odysseus till he reached his native land” (I, 23-24). Later, when Odysseus’ crew slaughters the cattle of the sun god Helios, Zeus, the god of all gods, displays his strength by punishing the men for eating the forbidden meat. Zeus sends a bolt of lightning to strike Odysseus’ ship to “cut short their journey home forever” (XII, 452), sending all but Odysseus into the depths of the sea. Surely the actions of Poseidon and Zeus lead the reader to believe that a god’s power ranks above all others.

However, Odysseus is armed with a shield of protection that even the gods cannot pierce. When Zeus “hit[s] the craft with a lightning-bolt and thunder...shipmates pitching out of her” (XII, 448, 450), Odysseus still refuses to be defeated by him. Battered and weak but still very much alive, the waterlogged captain washes ashore on Calypso’s island ten
days after the shipwreck. His fate, the outcome of his journey on earth, has been determined from the beginning of his life: that he will reach his beloved land of Ithaca after his tortuous odyssey. The gods may twist and torque the path on which he will travel, but the end result will be the same. From the moment that the infant Odysseus is born, his destiny is written, guaranteeing his safe return to Ithaca. Through King Alcinous, Homer reveals that “in the future [Odysseus] must suffer all that Fate / and the overbearing Spinners spun out on his life line / the very day his mother gave him birth” (VII, 232-234). Both gods and mortals are powerless against ultimate destiny; however, they are both equally capable of manipulating the events along the way.

Although the gods are responsible for many of the events in the journey, Odysseus also makes choices that change his path. When Odysseus and his shipmates narrowly escape from the Cyclops’ cave, Odysseus could have boarded his ship and set sail without a backward glance at the blind giant. Instead he chooses to taunt Polyphemus, crying “if any man on the face of the earth should ask you / who blinded you . . . say Odysseus” (IX, 559-560). This action alters the path his journey will take, for if Odysseus had not yelled his name to the Cyclops, the Cyclops would not have had any reason to pray to his father, Poseidon, for revenge. Therefore, Poseidon would have had no reason to delay his journey, and Odysseus might have reached Ithaca years earlier. Both the gods and the mortals have the power to postpone destiny, but they cannot alter it completely: Odysseus still manages to return home, even if 20 years later.
Later in his voyage, Circe advises Odysseus about the perils and decisions he will face. She gives him clear instructions about the Sirens but admits:

Once your crew has rowed you past the Siren a choice of routes is yours. I cannot advise you which to take
...
You must decide for yourself—

(XII, 61-64)

Odysseus chooses to maneuver between the two dangers, Scylla and Charybdis, in order to save the majority of his men. In this instance, Odysseus has the power to change his journey through his choices just as the gods are able to skew his path with their actions. Although the gods and mortals appear to come from different worlds, maybe they are more similar than it may appear.

Odysseus cannot foresee all the obstacles that the gods create on his journey, but even the gods indicate that they are unsure of the path ahead of the hero. Zeus laments that the mortals are wrong to see the gods as the only source of their misfortune, admitting that mortals can determine their journey with their free will:

Ah how shameless—the way these mortals blame the gods.
From us alone, they say, come all their miseries, yes,
but they themselves, with their own reckless ways, compound their pains beyond their proper share.

(I, 37-40)

Athena, too, questions the certainty of foretold events. She implies that her power is limited when she proclaims: “I’ll make you a prophecy, one the immortal gods / have planted in my mind—it will come true, I think, / ...[Odysseus] won’t be gone for long from the native land he loves” (I, 232-233, 235). Athena is not completely convinced of how the events of the odyssey will play out. Although “it’s light work for a willing god to save a mortal” (III, 263), she admits that the fulfillment of “the prophecy” is beyond her power and that she cannot intervene in Odysseus’ fate, lamenting: “My heart breaks for Odysseus, / that seasoned veteran cursed by fate so long— / far from his loved ones still” (I, 57-59). Her lack of power in this situation prevents her from rescuing the war-torn hero from his pain and grief. Mortals and gods are equally powerless in changing fate, as Athens proclaims, “Not even the gods / can defend a man, not even one they love, that day / when fate takes hold” (III, 269-271).

The gods and the mortals prove to have equal power in altering the events leading up to the predetermined fate, so although fate determines the end destination, the journey is always changing. Mortals can influence their path of life by personal choices and free will. If the conclusion is already written, maybe humans should focus on writing the story rather than longing for knowledge of the end. Homer writes
Odysseus’ story focusing on the dynamic journey and not the static end. For Odysseus, fate is immovable, but his journey changes with each turn of the page. The conclusion is no surprise; the adventure is what makes the read worthwhile.

