

COLLOQUIUM: HEROISM IN HOMER AND SOPHOCLES

NOVEMBER 11–14, SAN ANTONIO
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The *Iliad* of Homer presents our oldest image of war and the fighting man. It is also one of the truest. The hero must overcome the natural impulse to avoid death. How is he motivated to this fearful decision? What claim has the community on the hero, and what are its limits?

Homeric heroes lived in a society which reckoned one's worth in terms of public honor. The ethos of honor has never died and continues to motivate us, but it is in direct tension with important currents of Western thought since Socrates. Christian ethics emphasize the equal value of all men and have little understanding of heroic stature—except in the passive figure of the martyr, foreshadowed in classical thought by Sophocles' *Antigone*.

Heroes come in different types: Achilles in the *Iliad* is the hero of dash who nevertheless sulks when he is shabbily treated. Oedipus is a tragic hero whose flaw is a tragic inability to see the consequences of his actions. His fall is more a matter of fate than an exercise of his will, and he attains a heroic stature through the greatness of his suffering. His daughter Antigone is without any serious flaw: she disregards an unjust order to leave her brother unburied and fulfils her religious duties. For this she is sentenced to die, and meets her end without false hopes. The conflict between private and public morality, between the individual and the state, in Sophocles' *Antigone* is a crucial moment in Western civilization.

Jasper Griffin is a fellow and tutor at Balliol College, Oxford. He is the author of *Homer on Life and Death* and the editor of *Sophocles Revisited*. He is a Fellow of the British Academy and a frequent contributor to the *New York Review of Books*.

All participants will be expected to have read all of the materials before the colloquium begins. If you do not think your schedule would permit this, please decline this offer and we will try to include you in a subsequent program.

