My title is meant to recall that of an article by David Claus, "Aidös and the Language of Achilles" (TAPA 105 [1975] 113-28), whose title was itself an echo of Adam Parry's article, "The Language of Achilles" (TAPA 87 [1956] 1-7). Parry's famous article had asserted that Homer's traditional language was a perfect fit to the traditional heroic worldview, and that Homer, and hence his hero Achilles, was unable to articulate anything outside of this generic, homogeneous and internally coherent system. Achilles' language in this view is abusive: his disillusionment with heroic society can be registered only negatively. Since Achilles must speak in heroic language for lack of an alternative, he can only misuse it: ask questions which cannot be answered, make demands that cannot be met, etc. Achilles' language is thus relegated to a tragic negativity--the only possibility available to him is to act and speak anti-heroically. Parry had suggested, furthermore, that this rigidity of the worldview of the heroes-one is either "in" or "out"-is related to the fixity of Homeric diction.

Parry's view of the language of Achilles resonates with those interpretations of the poem which take Achilles to be a sort of existential hero who discovers some essential and transcendent truth about Man. Hence, for example, commenting on the meal of Priam and Achilles in Book 24 of the Iliad, Michael Nagler concludes that the hero has achieved a "generic stature" and become a "counterpart of the gods." 1 James Redfield writes on this scene that there is here a reconciliation "on the level of nature, outside the human world,. . . founded on a universal concept of man qua man." This reconciliation, he goes on to say, "is not a discovery of meaning [but] an accurate recognition of meaninglessness." 2 Cedric Whitman, finally, views Achilles as a man in search of absolute value, and concludes that "Priam and Achilles see life whole, and with the freedom of men on the last verge of time." 3 Such interpretations of Achilles insist on his fundamental alienation and otherness from Greek society, identifying the passionate and enigmatic

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1 Michael Nagler, Spontaneity and Tradition (Berkeley 1975) 198, 197.
speech of Book 9 as well as the silent gazing of Priam and Achilles after their meal in Book 24 as indicative of this ineffable otherness. I will return to this latter scene in a moment, but first I would like to consider the question of Achilles' language in a "pragmatic" framework, beginning with a look at Claus' critique of Parry's article.

Claus challenges Parry's characterization of Homeric formulaic language as a description of a perfect and inflexible world of thought patterns. He shows with numerous examples that Homer's formulas are riddled with ambiguities, and that they represent partial and often contradictory truths which are applied in different ways to different situations.

Achilles, Claus argues, does not simply negate the heroic "code" (taking this term to mean a pattern of meaningful behavior and speech), but rather stretches and bends it in order to articulate his own ideal view of that code. Hence despite the formality and rhetorical predictability of his overt statements, [Achilles] manages to suggest a division of the heroic world into men who feel and love, who can fight, who have proper joy in their possessions, and those who rely on "things" to defend themselves against heroic sthenos, who seek to be kinglier than others, whose possessions are nothing good to them, who do not even know what a life is worth. Again, while this rejects Agamemnon and all his ways, it leaves the heroic code, at least as Achilles idealizes it, intact (p. 25).

Achilles' point of view is not "utterly at odds with that of his society, even though it perhaps pushes one conception of the heroic system to extremes" (pp. 25-26). Achilles' notion of the true meaning of the heroic contract is thus not a mere negation but rather something the heroic code could be taken to mean.

Claus' point that Homeric language is full of heterogeneities and internal contradictions I take to be clearly demonstrated, not only by Claus' article but by that whole tradition of Homeric scholarship which has tried in vain to sort out and systematize the heroic code. Indeed, if there is anything universal about "natural" language (as opposed to a highly rationalized language such
as mathematics), it is this very characteristic; and this would be all the more so in a situation where codes of behavior and speech are embedded in gnomic expressions and ritual actions inculcated by imitation and oral transmission. Such internal contradiction is intimately connected not only to the contradictory claims inherent in the fabric of any given society, but also to the inevitable gap between individual experience and what is able to be conventionally expressed. It is this gap, in fact, to which the incessance of linguistic change is often attributed: no language is such an adequate vehicle of thought that it is impervious to change; and it is often asserted that it is art's special function to spearhead such changes, to point to new possibilities by stretching the conventions of language. At the same time, art's special function has also been seen as the production of imaginative solutions to real social contradictions.