Work Cited


This essay was written for Virginia Smith’s Greek Thought Seminar.
The Odyssey, by Homer, draws upon the earlier defeat of the Trojans in an epic battle against the Greeks. After much bloodshed, the author's protagonist Odysseus, a respected Greek warrior and displaced king of Ithaca, is about to begin his long journey home. Little does he know he will spend the next twenty years wandering the seas, constantly pushed further from his destination by a vengeful god named Poseidon through a series of disasters. Odysseus will battle gruesome monsters, resist alluring goddesses, and journey to
the underworld, all while struggling to keep his crew alive. In
the face of these adversities, Odysseus might seem to have the
battle won. Those who have celebrated the mythic man and
his feats or witnessed them firsthand have every reason to
believe he will overcome any obstacle placed before him and
deserve the praise of a hero. However, a man cannot honestly
call himself a hero when he not only taunts but shames and
tortures the Cyclops, blames his crew for his own lack of
judgment, and receives endless help from the gods, yet credits
himself for their undetected aid.

Odysseus, king and warrior, is in fact not the hero many
perceive him to be, and people tend to ignore his significant
flaws. Most mortals require an idol to lift their own hopes of
success and victory and even though Odysseus has “plundered
/ the hallowed heights of Troy” (I, 2-3), he is “driven time and
again off course” (I, 2) not only by the intentions of the gods
but by unseen factors of his own design. A real hero does not
inflate his ego by introducing himself as, “Odysseus... known
to the world / for every kind of craft – my fame has reached
the skies” (IX, 21-22). His self-praise and thoughtless actions
are rooted in his inability to remain modest, perceive his own
weaknesses, and accept responsibility for them. Although
Odysseus is a strong and just king, he cannot be
considered a hero because his ego, poor judgment, lack
of responsibility for his actions, and reliance upon the
gods detract from the authenticity of his heroic status.

One of the most obvious examples of Odysseus’ lack of
judgment occurs when he attempts to out-maneuver the son
Of Poseidon, a man-eating Cyclops named Polyphemus. By sealing the entrance of his cave with a large stone, this horrible monster is able to hold Odysseus and his men hostage while he devours them one by one. Odysseus nobly strives to save them from certain death and even though his cunning nature helps him inebriate and then blind the Cyclops, he is less a man of wit than one might think. Although Odysseus escapes the wrath of the Cyclops, his bad judgment interferes with his safety. Once he and his crew are no longer at risk, Odysseus arrogantly taunts the one-eyed beast. His shipmates beg him to stop, pleading for common sense and rationality from their trusted leader, asking him, “Why rile the beast again?” (IX, 550). Odysseus, however, cannot resist the lure of his own ego. Unfortunately, his burst of anger compels him to ignore the plight of his men in favor of a conceited rant:

...'Cyclops —
if any man on the face of the earth should ask you
who blinded you, shamed you so—say Odysseus,
raider of cities, he gouged out your eye,
Laertes' son who makes his home in Ithaca!
(IX, 558-562)

It is apparent that by indulging in such self-congratulatory behavior, Odysseus is utterly reckless and foolish. Had he not been a braggart, the giant might have let him run away unscathed, but Odysseus inflames the Cyclops. Verbally humiliated and physically tortured, Polyphemus demands that his father Poseidon, god of the seas, make sure Odysseus meets an equally cruel fate. Odysseus provokes the wrath of
Poseidon and further complicates his way home. A real hero does not exploit a victory to boost his ego.

Later in the saga, Odysseus again risks the lives of his crew because he ignores good advice. When he is cautioned by two separate sources, a renowned seer and a goddess, never to touch the cattle of Helios, he ignores the ill omens and buckles under pressure from his men. Tiresias, the blind prophet, warns him, "your ship [will be] destroyed, your men destroyed as well! ... you’ll come homelate, / all shipmates lost, and come [home] a broken man" (XII, 151-153). However, Eurylochus, one of his crew members, reminds him that his "crew’s half-dead with labor, starved for sleep" (XII, 305) and convinces him to relent or to risk mutiny. When Odysseus allows himself to be persuaded by him instead of by Tiresias, disaster follows.

