

## *Philomathes*

# **Άγκυλομήτης versus Μητις: A Thematic Word Study in the Homeric and Hesiodic Corpora**

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Near the beginning of *Iliad* 4, Hera and Zeus engage in an argument regarding whom the gods should aid in the Trojan War – the Argives or the Trojans. Angry with Zeus because he supports the defeat of the Argives, Hera acknowledges Zeus' supreme authority, but she also reminds him that she too shares the same lineage as he; "Κρόνος άγκυλομήτης," the Titan who overthrew his father Ouranos and was in turn overthrown by Zeus, is also her father.<sup>1</sup> In the Homeric and Hesiodic Corpora,<sup>2</sup> this passage is the first of the few instances of the use of the word άγκυλομήτης – an epithet that is attributed to only two figures: Kronos and Prometheus.<sup>3</sup>

Άγκυλομήτης, literally meaning "curved/bent μητις,"<sup>4</sup> is difficult to define because it is derived from the noun μητις, a tricky<sup>5</sup> word which has been defined by some as "skill or craft" and by others as "wisdom, prudence, or capability."<sup>6</sup> While

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<sup>1</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, 4.59. All quotations of the *Iliad* reference the Greek text of Homer, *Iliad: Books 1-12*, ed. David R. Monro, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1902) and Homer, *Iliad: Books 13-24*, ed. David R. Monro, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1902).

<sup>2</sup> These corpora include the *Theogony* and *Works and Days* for Hesiod and the *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, and the *Homeric Hymns* for Homer. Although I believe that the claims made in this paper apply to the *Homeric Hymns*, there will not be sufficient space to discuss uses of μητις in these hymns.

<sup>3</sup> Epithets are "ornamental adjective and noun combinations found attached ubiquitously to both proper and common nouns in early Greek epic," cf. Margalit Finkleberg, *The Homer Encyclopedia*, vol. 1 (Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell, 2011), 257.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*, trans. Alexander Lubotsky, vol. 1 (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2009), 12.

<sup>5</sup> Pun intended.

<sup>6</sup> Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*, 948-949; Franco Montanari, *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek*, translated by Rachel

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these definitions are both correct, μήτις is far more nuanced and does not neatly fit into these constricting definitions; rather, it involves all these qualities and more – cunning, forethought, deceit, and resourcefulness, just to name a few.<sup>7</sup> With the complexity of μήτις in mind, defining ἀγκυλομήτης is certainly no easy task. Nevertheless, scholars have been content to give little attention to the epithet, often defining it in ways which falsely attribute a sense of wickedness or injustice to the term.<sup>8</sup>

The goal of this paper is to distinguish between ἀγκυλομήτης and μήτις, not only asking what it means for someone to have “curved/bent μήτις” but also why Kronos and Prometheus are the only beings in the corpora to receive this epithet. Ultimately, this paper will argue that the element that distinguishes an ἀγκυλομήτης person from one who possesses μήτις has no connotations of injustice or wickedness, as the common translations insinuate; rather, this distinguishing element is one that connotes partial failing and recoiling. In short, an ἀγκυλομήτης person is characterized by μήτις that backfires.

To accomplish this task, this paper will first examine significant occurrences of μήτις in the corpora in an effort to gain a solid grasp on a few of its most significant attributes. With this backdrop provided, the paper will then discuss the stories of Kronos and Prometheus, as received in Hesiod, to better understand the role that μήτις plays in their actions.<sup>9</sup> Finally, the

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Barrit-Costa, et al., ed. by Gregory Nagy and Leonard Muellner (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2015), 1344.

<sup>7</sup> Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society*, trans. Janet Lloyd (New York: The Harvester Press Limited, 1978) 11.

<sup>8</sup> See pp. 14-9 for a few of these definitions.

<sup>9</sup> Although μήτις occurs in both Homer and Hesiod, the stories of Kronos and Prometheus are only found in Hesiod.

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paper will examine some of the most common translations of ἀγκυλομήτης, exploring how they fall short, before providing what this paper views to be the correct definition.

### **Some Attributes of Μῆτις**

In the *Iliad*, one of the most prominent passages in which μῆτις appears is found in Book 23 in the story of Antilochus' race at Patroclus' funeral games.<sup>10</sup> In this story, Antilochus, Nestor's son, employs μῆτις to beat Menelaus in a horse race. This passage is extremely important because it illustrates three significant aspects of μῆτις – its relation to τέχνη (craft/skill), its timeliness and patience, and its power.