Nevertheless, the point of Parry that Achilles is "alienated" throughout the poem is not thereby refuted, for he is clearly perceived by others in the story to be acting in an unheroic (or "anti-heroic") fashion. Claus' point that Achilles' speech in Book 9 has "a basis in . . . aidōs and the heroic code which [the members of the embassy] either do know about or ought to" (p. 25) may be true. But this should not obscure the fact that the other Greeks in the poem, including Patroklos, never do figure out what Achilles is driving at. Claus' Achilles, in fact, is not so far from the alienated figure which emerges from the perspective of Parry: he is still someone who has a special insight into things which he cannot make others understand. If Parry underestimates the potential of Achilles to "say what he means," Claus underestimates the importance of the "addressee" as a constitutive role in the articulation of meaningful language. The result is that Claus attributes to Achilles (and by implication to Homer as well) a privileged relationship to his society which

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6 The Russian formalists, for example, argued that art was the means of disrupting the automatization of everyday perception through "estrangement" (ostraneniye). See *Russian Formalism*, ed. Victor Erlich (New Haven 1981).
7 The most sustained theoretical statement of this Position is Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca 1981), but contradiction is central to psychoanalytical approaches, the "structuralist" anthropology of Levi-Strauss, as well as to more traditional analyses of tragic irony, ambiguity, etc.
forecloses beforehand a view of the poem as the dynamic process of managing the various contradictions it brings to the fore. That is, it is possible to consider the Iliad as a process of constructing an imaginary solution to certain social contradictions rather than as a representation of a solution prefabricated by the poet beforehand. This would mean seeing Achilles' speeches and actions as attempts to construct a version of the heroic code rather than as a series of unsuccessful attempts to represent an idealized version he knows all along. Both Claus' analyses of Achilles' speeches and Parry's notion of Achilles' alienation can be rethought in these terms, taking our cue from the distinction linguists make between rule-changing creativity and rule-governed creativity.8

All communication occurs in terms of conventions, but such conventions are constantly being used to "say" new things by various creative strategies. Rule-governed creativity is defined as the production of a new phrase or message which is a combination of conventional units in a way governed by prior conventions. Thus the sentence "there is a golden mountain on the moon" would be a "new" expression, but able to be understood given the existing conventions of English. Wallace Stevens' famous line, however, "green colorless ideas sleep furiously," is an example of rule-changing creativity, since the production and interpretation of this phrase require the establishment of a new convention which does not yet exist. Achilles' speeches can be said to be examples of such rule-changing creativity. Like Wallace Stevens, he is a sign-producer who wishes to change the "code", to articulate a meaning for whose communication and accurate reception no adequate conventions exist as yet. The situation seems to be paradoxical: if communication is based on conventions, how can it occur where no conventions exist? Yet unless we assume that language is "natural" in the strict sense (i.e., that it is immanent), all language must have become conventional by some form of rule-changing creativity.

The dilemma of Achilles, therefore, is not peculiar to formulaic diction or any other signifying system. The history of all the arts, in fact, is filled with

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8These terms of Chomsky are more convenient than those used for this opposition by Umberto Fco: ratio facilis vs. ratio difficilis. Eco's discussion, however, in A Theory, pp. 217-61, is the basis for what follows.
examples of innovative techniques, initially met with shock or bewilderment, only to be accepted in time when the rules of their production were understood and made explicit. Umberto Eco describes this situation thus:

The sign-producer has a fairly clear idea of what he would like to "say," but he does not know how to say it; and he cannot know how to do so until he has discovered precisely what to say. The lack of a definite content-type makes it impossible to find an expression type, while the lack of an appropriate expression device makes the content vague and inarticulable.⁹

This is not an impossible position, but it is always a risky one, and the history of the arts also provides us with examples of innovations which were so utterly unconventional that they were received as mere noise. New conventions cannot be created ex nihilo; an essential aspect of rule changing creativity is to find a means of making the new convention acceptable to others. In order to be successful, therefore, rule-changing creativity must "lean", so to speak, on existing conventions, so that an addressee will be able to deduce the new rule being proposed. This means using conventional expressions, but in such a way as to signal that they mean something more than usual (as, for example, when we place a word in inverted commas). Such a process may involve stretching existing conventions by hyperbole, catachresis, oxymorons-in short, by exploiting all the devices of figurative language we generally attribute to poiesis-much in the way Claus describes Achilles' use of formulaic language.¹⁰