Odysseus often avoids responsibility by shifting consequences from himself to his men. While he may have blinded the Cyclops physically, it is he himself who is mentally blind when he makes his shipmates swear not to touch the sacred animals. Odysseus is naïve when he makes them agree to a promise: "Swear me a binding oath, all here, that if / we come on a herd of cattle or fine flock of sheep, / not one man among us—blind in his reckless ways— / will slaughter an ox or ram" (XII, 323-326). Odysseus turns a blind eye to the fact that these men are mortal, that the temptation will probably be too much for them and that they will most likely be seduced by it. Odysseus misjudges their endurance. Soon enough, they kill all of Helios’ cattle. These men are not superhuman; they are human and hungry. Homer seems to be saying that
temptation without judgment is too much for any mortal, and this incident clearly shows the reader the result.

In Book XII, Odysseus once more proves he is not heroic when he excuses his own questionable behavior. When his diminishing band of survivors releases the ill-fated winds that further delay their journey home, Odysseus fails to recognize that his men are fallible. Odysseus is more willing to blame the gods than his own abilities when he pities his own predicament and cries out: “Father Zeus... / ... you lulled me into disaster. / Left on their own, look what a monstrous thing / my crew concocted!” (XII, 398-401). Odysseus makes sure Zeus thinks his crew brought about their downfall, yet ironically believes he deserves to be saved. He not only blames the men he is supposed to protect, but he also blames Zeus, the ruler of the gods. He explains to Zeus that he only lands on the Island of the Sun because his men urge him to do so (XII, 292). Odysseus is at fault for thinking he has nothing to do with how things turn out. A hero does not lead his men into a place where disaster is fated to occur. Homer even comments on the relationship between men and the gods when he points out the undue reliance humans have on them:

‘Ah how shameless—the way these mortals blame the gods.
From us alone, they say, come all their miseries, yes, but they themselves, with their own reckless ways, compound their pains beyond their proper share.’

(I, 37-40)
Odysseus' “own reckless ways” further add to his god-given problems.

Odysseus does not recognize his own weaknesses though he is able to survive impossible odds with the aid of the goddess, Athena. She often leads him along the right path when he himself is clueless. An unseen advocate and protector, she is the model of leadership that Odysseus himself is not always prepared to offer his own men. Odysseus can hardly be called an able guardian, unlike Athena, who is capable of thinking up new solutions. She changes Odysseus' physical appearance and even covers him at times in a mist to shield him from unwanted attention. On one occasion she gives him “rippling strength,” helping him win a discus competition (VIII, 157). Although Athena’s efforts may contribute to his success in a minor way, one cannot help but wonder if Odysseus would be as triumphant had he not had the grey-eyed goddess nudging him in the right direction and bailing him out of his own mischief. His accomplishments are less impressive because he does not reach his god-like status alone.

While it can be argued that Odysseus’ journey in the end is successful because he learns to concentrate his attention where it belongs, his significant flaws diminish the degree of praise, attention, and credit he deserves. Odysseus succeeds, but at a heavy price. His best interests are often thwarted by decisions that undermine his own goals. Though it cannot be denied Odysseus endures incredible hardships in his odyssey to Ithaca, it is the odyssey of another kind that is perhaps more important to Homer. Odysseus is not the hero
he is perceived to be or that legend makes him, and his heroic image is tarnished by his egotism, faulty judgment, lack of accountability for his actions, and dependence on the gods. A hero is successful because of the decisions he makes with care. Homer is telling us that we must test our own weaknesses and that a hero does not deflect responsibility. Odysseus may be looked upon with some degree of admiration, but he should not be referred to as “a deathless god” (VIII, 16) or “some god who rules the vaulting skies” (XVI, 206). Ultimately, Odysseus’ legendary status is undeserved.

Work Cited


This essay was written for Saundra Alassio’s Greek Thought Seminar.
Throughout Ancient Greek plays, there is a prominent theme of evening the score and giving people the same punishment that they inflicted upon others. In Aeschylus' plays in The Oresteia: "Agamemnon," "The Libation Bearers," and "The Eumenides," the theme of violence never seems to end. The king of Argos, Agamemnon, sacrifices his daughter
in hopes of gaining an advantage during battle; and then his
wife, Clytaemnestra, kills Agamemnon because he killed his
daughter. Further building on the cycle of violence, Orestes,
Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra's son, kills Clytaemnestra
since she killed Agamemnon. These three characters justify
their murders: Agamemnon “to bless the war” (“Agamemnon”
224); Clytaemnestra “by the child’s Rights” (“Agamemnon”
1459), and Orestes to “avenge [his] father’s murder” (“The
Libation Bearers” 21). All are “caught in the nets of doom”
(“Agamemnon” 1047); they are perpetrators of the curse on the
House of Atreus, “where Justice and bloody slaughter are the
same” (“The Eumenides” 184). But this kind of justice based
on revenge comes at a high cost of turmoil and death.
Is Aeschylus’ message that violence and retribution are
a part of the human condition? How do the characters
and the author define justice? Is the justice of “act for
act” worth the consequences?