Before the race begins, Nestor reminds Antilochus that although Zeus and Poseidon ἰπποσύνας ἐδίδαξαν παντοίας (taught him all sorts of horsemanship), he will still be going into the race with what appears to be a huge disadvantage;<sup>11</sup> compared to the other men's horses, his are βάρδιστοι (extremely slow).<sup>12</sup> However, Nestor argues that Antilochus has a trick up his sleeve that will allow him to win, should he employ it properly: his μῆτις. In fact, despite his age, Antilochus knows how to μητίσασθαι (make μῆτις) more than the other men – a skill that he has no doubt learned from his father.<sup>13</sup> Nestor then encourages his son and leads him (and the curious reader) through a brief masterclass in the applications of μῆτις: "By μῆτις (μητι) the wood-cutter is far better than by force (βιηφι). And again by μῆτις (μητι) the helmsman guides a swift ship on the

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<sup>10</sup> Detienne and Vernant, *Cunning Intelligence*, 12. Much of my analysis of Antilochus' race draws from Detienne and Vernant's observations made on pp. 11-26 of *Cunning Intelligence*.

<sup>11</sup> Homer, *Iliad* 23.307-8. All translations are my own.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* 23.310.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* 23.312.

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wine-dark see though it is buffeted by winds. And by μῆτις (μήτι) a chariot-driver overcomes a chariot-driver.”<sup>14</sup> In all three of these examples, Nestor illustrates the intimate connection between τέχνη and μῆτις in that each of his examples deals with a person defined by a certain skill or craft. Also, in the first two examples, it is explicitly clear that the ones using μῆτις are facing something stronger than themselves – a tree and the winds, respectively – and, through context, it becomes clear that by μῆτις the horseman with weaker, slower horses will conquer the ones with faster horses. Therefore, what Nestor is ultimately saying about μῆτις is that it is a type of skillful, strategic knowledge that can overcome forces more powerful than its user. However, μῆτις can only succeed if it is employed at the correct time. This aspect of μῆτις is made clear through Antilochus’ patience during the race.

As he is driving his horses, Antilochus falls behind before he overtakes Menelaus to win the race. It is important to understand that he does not fall behind because his μῆτις failed; rather, it was working the whole time, being used patiently and discreetly with forethought. To successfully win the race, he must perfectly calculate how and when he will execute his daring maneuver, and he must δοκεύει (keep a close watch on) his competitors, just as his father told him; he must wait for the perfect time to strike.<sup>15</sup> Antilochus’ patience and perceptiveness reveals another integral part of μῆτις: timeliness centered on strategic planning.<sup>16</sup> It is not sluggish or hasty; it strikes at the perfect moment. Such an emphasis on the timeliness of μῆτις is

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 23.315-8.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 23.325. For a deeper analysis on the relation of δοκεύω to μῆτις, see Detienne and Vernant, *Cunning Intelligence*, 15.

<sup>16</sup> Detienne and Vernant, *Cunning Intelligence*, 15-6.

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clearly seen in the words of Diomedes and Antilochus who each recognize that λεπτή μῆτις (μῆτις that is light)<sup>17</sup> goes hand in hand with both a βράσσω νόος (rather sluggish mind)<sup>18</sup> and a κραιπνότερος νόος (rather hasty/rash mind).<sup>19</sup> Ultimately, Detienne and Vernant sum up this point best: “Μῆτις knows how to wait patiently for the calculated moment to arrive. Even when it originates from a sudden burst of action, the operation of μῆτις is diametrically opposed to that of impulsiveness.”<sup>20</sup>

While Nestor’s words and Antilochus’ actions in the race are most helpful in illustrating the power, skill, strategic planning, patience, timeliness, and forethought bound up in μῆτις, the deceitful aspects bound up in the word are best depicted in the various actions of Odysseus in the *Odyssey*. As the only mortal figure in the corpora to be πολύμητις – one who possesses a great quantity/many types of μῆτις – Odysseus is constantly putting his μῆτις on display in fantastic ways.<sup>21</sup> The main, recurring theme that appears in almost every instance of Odysseus’ μῆτις is his use of δόλος, defined as “deception, trickery, or fraud.”<sup>22</sup> In the *Odyssey*, such a relationship between Odysseus’ δόλος and μῆτις first appears in Nestor’s description of Odysseus’ μῆτις to Telemachus: “No one ever wanted his μῆτις to be compared against [Odysseus’], since godlike Odysseus excelled very much in all sorts of trickery (παντοίοισι δόλοισι).”<sup>23</sup> While there are many instances of

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<sup>17</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, 10.226.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 10.226

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 23.590.

<sup>20</sup> Detienne and Vernant, *Cunning Intelligence*, 15.

<sup>21</sup> Montanari, *Dictionary of Ancient Greek*, 1713.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 547.

