Dialogue 24. The Hero as savior.
The key word here is the noun *sōtēr* ‘savior’; its derivative is *sōtēria* ‘safety, salvation’. Earlier we saw the verb *sōzein* ‘save; be a sōtēr for someone’ (either by ‘bringing to safety’ or, mystically, by ‘bringing back to life’).

A) Plato Republic (10.621b-c1): Socrates is quoted as saying, with reference to the “Myth of Er”: *kai ho muthos esōtē and the myth was saved*.

A6. Aristotle muses about becoming ever more solitary in old age and becoming ever more fond of muthos (fr. 668 ed. Rose, via “Demetrius” 144: *hosōi gar autitēs kai monētēs eimi, philomuthoterōs gégeōn*).

A7. Patterns of myth/ritual symbiosis can be seen most clearly in small-scale societies, e.g. the Yukuna: we will return to this topic towards the end of this dialogue.

B) Iliad XVIII 202-214:
But Achilles dear to Zeus arose, and Athena flung her tasseled aegis round his strong shoulders; she crowned his head with a halo of golden cloud from which she kindled a glow of gleaming fire. As the smoke that goes up into heaven from some city that is being beleaguered on an island far out at sea - all day long do men sally from the city and fight their hardest, and at the going down of the sun the line of beacon fires blazes forth, flaring high for those that dwell near them to behold, if so be that they may come with their ships and save them - even so did the light flare from the head of Achilles.

C) Iliad XIX 372-379:
He [Achilles] slung the silver-studded sword of bronze about his shoulders, and then took up the shield so great and strong that shone afar with a splendor as of the moon. As the light seen by sailors from out at sea [pontos], when men have lit a fire in their homestead high up among the mountains, but the sailors are carried out to sea [pontos] by wind and storm far from the haven where they would be - even so did the gleam of Achilles’ wondrous shield strike up into the heavens.

D1. Notice that the reflection of light from the surface of the bronze Shield projects an image of salvation: it is the sēma ‘tomb’ of the hero Achilles, which is like a lighthouse. This sēma is situated on the Hellespont.

D2. The word *Hellēspontos* means ‘the crossing of Hellē’.

D3. For the *effect of light reflected by bronze*, compare the bronze relief sculpture (the sculptor was St. Gaudens) showing the faces of soldiers of an all-black regiment marching to their death in 1863; their officer, Col. Robert Gould Shaw (a Harvard graduate) died with them; their story is told in the film Glory. You can find the relief sculpture in front of the statehouse on Beacon Hill in Boston. Try to see it at the last light of the sunset of the summer solstice.

E) Herodotus 7.189:
The Persian fleet put to sea and reached the beach of the Magnesian land, between the polis of Kasthanaia and the headland of Sepias. The first ships to arrive moored close to land, with the others after them at anchor; since the beach was not large, they lay at anchor in rows eight ships deep out into the sea [pontos]. Thus they spent the night, but at dawn out of a clear and windless sky a storm descended upon them and the sea began to boil. A strong east wind blew, which the people living in those parts call *Hellespontēs*. Those who felt the wind rising or had proper mooring dragged their ships up on shore ahead of the storm and so survived with their ships. But the wind carried those ships caught out in the open against the rocks called the Ovens at Pelion or onto the beach. Some ships were wrecked on the Sepian headland, others were cast ashore at the polis of Meliboa or at Kasthanaia. The storm was indeed unbearable... There was no counting how many grain-ships and other vessels were destroyed... The storm lasted three days. Finally the Magi made offerings and cast spells upon the wind, sacrificing also to Thetis and the Nereids. Thus they made the wind stop on the fourth day, or perhaps it died down on its own. *They sacrificed to Thetis after hearing from the Ionians the story that it was at this place that Peleus had abducted her, and that all the headland of Sepias belonged to her and to the other Nereids.*

E1. Sepias means “the place of the sepia.” It was here, says the tradition, that Peleus and Thetis conceived Achilles.

F) Pindar Pythian 8.35ff
[35] For you follow, at wrestling matches, in the footsteps of your mother’s brothers. You did Theognetos proud, the one in the Olympics. Also Kleitomakhos, whose victory at the Isthmians gave proof to the boldness of his limbs.
Making great the house of the Meidulidai, you win as a prize the words that once the son of Oikles said |\textit{ainissomai}|, when he saw |\textit{theaomai}| the Sons holding their ground at Thebes, by the power of the spear, at the time when they, the Epigonoi, had come from Argos, on the second expedition. Thus he spoke about those who fought: |\textit{lêma}| “By inherited nature, the noble purpose |\textit{pateres}| shines forth from fathers to sons. I can see |\textit{saphes}| Alkmaion, wielding the patterned snake on his blazing shield, in the forefront of the gates of Kadmos.”

We see here that the heroes in the age of heroes are stylized ancestors for the post-heroic age. If a man as an athlete in the post-heroic age ‘did his ancestors proud’, he also did the heroes of the heroic age proud. That is the logic of hero cult as a stylized form of ancestor worship.