When Agamemnon is confronted with the decision
of whether or not to kill his daughter, he expresses some
conscience and doubt: “Pain both ways and what is worse?”
he agonizes just before he renders his daughter as a sacrifice
to the gods, “[feeding] their fury,” rationalizing that “law is
law!” (“Agamemnon” 212, 215-216). Despite his hesitation,
and despite his daughter's prayers to save her, Agamemnon is
overcome with frenzy and proceeds with her execution.

Similarly, it may appear that Orestes is not as guilty
as his mother, Clytaemnestra, because he also hesitates and
deliberates before killing her. Right before he pulls the rope
to take her life, he agonizes to his companion, “What will I do, Pylades? - I dread to kill my mother!” (“The Libation Bearers” 886). Although his mother has treated him horribly by excluding him from the throne and even going as far as exiling him, she is still his mother and ending her life is torturous for him. His consciousness of his horrible deed creates an illusion that he is justified in killing Clytaemnestra, but in reality he kills her fully knowing the extent of his wicked action, and he still ultimately chooses to do evil. He may appear innocent because he is not sentenced to any form of punishment during his murder trial, but this declaration does not alter the truth that Orestes did in fact kill his own mother.

Orestes’ full awareness of his deed makes him just as guilty as Clytaemnestra, who also kills out of revenge and hunger for power to rule the kingdom. Standing over the dead body of her husband, she triumphantly shouts, “Act for act, wound for wound!” and gloats to her lover Aegisthus, “You and I have power now” (“Agamemnon” 1555, 1707). Orestes seems equally vengeful and ready to implement the command of Apollo to “gore them [Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus] like a bull!” (“The Libation Bearers” 280) as he rages, “Oh, she’ll pay / she’ll pay, by the gods and these bare hands— / just let me take her life. . .” (“The Libation Bearers” 425-426) and beseeches his dead father to “give [him] power now to rule the house” (“The Libation Bearers” 467). Orestes is also motivated by his personal revenge against his mother because he is hurt by the fact that his own mother was willing to sell him and get rid of him. As Clytaemnestra faces his sword and questions his proposed course of action, he deliberately tells her, “[You]
disgraced me, sold me, a freeborn father's son" ("The Libation Bearers" 902). He can hardly be justified in committing this murder as he is motivated by his anger and selfish vengeance just as his mother had been.

Since Orestes is just as guilty as Clytaemnestra, his unlawful transgression warrants the same punishment that Clytaemnestra receives. However, Aeschylus chooses to let Orestes live in order to convey that peace should be valued over revenge in order to end the violence. He asks us to go beyond personal vendetta and to reevaluate our definition of justice. Even the Furies reflect, "Guilt both ways, and who can call it justice?" ("The Eumenides" 155). Aeschylus also has Athena acquit Orestes to emphasize how compassion transforms both the convict and the prosecutor, allowing the entire kingdom to flourish and live in harmony. The Chorus, observing the violence around them, admonishes that "Justice turns the balance scales, / [and] sees that we suffer / and we suffer and we learn" ("Agamemnon" 250-252). In "The Eumenides," Orestes echoes that he has "suffered into truth," as the blood is "fading on [his] hands" ("The Eumenides" 274, 278). And just before Athena confirms Orestes' acquittal, the Furies admit that although "There is a time when terror helps, / ... / It helps, at times, to suffer into truth" ("The Eumenides" 529-531). Aeschylus teaches the reader that although suffering and violence seem to be an integral part of humanity, we also have the power to choose a new kind of justice, a justice not based on "[wiping] out death with death," ("The Libation Bearers" 823) as dictated by the curse of the House of Atreus but, rather, on "the love this family bears towards our land / [that] will bloom
in human strength from age to age” (“The Eumenides” 1040-1041).