<sup>23</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, 3.120. All quotations of the *Odyssey* reference the Greek text of Homer, *Odyssey: I-XII*, edited W. B. Stanford, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Bristol, UK: Bristol Classical Press, 1996). One should keep in mind

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Odysseus' μῆτις in the *Odyssey*, the one which will be most advantageous to the current discussion is his found in his confrontation with Polyphemus in Book 9.<sup>24</sup> This confrontation provides the best view into the workings of the mind of a master of μῆτις because, in this confrontation, Odysseus explicitly says that he was putting his life in the hands of his μῆτις.<sup>25</sup> Μῆτις truly was his only means of survival.

In his confrontation with the cyclops, Odysseus exhibits all aspects of μῆτις: cunning strategy, forethought, patience, deceit, power, and skill. Its power is evident in Odysseus' ability to overcome the cyclops with wine and blind him, despite being ὀλίγος, οὐτιδανός, and ἄκικος (small, worthless, and feeble)<sup>26</sup> compared to the ἀνήρ πελώριος (monstrous man).<sup>27</sup> His forethought and patience show through both in the fact that he refrains from killing the cyclops when he has the chance and in that he makes himself and his men wait (ἐμειναμεν) because he knows that they could not remove the massive stone from the doorway on their own to escape.<sup>28</sup> However, the most strategic aspect of Odysseus' μῆτις shows through in his most blatant use of δόλος – his name.

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when examining the following instances of Odysseus' μῆτις that Odysseus is more than once said to be equivalent to Zeus when it comes to μῆτις (Διὶ μῆτιν ἀτάλαντον – *Il.* 2.169, 10.137) – the same Zeus who will later be seen to be both μητίετα and μητιόεις (Hesiod, *Theogony*, 520, 457). Therefore, the way that Odysseus employs his μῆτις will set the scene, if not act as an exact foil, for the way that Zeus will use his μῆτις in Hesiod.

<sup>24</sup> Odysseus' actions in *Odyssey* Book 22 also excellently illustrate his μῆτις.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* 9.422-423.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* 9.515. While I have chosen to translate οὐτιδανός as "worthless," it almost certainly also includes the idea of being "a nobody" – a beautiful instance of poetic irony playing on Odysseus' fake name: "Οὔτις," cf. 9.366.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* 9.187.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* 9.307.

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Right before Polyphemus is about to pass out, thoroughly inebriated from gorging himself on Odysseus' special wine, he asks Odysseus what his name is, falsely claiming that he will give him a guest-gift.<sup>29</sup> Not only does Odysseus have the forethought to recognize the trap, but he also has the forethought to employ a δόλος that will keep him and his men safe. Odysseus cunningly responds that his name is "Οὔτις" (Nobody),<sup>30</sup> knowing that when Polyphemus soon calls out in pain for help from the neighboring cyclops, he will be forced to say: "Οὔτις με κτείνει δόλω οὐδὲ βίηφιν" (Nobody is killing me by trickery and not by force).<sup>31</sup> Soon after Polyphemus calls out to his neighboring cyclops, falling prey to the δόλος of Odysseus' name, Odysseus once more explicitly illustrates the relationship of δόλος to μῆτις; he says that he πάντας δὲ δόλους καὶ μῆτιν ὕφαινον (was weaving a μῆτις and all deceits),<sup>32</sup> trying to figure out how to escape the cave with his life. He then again exhibits the patience of his μῆτις when he and his men wait underneath the bellies of the animals until the next Dawn.<sup>33</sup> Finally, he exhibits forethought and skill when he expertly judges the distance that the boulder hurled by the cyclops would travel, only calling out to the cyclops again once his boat is in the perfect position for the upheave of the waves caused by the boulder to quickly push his boat away from the cyclops towards his other comrades.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 9.355-356.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 9.366.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 9.408. While this reply is filled with irony in light of the prophecy that Polyphemus receives (506-515), it perfectly illustrates Nestor's argument in *Iliad* 23: μῆτις can conquer βίη.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 9.422.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 9.429-436.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 9.539-542.

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Having briefly examined some examples of the multi-faceted nature of μῆτις, it is now necessary to examine one final aspect – one which is of utmost importance to the discussion of ἀγκυλομήτης. Simply put, μῆτις is not inherently good or evil; rather, it is, in a way, morally ambivalent. This ambivalence is particularly evident in the fact that the recipients of μῆτις often view μῆτις as an evil, even when the user of μῆτις views it as good and necessary. In order to conduct an adequate examination of this aspect of μῆτις, it will be beneficial to examine the responses of the victims of μῆτις in the examples previously discussed: Menelaus and Polyphemus.