In the context of Achilles' situation in the Iliad, which Claus aptly characterizes-i.e., "he must be paid, but he cannot be bought" (p. 24)--the result for Achilles is a pattern of seemingly contradictory speech and action precariously positioned between rejection of and submission to the heroic

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⁹Eco, A Theory, p. 188.
code, neither of which, taken alone, would be rule changing creativity. Going home would be a simple negation of the heroic code, within which such negations are predicted and coded as "unheroic", "shameful", etc.; but accepting Agamemnon's gifts would be submitting to it. So Achilles stays and refuses the gifts. In Book 16, he refuses to help the Greeks himself, but sends out Patroklos, cautioning him not to win too much. When Achilles does return in Book 19, eager to reenter the battle for personal revenge, he is persuaded to wait for the other Greeks to take their meal, but refuses to participate himself; nor does he show any interest in the reconciliation with Agamemnon urged by the other Greeks. These seemingly contradictory actions, inscrutable to others in the poem, portray an Achilles groping to articulate to himself and others a new version of the heroic code, an articulation which fails several times to attain the status of a convention.

In view of this failure, Party is right to assert that Achilles is alienated, but it is not enough to say that this is somehow the point of the poem, as do Redfield and others, so that Achilles becomes just another existential hero. Achilles' alienation is not essential, but specific to an historical moment whose discursive contradictions are inscribed in the *Iliad*. His version of the heroic code is not transcendent and incommunicable in some essential way, but rather fails repeatedly to achieve the status of discourse, which would have to entail establishing a convention for its communication acceptable to others in the poem. This last point is crucial, for it defines the terms in which Achilles could be seen to succeed in some way, and this brings us to the meal of Priam and Achilles in Book 24.

The significance of the communal meal in Homer has often been noted: specifically, its status as the privileged mode of reconciliation and reintegration. A communal meal is a form of communal language, signifying one's commitment to a group over against other claims which conflict with the best interests of that group. One of the indices of Achilles' "alienation," in fact, is his pointed refusal to participate in communal meals. Neither of Odysseus' two speeches urging a meal in Book 19 persuades Achilles to make this conciliatory gesture to Agamemnon-and the point is

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11 Michael Nagler's discussion, *Spontaneity*, chapter 6, is most illuminating on this issue, although vitiated by his radically essentialist interpretations.
made several times that only Achilles does not eat (19. 303-308, 319-321, 345-348). At the beginning of Book 23, while the others eat, Achilles lies on the beach sobbing for Patroklos (23. 55-60). And after the games, while the others get ready their dinner, Achilles tosses in his bed, then abuses the body of Hector and continues to mourn for Patroklos (24. 1-18). When Thetis visits him, she rebukes Achilles for not eating and sleeping, and asks him to give up his fruitless mourning (24. 128-130). Even the gods agree that Achilles' behavior is highly "unconventional" and to them nonsensical—but neither the gods nor the other Greeks are the model readers of Achilles' "message".

In Troy, meanwhile, there is a mirror image of Achilles' situation in the person of Priam. Like Achilles, Priam refuses to eat, sleep or drink (24. 637-642). He wallows in dung (24. 163-165), curses his remaining sons, and states that, like Achilles, he has nothing worth living for (24. 239ff.). His decision to visit Achilles is incomprehensible to the other Trojans, who beseech him, just as others have beseeched Achilles, to act sensibly (24. 200ff., 327-328). All the thematic connections between Achilles and Priam—their shared grief, their alienation, their common needs and desires, and especially the meal they share in Achilles' tent—are conventional notions introduced to "prop up" that climactic moment when Achilles finally is able to make someone understand his, until then, utterly private language. The meal Achilles and Priam share becomes the convention against which a new convention "leans", intimating, in the silent exchange of mutual recognition and admiration which follows the meal, a meaningful exchange which is as yet ineffable in the scope of the Iliad:

But when they had put aside their desire for eating and drinking,  
Priam, son of Dardanos, gazed upon Achilleus, wondering  
at his size and beauty, for he seemed like an outright vision of gods.  
Achilleus in turn gazed on Dardanian Priam  
and wondered, as he saw his brave looks and listened to him talking.  
But when they had taken their fill of gazing one on the other,  
first of the two to speak was . . . Priam (24. 628-634).