By allowing Orestes to go free of charges, Aeschylus is ending the violence which conveys that he believes peace is more important than the violence caused by the “justice” of retribution. The killings are not solving the issue of who should rule the kingdom or who is at fault, but rather these deaths just breed more and more violence. After Orestes murders his mother, the Chorus reflects upon the recent events and questions, “Where will it end?— / where will it sink to sleep and rest, / this murderous hate, this Fury?” (“The Libation Bearers” 1075-1077). Even though the Chorus had originally supported Orestes in seeking revenge, they now realize that it is actually making matters much worse. Then, during the trial, Aeschylus utilizes Athena to deliver his central message regarding peace in the following passage as she appeases the Furies:

Here in our homeland never cast the stones
that whet our bloodlust. Never waste our youth,
inflaming them with the burning wine of strife

...Do great things, feel greatness, greatly honoured.
Share this country cherished by the gods.

(“The Eumenides” 867-869, 877-878)

Aeschylus favors peace because it leads to “great things” and “honor” which violence cannot attain.
Even though Orestes does not deserve the grace that Athena so generously bestows upon him, it is not in vain because Orestes uses his power as ruler of the nation to reiterate Athena’s declaration of peace. He graciously thanks Athena for her kindness and then announces to the people of Athens, “All who keep [the peace], who uphold [Athena’s] rights / and citadel for ever, comrades spear to spear, / we bless with all the kindness of our heart” (“The Eumenides” 789-791). Although he does not quite regret killing his mother, he is able to move past it and focus on serving his father’s kingdom to the best of his capabilities.

Not only does Orestes become a better person through Athena’s good graces, but the whole Athenian society reaps the benefits. At first the Furies are angry with Athena for acquitting Orestes, but then they rapidly realize that hating Orestes accomplishes nothing. The leader of the Furies, astonished at his newly found perspective, reveals to Athena, “Your magic is working...I can feel the hate, / the fury slip away” (“The Libation Bearers” 908-909). Similarly, the women thank the Furies at the outcome of Orestes’ trial by exclaiming, “This peace between Athena’s people and their guests / must never end. All-seeing Zeus and Fate embrace, / down they come to urge our union on- / Cry, cry, in triumph, carry on the dancing on and on!” (“The Eumenides” 1054-1057). These final words of the entire trilogy once again stress Aeschylus’ vital message that although one may deserve punishment, forgiveness and grace lead to far greater outcomes for all involved.
Hatred only divides a community which leads to tremendous strife and conflict, whereas peace has the capability to unify and strengthen many people into one nation that lives in harmony. Although most of Aeschylus' trilogy, The Oresteia centers on violence and tragedy, there is a subtle yet strong message that no matter how awful the hostility and bloodshed, there is still hope for peace through grace.

Works Cited


This essay was written for Deanne Kruse and Dana Lawton's Greek Thought Seminar.
Karl Marx is known for his shrewd and relevant critique of capitalism and his passionate endorsement of a communist system. Charles Darwin is known for his groundbreaking account of evolution, illustrating his theory on the formation of species. At first glance, Marx's focus in *Wage-Labour and Capital* and Darwin's focus in *The Origin of Species* seem quite disparate. However, the theories of Marx and Darwin have
one crucial concept in common: the centrality of competition. Darwin writes, “As more individuals are produced than can possibly survive, there must in every case be a struggle for existence, either one individual with another of the same species, or with the individuals of distinct species, or with the physical conditions of life” (Darwin 44). Though Darwin is referring to competition amongst species in nature, we can find parallels in Marx’s analysis of the economic inequalities that result from unfettered capitalism. From Darwin’s analysis, we learn that competition—whether social, scientific, or economic—necessitates a struggle for existence in which only the most fit survive. **Despite similarities, the two men’s theories diverge in their application:** competition under Darwin is beneficial to the vibrancy of the natural world, whereas competition under Marx leads to economic hardship.

The foundation of Darwin’s argument is that species’ struggle for survival is determined by natural selection, or the “preservation of favourable variations and the rejection of injurious variations” (Darwin 47). In the wild, organisms belonging to competing species (or rivals of the same species) will compete for limited resources. The organisms with the most favorable traits—whether they be external or internal—for their particular environment will survive and produce offspring, while their less-fit counterparts will be unable to successfully reproduce. Indeed, “if any one species does not become modified and improved in a corresponding degree with its competitors, it will soon be exterminated” (Darwin 57).
This same principle can be seen in the notion of division of labor in *Wage-Labour and Capital*: skillful and efficient workers are favored by the capitalist class over those lacking these traits. Marx points out that in order to produce goods as efficiently as possible, businesses require increasing specialization on the part of their workers (Marx 41). As a result, workers operate under immense pressure to continue performing at the desired standard of speed and accuracy or they risk losing their livelihood; workers who are "less fit" in that they take longer to complete a task or are more prone to error will therefore be replaced by more desirable workers—those who have achieved greater specialization of skills. Consequently, employers protect against injurious variations in worker ability by firing the weak and hiring those with favorable variations. In other words, capitalists eliminate the weakest pool of workers just as natural selection selects for the strongest pool of genes. The Darwinian principle of selection of desirable traits seems to apply to the workings of capitalism, then, even if the actors performing the selection are dissimilar.