After Antilochus wins the race in *Iliad* 23, he is severely scolded by Menelaus for his μῆτις, which he refers to as a use of δόλος.<sup>35</sup> In the chariot race, Antilochus used his μῆτις to almost force a crash by cutting off the path of Menelaus' chariot – a cunning maneuver disguised as a senseless one.<sup>36</sup> After the race, Menelaus is ἄμοτον κεχολωμένος (insatiably angry) with Antilochus, believing that Antilochus' maneuver was unjust.<sup>37</sup> This is clearly seen when he calls the ἡγήτορες ἢ δὲ μέδοντες (chiefs and rulers) to δικάσσετε (give a judgment) between him and Antilochus.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, in *Odyssey* 9, Polyphemus talks to his favorite ram, expressing his anger towards "Nobody" by claiming that an ἀνὴρ κακός (wicked man) deceived him and blinded him.<sup>39</sup> He then speaks of how he wishes to smash

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<sup>35</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, 23.585.

<sup>36</sup> Detienne and Vernant, *Cunning Intelligence*, 22.

<sup>37</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, 23.567.

<sup>38</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, 23.573-574.

<sup>39</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, 9.454.



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“Nobody’s” head so that his heart might recover from the κακῶν (wicked things) done to him.<sup>40</sup>

Here it is important to note that neither Antilochus nor Odysseus was setting out to commit an evil or an injustice. Recall that Antilochus was simply following the advice of his father Nestor, a type of paragon of wisdom among the Achaeans, and Odysseus was trying to escape with his life from the monster who had been carrying out evils against him and his men. In neither of these examples is μῆτις clearly good or evil; it is ambivalent. This moral facet of μῆτις is perhaps best illustrated in the *Theogony* when Hesiod describes the goddess Μῆτις as being able to devise ἀγαθὸν τε κακὸν τε (both good and evil) for Zeus.<sup>41</sup>

### **The Μῆτις of Kronos and Prometheus**

Now that we have examined some defining characteristics of μῆτις, we are equipped to examine the stories of Kronos and Prometheus and determine exactly what their μῆτις looks like and how it helped or hurt them. In Hesiod, Kronos is famous for two main things: castrating his father Ouranos and swallowing his children. In the *Theogony*, Kronos’ castration of Ouranos is the first instance of him being ἀγκυλομήτης. In this story, Kronos hides in a λόχος (ambush)<sup>42</sup> with an iron sickle in his

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 9.460. It is important to note that one might reasonably object to giving so much credibility to Polyphemus’ claims in these instances; after all, he is described as one who οὔτε δίκας ἐὺ εἰδὸτα οὔτε θέμιστας (neither has good knowledge of justice/customs nor laws – 215). However, one must not forget that his father Poseidon hears and honors his prayer to exact vengeance on Odysseus (536), illustrating that Polyphemus was evidently not the only one to believe that Odysseus’ actions were evil.

<sup>41</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony*, 900. All quotations from the *Theogony* reference the Greek text of West, M. L., *Hesiod Theogony: Edited with Prolegomena and Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 174.

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hand to assure that he remains unnoticed before completing his plan – a plan which Hesiod calls a δολίην κακήν τε τέχνην (a deceitful and wicked craft/skill).<sup>43</sup> These words act as exclamation points in the text, alerting the reader to the reality of the nature of Kronos’ deed; it is μῆτις. However, interestingly enough, there is nothing about this μῆτις – the μῆτις of one who is ἀγκυλομήτης – that seems to differentiate it from any example of μῆτις seen thus far; Kronos’ μῆτις involves τέχνη (craft/skill), just like the wood-cutter and helmsman’s did in Nestor’s lecture, and it involves δόλος and is marked as κακή, just as Odysseus’ was;<sup>44</sup> yet, interestingly enough, it does not seem to involve anything more. This is a crucial observation and a point that will resurface later.<sup>45</sup>

At some point before his children are born,<sup>46</sup> Kronos learns from his parents Gaia and Ouranos that he is destined to be overthrown by his child Zeus.<sup>47</sup> In order to maintain his power, he forms a μῆτις to prevent this unwanted succession;

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 160.

<sup>44</sup> Similarly, Antilochus’ μῆτις involved δόλος and lack of δίκη.