I have underlined two phrases in Lattimore's translation which make up what appears to be a minor "nod" on Homer's part. But mython akouon in
line 632 should perhaps be translated "understanding his meaning," for much in the context seems to imply that the gazing is itself a form of communication. Note that it comes immediately after the formulaic closing of the meal (628), right where we would expect someone to speak, as in Iliad 2. 432-433 (= Od. 3. 473-474; cf. Il. 9. 92-94, 222-225; I1. 779-780; Od. 8. 485-486; 15. 303-304, 501-502; 16. 55-56; 17. 99-100; 24. 489-490):

But when they had put away their desire for eating and drinking the Gerenian Horseman Nestor began speaking among them.

Moreover, lines 633-634 themselves resemble such formulaic endings of meals, as though the gazing itself has a social and communicative function similar to a communal meal. The gazing is thus positioned in such a way as to implicitly compare it both to the communal language of a meal and to individual speech. It is, of course, from Priam, not Patroklos, not Agamemnon, not even Zeus, that Achilles receives his long-sought-for time.

The Iliad articulates a crisis in discourse, which is to say a crisis in the very form of social organization, and this crisis is somehow rooted in the material conditions of the times. In the realm of discourse, such a crisis means that the contradictions underlying the fabric of society become untenable and their ideological mystification breaks down. The contradictory character of language begins to become manifest and to become the subject of reflection, inaugurating an often explicit ideological struggle over what had been taken for granted. It is impossible to deduce from the Iliad alone the precise nature of the material conditions of Homer's time, because the poem itself participates in this ideological struggle and thus to some degree mystifies them. That is, the Iliad does not represent a social crisis from some privileged perspective outside of the struggle, but is an attempt to construct a resolution in the realm of ideology itself.

Nevertheless, we can, with the help of hindsight unavailable to Homer, construct an account of this crisis in terms of a transition vis-a-vis its outcome in the succeeding centuries of Greek history. Although there is little

\[12\text{akou"o with the accusative can have this sense: see LSJ s.v. 113., and cf. Iliad 14. 125. For mythos meaning "unspoken purpose," see LSJ s.v. 15.}\]
disagreement that the archaic period was indeed a time of transition and turbulence, there has been substantial disagreement on what there was a transition from or to. Here we must rely on various narratives of development (anthropological, sociological, historical materialist) based on analyses of partially analogous situations. What follows is a brief sketch of one possible account of that transition based on those ideological issues most prominently thematized in the Iliad. This should not be taken as some sort of definitive historical account, but rather as an attempt to suggest the kind of "questions" to which the Iliad might be read as tentative "answers".

1. Politically, a rule justified by birthright and divine dispensation becomes displaced by a rule based on one's ability. The rise of tyranny, as a fairly widespread phenomenon in the 7th and 6th centuries, is symptomatic of a breakdown of the ideology of inherited excellence, a matter given thematic development in the Iliad.13 There is not, of course, a total eclipse of aristocratic ideology; rather, it is no longer taken for granted. Once the basis of the claim becomes subject for discussion, its arbitrariness can become apparent. It is when the social world "loses its character as a natural phenomenon that the natural or conventional character (phusei or nomoi) of social facts can be raised."14

2. Economically, the gift-exchange economy of archaic Greece with its distribution of "prizes" (which is the economic basis of Agamemnon's authority, culturally misrecognized and ideologically masked as his personal generosity) is displaced by a more rationalized and explicit mode of evaluation, culminating in a money economy in which everything, including a man's labor, can be reckoned in terms of gold. This transition involves the breakdown of the delicate cultural charade which insures that "gifts" are never explicitly treated as what they, at one level at least, objectively are: payment for services rendered or anticipated. The scandalous dispute of Book 1 of the Iliad has the effect of raising the issue of the relationship between the gifts one receives and one's value as a hero to a

13Peter Rose, "How Conservative is the Iliad?", Pacific Coast Philology 13 (1978) 8991, sketches out some of the major points, which he develops in more detail in forthcoming work which he has kindly allowed me to see.
level of explicit calculation which undermines the ideological mystification of the whole process and thus dooms it.\footnote{15}{For a characterization of gift-exchange in a "traditional" society, see Pierre Bourdieu, \textit{Outline of a Theory of Practice}, pp. 171-97.}