Competition as described in *The Origin of Species* also relates to Marx's characterization of the job market in general. Just as Darwin speaks of the struggle necessitated by a great number of individuals living in a single environment, Marx notes, "There will be no lack of fresh and exploitable blood and muscle" to keep the capitalist machine running (Marx 46). In short, workers are expendable. Out of this great pool of potential workers comes a competition that turns the job market into an intra-species struggle as ruthless as those that have occurred in natural habitats over many centuries.
Because the fundamental goal of the capitalists is to outsell their competitors, the capitalist must "restlessly [introduce] further subdivision of labor and new machines, which, though more expensive, enable him to produce more cheaply" (Marx 44). As a result of specialization and machinery, laborers are now each able to complete the work previously done by many more men and women, allowing the capitalist to hire a smaller number of workers while still being able to produce the same amount as before. Just as species in the wild must compete for limited resources in the form of food, shelter, and mates, workers must compete against one another in order to secure limited resources in the form of jobs (Marx 44).

The capitalists, by convincing workers that it is in their interest to out-work, out-think, and out-sacrifice their peers, have instigated a struggle for existence not unlike the kind outlined by Darwin. The people who are rewarded with a job from the ever-diminishing pool of work will receive monetary gains over their less-fortunate peers. The remaining workers, motivated by the need to earn money for survival, will be forced to overcome others in the race for employment or else suffer economic demise. As Marx has put it: "The more [a person] works, the more he competes against his fellow workmen, the more he compels them to compete against him..." (Marx 45). Competition breeds further competition, and the struggle for survival and security intensifies in the process. Though the goal is to obtain work and not to pass on strong genes, under a money-centric capitalistic system a job is equally as crucial for survival in society as genes are for survival in nature.
Though there are similarities between competition in the wild and competition in the workplace, these two environments do imply different conclusions. According to The Origin of Species, “During the modification of the descendants of any one species, and during the incessant struggle of all species to increase in numbers, the more diversified these descendants become, the better will be their chance of succeeding in the battle of life” (Darwin 73). Thus, competition and natural selection generally benefit the natural world. They allow nature to remain vigorous and vibrant; natural selection is a valuable process not only within the scope of the present, but for future generations of organisms as well. This competition can be seen as a positive force.

However, the same cannot be said for an unbridled capitalist system. Marx says, “If...the income of the worker increases with the rapid growth of capital, there is at the same time a widening of the social chasm that divides the worker from the capitalist, an increase in the power of capital over labour, a greater dependence of labour upon that capital” (Marx 39). In Marx’s conception, then, the capitalist system harms its very foundation: the workers. It pushes them into further economic peril and subverts their welfare for the interests of the capitalist class. For better or worse, workers remain dependent on the success of the capitalists in order to receive wages, no matter how small they may be. Because the nature of capitalistic competition ensures that wages will be no greater than they need to be for the system to function, the well-being and security of workers is often sacrificed (Marx 37). Under such a system, the welfare of many human beings is weighed
against concerns for profit and production. Those who do not fit into this equation are left behind. The punishment for this unfortunate group is not to gradually and unconsciously drop out of the gene pool, but to continually struggle to provide for their basic needs.

It is clear that basic parallels exist between competition in Darwin's *The Origin of Species* and Marx's *Wage-Labour and Capital*. In Darwin's world, the prize for unique and favorable attributes is life and progeny, and those lacking such traits face extinction. In Marx's conception of capitalist society, the same struggle for success over failure occurs: the strong are able to work while the weak may be doomed to impoverishment. It must not be forgotten, however, that what is efficient and successful in the natural world does not necessarily have the same effect when applied to human society; generally, natural selection works to the benefit of the majority, while capitalism works to the detriment of the majority. For this reason, the implications of Darwinian competition in a social context should not be overlooked. Rather, the parallels between competition in nature and competition in capitalist economies help underscore capitalism's flaws, as justice in the wild is quite different from justice in human society.
Works Cited


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