<sup>45</sup> Although outside the scope of this essay, a question can be raised as to how much of this μῆτις should be attributed to Kronos himself. Although Rhea seems to insinuate that Kronos alone is to be held responsible for the deed (472), Hesiod makes it clear in this passage that the μῆτις employed in the castration of Ouranos did not originate with Kronos; rather, it was the product of his mother Gaia. Kronos was not the one to come up with the “δολίην κακήν τε τέχνην,” nor was he the one to create iron and form it into a sickle; Gaia was (160-163). In fact, it was not even Kronos’ idea to hide in a λόχος; it was Gaia’s (evidenced by “μιν κρύψασα” – 174). Ultimately, Gaia was the mastermind, and Kronos was only there to do the dirty work. However, even though this μῆτις did not originate with him, it is likely attributed to him because it could not have been actualized without his action. Nevertheless, this instance of Kronos’ involvement with μῆτις is significant because it allows him to set himself up in a position in which he is able to employ his own, original μῆτις: his plan to swallow his children.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 501-502.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 463-465.

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he decides to swallow his children.<sup>48</sup> Although there is not much evidence that explicitly alerts the reader to the fact that Kronos is employing μήτις – aside from the fact that he is referred to as Κρόνος ἀγκυλομήτης a few lines later in Rhea’s entreaty<sup>49</sup> – there is one indicator that immediately catches the attention of the careful reader. While Kronos is waiting for his children to be born, he is described as δοκεύων (keeping a close watch).<sup>50</sup> This is the same action that Nestor told Antilochus would be necessary for his μήτις to succeed.<sup>51</sup> However, Kronos’ μήτις only works for a short time before he himself is conquered by the μήτις of another group of people: Rhea, Gaia, Ouranos, and Zeus. Their μήτις, which takes the form of replacing Zeus with a rock wrapped in swaddling clothes,<sup>52</sup> is explicitly illustrated in the text when Gaia begs her parents to “μήτιν συμφρόσσασθαι” (contrive a μήτις with her).<sup>53</sup> Gaia and Zeus’ μήτιες are also illustrated when Kronos is said to have been δολωθείς (beguiled) by Gaia’s promptings and conquered τέχνησι βίηφι τε (by craft/skill and force) of Zeus.<sup>54</sup>

Having examined the occurrences of μήτις in the story of Kronos, it is now necessary to briefly examine its occurrences in the stories of Prometheus.<sup>55</sup> In Hesiod, there are two slightly

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 467.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 473.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. 466.

<sup>51</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, 23.325

<sup>52</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony*, 485-486.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. 471.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. 494, 496.

<sup>55</sup> It is important to note that Prometheus’ name is intimately etymologically related to the noun meaning “foresight” – προμήθεια (Montanari, *Dictionary of Ancient Greek*, 1776) – illustrating just how full of μήτις Prometheus is by nature (Detienne and Vernant, *Cunning Intelligence*, 93). Also, while Prometheus is described as being ἀγκυλομήτης later in the story (546), he is first introduced as being ποικίλος, αἰολόμητις, and ποικιλόβουλος (511, 521), each of which

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different stories involving Prometheus: a longer version in the *Theogony* in which he supposedly does not successfully trick Zeus but still achieves the desired result of his trickery<sup>56</sup> and a shorter version in the *Works and Days* in which he is said to successfully trick Zeus.<sup>57</sup> Because the *Theogony* includes two separate instances of Kronos' cunning actions, the story given in the *Theogony* will be the primary text discussed in this section.

The story of Prometheus' acts of μῆτις begins with him laying out two separate portions of a sacrifice for Zeus with the goal of deceiving him. In one portion, the majority of the rich, tasty, fattened has been hidden, and in the other a thin layer of fat has been wrapped around the bare bones of the sacrificial victim.<sup>58</sup> Although Zeus supposedly recognizes this trick, he still chooses the portion which Prometheus wanted him to choose – the bones wrapped in fat. Upon recognizing Prometheus' δολία τέχνη (another red flag alerting the reader to Prometheus' use of μῆτις), Zeus immediately becomes angry (χῶσατο).<sup>59</sup> To

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Detienne and Vernant convincingly argue to be synonyms for πολύμητις, the primary epithet of Odysseus in Homer (Detienne and Vernant, *Cunning Intelligence*, 18). Therefore, the attentive reader should be prepared to view Prometheus in a similar way to Odysseus – the man who is equal to Zeus in μῆτις (*Iliad*, 2.169, 10.137).

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. 529-616. This apparent problem in the story of Prometheus in the *Theogony* is only slightly lessened by taking ἐξαπαφίσκων (337) as a conative, present tense participle – “trying to deceive/cheat.” However, even when the participle is rendered in this way, the reader is still forced to reconcile the claim that Prometheus did not deceive Zeus (550-551) with the fact that Zeus chose the portion that Prometheus wanted him to choose, thereby guaranteeing man the better portion for all time (553-557), cf. West, *Hesiod Theogony*, 322.

