

I want to respond to the transhumanist view that transcending our mortal natural beings would be prudential and desirable. I take Homer's *Iliad* as a resource for thinking about, and opposing, the transhumanist view. I will defend what I call the Homeric View, and argue that invulnerability, where it is conceivable at all, would make our lives go worse.

To be invulnerable as the gods, ageless and blissful – what could possibly be wrong with that?(**) My subject is whether or not our lives would go better if we were technologically enhanced humans or transhuman. If it were technologically possible, should we push towards bioengineered 'perfection'? Should we make ourselves 'more than human'? The debate raises the most enduring questions – about what it is to be human, about our relationship to nature, and about what kind of social world we want. I will put together the ambition of transhumanism to be invulnerable with the *Iliad*, one of the oldest stories about gods and mortals, and about war and death. We are familiar, in the *Iliad*, with the importance of courage, virtue, and honour to human flourishing. But Homer also presents war as the occasion to reflect upon the significance of mortality and human vulnerability. The flourishing of an individual depends not only on courage in light of the inevitability of death in battle but also, more basically, on an understanding of human mortality. By exploring temporality, narrative, and the contrast between divine and mortal wounds in the *Iliad*, I will show how the Ancients speak to the present debate in bioethics.

I will focus on one basic idea, vulnerability, in the *Iliad*. I will suggest that it is close to the idea that we ourselves possess. Of course, neither pain nor death are desirable in themselves. Nevertheless, they contribute to ethical goods in virtue of their anticipation and the narratives provided in light of their existence. When Achilles eventually gives up his guise of invulnerability, he restores his particular individual nature and recovers his place in a social world. Achilles's story suggests at least this: that vulnerability is not necessarily a bad thing, and not in the sense that vulnerability is a natural human experience, but in the first personal sense that it is a good thing for an individual. Homer leads us to see that vulnerability makes Achilles's life go better.

* The research for this paper started with a question I often pose to myself when I begin a philosophical investigation: 'What would Bernard Williams think?' Here I drew inspiration from Williams's essay 'The Makropulos Case: reflections on the tedium of immortality' in *Problems of the Self*, CUP, 1973, and 'Persons, Character, and Morality' in *Moral Luck*, CUP, 1981.

** I am indebted to Leon R. Kass's paper 'Ageless Bodies, Happy Souls: Biotechnology and the Pursuit of Perfection' in *The New Atlantis*, Spring 2003: 9-28, and also his book *Life, Liberty, and the Defense of Dignity*, 2002, Encounter Books, San Francisco, especially Chapter 9 'L'Chaim and Its Limits: Why Not Immortality?'