3. Socially, there is a weakening of emphasis on "natural" ties, such as kinship, and one's "community" becomes increasingly defined in more abstract ways, as, for example, in the Athenian establishment of geographically defined demes over against the old affinal phratries. At the same time, the traditional unwritten "code" of behavior, embedded in gnomic expressions and implicitly acknowledged in communal rituals such as meals, becomes displaced by the rise of the new city-state, with its written laws explicitly outlining obligations among individuals who will be constituted as such by the discursive formations-legal, political, economic, religious, etc.-of the city-state.\footnote{16}{For the notion of "discursive formation", see M. Foucault, \textit{The Archaeology of Knowledge}, tr. A. M. S. Smith (New York 1972) 21-78.} Priam and Achilles, wrenched from their previous communal contexts, bereft of their most precious loved ones, and establishing an extraordinary and exclusive relationship with one another, are at some level a figure of this new kind of individual.\footnote{17}{Cf. the simile of 24. 480-483, comparing Priam before Achilles to a polluted outcast, and Priam's claim that he has done what no other man has done by coming to Achilles (24. 505-506). This should also be compared with 16. 97-100, where Achilles wishes that all the Greeks and Trojans would die so that only he and Patroklos could conquer Troy. Note also that Achilles asks Priam to sleep outside lest Agamemnon somehow find out about their agreement (24. 650-655).}

All these momentous changes, many of which will be repeatedly thematized in Attic tragedy (one need only think of the Antigone, with its opposition of written vs. unwritten laws, state duty vs. familial duty, logic vs. intuition, etc.), can be thought of as the dissolution of a so-called "traditional" society based on a shared commonality (\textit{Gemeinschaft}), and the subsequent establishment of a larger but more atomized society based on a rationalized association among individuals who are constituted as such (\textit{Gesellschaft}).\footnote{18}{The terms \textit{Gemeinschaft} and \textit{Gesellschaft} are those of Ferdinand Tönnies, \textit{Community and Society}, tr. C. P. Loomis (East Lansing 1957), whose account is, however, very generalized. Pierre Bourdieu, \textit{Outline of a Theory of Practice} (note 14, above), gives an excellent anthropological account of this sort of transition. Max Weber's thesis in \textit{Economy and Society} (New York 1968), that history in the West is ruled by a relentless process of the rationalization of social forms, human relations, etc., in which a "charismatic" leader mediates briefly between the demise of one social formation and the rise of another, could provide many.
The ties binding this new society together are based on a more formalized definition of the individual, who will become a sort of interchangeable monad, just as the new hoplite fighting tactics become based on a highly rationalized matrix of interchangeable positions. Such a transition necessarily entails a breakdown of the ties binding together the "traditional" society, a process perceived by that older society as alienation. The little community established by Achilles and Priam in book 24 of the Iliad is a forerunner of this new social organization; but it is a community whose discourse is, in the Iliad, as yet unformulated.

The Iliad is thus a meditation on a profound cultural dilemma, an attempt to wrestle with these pressing problems and allow them to enter into the world of discourse. To essentialize the "meaning" of the poem into a statement of some transcendent truth or other is to put the poet in a position relative to his society which is just as theoretically impossible for him as it is for Achilles. Homer’s "stance" in the poem is complex, and, like Achilles’ own speeches and actions, contradictory. Although it has been argued persuasively that the poem is an outright condemnation of Achilles or, conversely, that it is a celebration of him, to attribute such univocal judgments to Homer is to reduce the historically specific contradictions with which he is struggling into simple oppositions such as good vs. bad, true vs. false, loving vs. selfish, etc. These oppositions, supposedly timeless and self-evident, are versions of our own historically specifiable contradictory consciousness, and imposed by us on a text which can bear them only with substantial distortion and simplification.

Steve Nimis
Miami University of Ohio

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interesting insights into the Greek situation. For the importance of writing in the development, see Jack Goody, Domestication of the Savage Mind (Cambridge 1977). For the importance of money, see Alfred Sohn-Rethel, Intellectual and Manual Labor (London 1978).