<sup>57</sup> Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 47-105. All quotations of the *Works and Days* reference the Greek text of Verdenius, W. J., *A Commentary on Hesiod: Works and Days*, vv. 1-382 (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1985).

<sup>58</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony*, 538-541.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 553-555. Note that this is the exact same reaction that Menelaus has upon realizing the δόλος of Antilochus (*Il.* 23.567).

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punish mankind, the group on whose behalf Prometheus was evidently working, Zeus withholds fire from them<sup>60</sup> – a clever, foresightful action that would prohibit them from being able to enjoy the rich, fatty portions of future sacrifices won for them by Prometheus.<sup>61</sup>

However, Prometheus steals fire from Zeus and brings it back to mortals, evidently foiling the plan of Zeus. In response to this sly act of μήτις, Zeus, both μητίετα (characterized by μήτις)<sup>62</sup> and μητιόεις (full of μήτις),<sup>63</sup> decides to give a μέγα πῆμα (great bane) to Prometheus and mankind.<sup>64</sup> For mankind he fashions woman, a κακόν and δόλον to humans<sup>65</sup> – language that should call to mind Kronos’ act of μήτις in his castration of Ouranos. Likewise, for Prometheus he connives an equally terrible punishment; he shackles him with unbreakable bonds (άλυκτοπέδησι), drives a column through his midsection, and sends a terrible eagle to eat daily his immortal liver that always grows back.<sup>66</sup> These punishments are ones which not even ποικίλος, αἰολόμητις, and ποικιλόβουλος Prometheus could escape – ones that could only be contrived by one whose μήτις is so superior that οὐκ ἔστι κλέψαι νόον οὐδὲ παρελθεῖν (it is not possible to cheat or pass beyond his mind).<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid. 563; Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 50.

<sup>61</sup> Paley, F. A., *The Epics of Hesiod: With an English Commentary* (England, Whittaker: 1861), 12.

<sup>62</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony*, 520.

<sup>63</sup> Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 51.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. 56.

<sup>65</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony*, 570, 589.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. 521-525.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. 613.

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### **Defining Ἀγκυλομήτης**

As mentioned above, ἀγκυλομήτης is a compound of two Greek words: the adjective ἀγκύλος, meaning “curved” or “bent,” and the noun μῆτις, which has thoroughly been discussed throughout the entirety of the paper.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, ἀγκυλομήτης refers to someone who has “curved/bent” μῆτις. However, scholars rarely define the word in this way. In their often brief examinations of this epithet, scholars have been content to define ἀγκυλομήτης in various ways, such as “crooked of counsel,” “one who possesses wily cunning,” or “one who thinks crooked thoughts.”<sup>69</sup> Unfortunately, these definitions fail to grasp the full meaning of the word, either insinuating too little or too much.

For example, Detienne and Vernant’s definition looks almost no different from their definitions of the word μῆτις throughout their work, and it does not even touch on the implied meaning of the “curved/bent” aspect of the word. On the other end of the spectrum, Montanari and Beekes’ definitions, aside from the fact that they oversimplify μῆτις to mean “counsel” and “thoughts,” seem to attribute a sense of evil, immorality, or injustice to the word. In defense of such a view, Verdenius argues that the ἀγκύλος stem of ἀγκυλομήτης “seems to be based on the analogy of σκολιός.”<sup>70</sup> However, West believes that this argument holds no weight, saying, “While σκολιός might be used of a wicked or unjust device, ἀγκύλος in such a sense cannot be paralleled earlier than Lycophron (344

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<sup>68</sup> Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*, vol.1, 12.

<sup>69</sup> Montanari, *Dictionary of Ancient Greek*, 14; Detienne and Vernant, *Cunning Intelligence*, 63; Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*, vol. 1, 12.

<sup>70</sup> Verdenius, *A Commentary on Hesiod*, 44. Σκολιός is an adjective that means curved/bent/twisted, and it can be used metaphorically to mean unjust or wicked.

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[BCE]).<sup>71</sup> It is also worth noting that both Chantraine and Frisk claim the relation of ἀγκύλος and σκολιός to be suspect.<sup>72</sup> While these arguments are somewhat convincing from a linguistic point of view, the argument made from a study of thematic usage is stronger. Recall that μήτις in and of itself is morally ambivalent and can be used “to contrive both good and evil.”<sup>73</sup> Therefore, to claim that “crooked/bent μήτις” is μήτις that is morally crooked/bent is to disregard the nature of μήτις itself. Comparing the μήτις employed by Kronos and Prometheus with the actions of Zeus further solidifies this point.

Recall the main actions of Kronos in the *Theogony*. While it is true that Kronos carried out a δολιὴν κακὴν τε τέχνην against his father,<sup>74</sup> this was only because Ouranos was the first to commit a shameful deed.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, Zeus fashions a κακὸν for mankind in response to Prometheus’ actions, which, as discussed below, may not be evil at all.<sup>76</sup> Both deities respond through μήτις with a κακὸν, but only one of them is described as ἀγκυλομήτης; the other is μητίετα and μητιόεις. In addition, while one might think that Kronos’ swallowing of his children to prevent an unwanted, fated succession sets him apart from one who possesses pure, unadulterated μήτις, this is simply not correct. Zeus himself swallowed his wife Μῆτις, the personified deity of μήτις, to prevent this same sort of unwanted, fated

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<sup>71</sup> West, *Hesiod Theogony*, 158.

<sup>72</sup> Pierre Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque: histoire des mots* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1999), 1013; Hjalmar Frisk, *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Indogermanische Bibliothek, 2, Reihe: Wörterbücher (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1954), 11.

<sup>73</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony*, 900. Also recall that the recipients of μήτις (cf. Menelaus and Polyphemus) often view “regular” (non-crooked/bent) μήτις as evil or unjust.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. 160.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. 172.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. 570.

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succession, and he did so by δόλος and αἰμυλίοισι λόγοισιν (trickery and wily words) – a clear reference to μήτις.<sup>77</sup>

One might reasonably object to this point, arguing that Zeus' situation is different because he was advised by Gaia and Ouranos to swallow his wife,<sup>78</sup> while Kronos, although being warned of the imminent succession by Gaia and Ouranos, was not advised to swallow his children.<sup>79</sup> However, such a statement gives too much moral authority to Gaia and Ouranos. Recall that Kronos' first use of μήτις was actually Gaia's own plan which she praised Kronos for being brave enough to fulfill.<sup>80</sup> Also recall that when Rhea goes to Gaia and Ouranos and asks them to contrive a μήτις with her to repay Kronos for swallowing his children, she cites Kronos' castration of his father as one of the things for which he must be punished, and Gaia agrees.<sup>81</sup> With the questionable character of Gaia in mind, why should the fact that she advises Zeus to swallow his wife somehow make his deed more permissible than Kronos'?

It is also important to note that Zeus' swallowing of Μήτις is not the only instance of him taking matters into his own hands and forcing his own will upon another to keep his power. Here, the story of Thetis comes to mind. In order to prevent Thetis from bearing a son that would be stronger than him, Zeus forces her to marry Peleus, a thing which causes her, in her own words, to have endured the most "wretched woes" of any of the

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid. 886-891.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. 892-894.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. 463-465.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. 160-173.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. 471-474.



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Olympian goddesses.<sup>82</sup> However, in spite of all these things, Zeus is never called ἀγκυλομήτης.

Therefore, the only other action that Kronos does that is not directly paralleled by Zeus is his shackling of his siblings to keep sole power for himself, a deed that is only briefly indirectly mentioned for two lines – an extremely unlikely reason for Kronos to receive the epithet ἀγκυλομήτης.<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, in the stories of Prometheus, Prometheus' actions are never classified as evil, but Zeus' response is, specifically his creation of woman.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, while Prometheus' motives for trying to trick Zeus have been hotly debated, some have argued that Prometheus was acting on behalf of man in order to secure the choice parts of the sacrifice for them and in bringing fire back to them.<sup>85</sup> If this is the case, then Prometheus is actually a type of beneficent philanthropist for humankind. Here too, just as with the story of Kronos, it is difficult to find any elements of evil or injustice that set the μῆτις of Kronos and Prometheus apart from other uses of μῆτις.

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<sup>82</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, 18.429-431. For background on the mythological tradition surrounding Thetis, Zeus, and their son that could have been, see Pindar, *Isthmia*, 8.26a-36a.

<sup>83</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony*, 501-502.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.* 570.

<sup>85</sup> Although such a position makes sense of the fact that Zeus' first punishments are given to humankind, exactly why Prometheus tries to deceive Zeus on behalf of mankind has puzzled scholars (West, *Hesiod Theogony*, 319). Hesiod gives no apparent reason in either of his works, but Lamberton posits that Prometheus is acting as a philanthropist for mankind, possibly with the goal of trying to finally let them win one battle over the gods – the beings who, in Hesiod, often do nothing beneficial for humans; cf. Robert Lamberton, *Hesiod* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 92-93, 100. It is also worth noting that Prometheus is described as ἀκάκητος (614), a word which Paley has chosen to translate as "beneficent" (Paley, *The Epics of Hesiod*, 217). However, West argues that the meaning of the word is unknown (West, *Hesiod Theogony*, 336).

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With these comparisons in mind, along with the similar points made in the discussion of the nature of Antilochus' and Odysseus' μήτις, it should be extremely apparent that "crooked/bent μήτις" does not entail any moral notions that are not also connoted by μήτις. Therefore, the obvious question remains: What does it mean for someone to have "crooked/bent μήτις?" The answer to this question can be discovered through a slightly deeper look into the etymology of the adjective ἀγκύλος.

While ἀγκύλος does mean "bent/curved," many of its denominatives refer to a distinct type of bending. For example, ἀγκύλλω means "to bend backwards," ἀγκύλωμα refers to a loop, and ἀγκύλη can refer to a strap or a loop.<sup>86</sup> Each of these words refers to a type of bending that is not simply slightly angled or crooked; rather, the bending is totally backwards – in the latter two examples forming a type of circular shape, and in the first example a shape similar to a semi-circle, which, if its curved course is followed and extended, would point back to the object's point of origin.

Such an idea of curvature that points back to a point of origin can be metaphorically translated into the idea of backfiring or rebounding. When this metaphor is applied to μήτις, the meaning of ἀγκυλομήτης becomes clear. Ultimately, someone who is ἀγκυλομήτης is one who is characterized by a μήτις that works before severely backfiring or rebounding – just like a boomerang.<sup>87</sup> Therefore, one who is ἀγκυλομήτης can only

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<sup>86</sup> Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*, vol. 1, 12.

<sup>87</sup> It is important to give credit for this idea to Detienne and Vernant. While they never argue that ἀγκυλομήτης has anything to do with a μήτις that backfires, they do state that Prometheus' μήτις "recoils against him in the end" (Detienne and Vernant, *Cunning Intelligence*, 18). It was this statement that sparked this paper's take on the

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be someone who is specifically known for both prevailing and being conquered through the use of μῆτις. Fittingly enough, there are only two characters in the Homeric and Hesiodic Corpora who fit this definition to the tee: Kronos and Prometheus.

This recoiling aspect of Kronos' μῆτις is plainly seen in the two stories for which he is best known: the castration of his father, in which his μῆτις works for long enough to become king of the gods, and his failure to withstand being overthrown by the μῆτις of Rhea, Gaia, and Ouranos and Zeus. In fact, Hesiod explicitly states that Kronos is overthrown "Διὸς μεγάλου διὰ βουλᾶς" (by the counsels of great Zeus) – counsels which, as illustrated above, involve μῆτις.<sup>88</sup> In the same way, Prometheus' μῆτις works first in that he is able to briefly trick Zeus into making a choice beneficial to mankind and second in that he successfully steals fire out from under Zeus' proverbial nose. However, he too, like Kronos, is conquered by the μῆτις of the supreme νόος of Zeus.<sup>89</sup> Therefore, the only true difference between the one who is ἀγκυλομήτης and the one who possesses μῆτις is that the ἀγκυλομήτης one's μῆτις will fail, and he, in turn, will be conquered by μῆτις.

### **Conclusion**

Having now come full circle,<sup>90</sup> a recap of the main points of the paper will doubtless be beneficial. First, μῆτις was shown to

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meaning of ἀγκυλομήτης – a definition, to my knowledge, found nowhere else in scholarship.

<sup>88</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony*, 465. It is only fitting that one of the few times that Zeus is mentioned as being μητιόεις in Hesiod appears at his introduction into the story of the overthrow of Kronos (457).

<sup>89</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony*, 613.

<sup>90</sup> Pun intended.

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mean far more than “skill or craft” or “wisdom, prudence, or capability.”<sup>91</sup> As is evident in the speech of Nestor, Antilochus’ race, and Odysseus’ encounter with Polyphemus, μήτις encapsulates not only these ideas, but also those of forethought, patience, and δόλος. Second, through an examination of these same episodes, and later those involving Prometheus and Kronos, it was made clear that μήτις has no inherent moral bent; it is morally ambivalent. Next, having established this aspect of μήτις, a few of the most common definitions of ἀγκυλομήτης were examined, critiqued, and ultimately shown to be based on a false presumption. Finally, through a brief examination of the etymology of ἀγκυλομήτης as well as the successes and failures of Kronos and Prometheus, the definition of ἀγκυλομήτης was made clear: one who is ἀγκυλομήτης is one who is characterized by μήτις that backfires.

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<sup>91</sup> Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*, vol. 2, 948-949; Montanari, *Dictionary of Ancient Greek*, 1344.

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