G) Pindar \textit{Pythian} 8.95ff

[95] Creatures of a day. What is a someone, what is a no one? Man is the dream of a shade. But when the brightness given by Zeus comes, there is at hand the shining light of men, and the life-force |\textit{aiôn}| gives pleasure. Aigina! Philê Mother! Make an armada of freedom for this \textit{polis} as you bring it back to light and life, back to Zeus! May Aiakos the Ruler be there. So also Peleus. And noble Telamon. And especially Achilles.

For a detailed analysis of focus passages A and B, see the Heroes website: go to Texts and then go to: G. Nagy, “Refractions of Epic Vision in Aeschylus’ \textit{Seven Against Thebes} and Pindar’s \textit{Pythian} 8.”

What is a \textit{skia} in Homer?

How is it related to \textit{psukhê}?

Does the translation ‘of’ in ‘dream of a shade’ mark a subjective or objective genitive?

Note that \textit{aiôn} means both ‘life force’ and ‘eon.’

As we see from my analysis in the paper that I cited, successful persons in the post-heroic age are imagined positively as if they were “dreamed” by their ancestors in the heroic age.

Such positive “dreaming” is matched by a sinister negative “dreaming” when the hero is angry, as we see in focus passages C and D:

H) Aeschylus \textit{Seven} 709-711... Yes, it |\textit{daimôn}| boiled over with the curses |\textit{kateugmata}, from \textit{eukhomai}| of Oedipus! True are the visions |\textit{opsis} plural| of apparitions-in-dreams |\textit{en-hupnia}, - visions of dividing the father’s property.

This passage C is thematically the reverse of A and B.

There was a comedy by Aristophanes called \textit{The Heroes} where the chorus of heroes at the beginning says the equivalent of “he knows when you’ve been bad or good, so be good for goodness’ sake.”

I) Aeschylus \textit{Seven} 720ff... I shudder in dread of the goddess who destroys dynasties. She is not like other gods. She is the all-truthful |\textit{pan-alêthês}| seer |\textit{mantis}| of evils, the Fury |\textit{Erinys}| of a father’s cursing |\textit{eukhomai}|. [725] She is poised to bring to fulfillment |\textit{telos}| the curses |\textit{kat-arai}|, full of passion |\textit{thumos}|, that came from Oedipus, the one whose mind |\textit{phrên}| was thrown off course. This discord |\textit{eris}|, destroyer of his children, is pressing ahead.

The vision of the Furies

The ‘Fury [\textit{Erinys}] of a father’s cursing [\textit{eukhomai}];’ the ‘of’ can be subjective.

For a parallel theme of positive ancestral dreaming in modern poetry, consider this:

J) selections from Walt Whitman, \textit{Crossing Brooklyn Ferry} (1892):

I am with you, you men and women of a generation, or ever so many
generations hence,
Just as you feel when you look on the river and sky, so I felt,
Just as any of you is one of a living crowd, I was one of a crowd,
Just as you are refresh’d by the gladness of the river and the bright flow, I
was refresh’d,
Just as you stand and lean on the rail, yet hurry with the swift current, I
stood yet was hurried

... I too and many a time crossed the river of old

... Closer yet I approach you,
What thought you have of me now, I had as much of you - I laid in my
stores in advance,
I consider’d long and seriously of you before you were born.

... Who knows, for all the distance, but I am as good as looking at you now, for
all you cannot see me?

For a parody, consider this:
K) Allen Ginsberg "A Supermarket in California"

What thoughts I have of you tonight, Walt Whitman, for I walked
down the sidestreets under the trees with a headache self-conscious looking at the full moon
In my hungry fatigue, and shopping for images, I went into the neon
fruit supermarket, dreaming of your enumerations!
What peaches and what penumbras! Whole families shopping at
night! Aisles full of husbands! Wives in the avocados, babies in the tomatoes!
--and you, García Lorca, what were you doing down by the watermelons?
I saw you, Walt Whitman, childless, lonely old grubber, poking
among the meats in the refrigerator and eyeing the grocery boys.
I heard you asking questions of each: Who killed the pork chops?
What price bananas? Are you my Angel?
I wandered in and out of the brilliant stacks of cans following you,
and followed in my imagination by the store detective.
We strode down the open corridors together in our solitary fancy
tasting artichokes, possessing every frozen delicacy, and never passing the cashier.
Where are we going, Walt Whitman? The doors close in an hour.
Which way does your beard point tonight?
(I touch your book and dream of our odyssey in the supermarket and feel absurd.)
Will we walk all night through solitary streets? The trees add shade to shade, lights out in the houses, we'll both be
lonely.
Will we stroll dreaming of the lost America of love past blue automobiles in driveways, home to our silent cottage?
Ah, dear father, graybeard, lonely old courage-teacher, what America
did you have when Charon quit poling his ferry and you got out on a
smoking bank and stood watching the boat disappear on the black waters of
Lethe?

Berkeley, 1955

L) from Odyssey v 332-353: When he [Odysseus] was in this plight, Ino daughter of Kadmos, also called Leukothea, saw
him. She had formerly been a mere mortal, but had been since raised to the rank of a marine goddess. Seeing in what
great distress Odysseus now was, she had compassion upon him, and, rising like a sea-gull from the waves, took her seat upon the raft. "My poor good man," said she, "... swim to the Phaeacian coast where better luck awaits you. And here, take my veil and put it round your chest; it is enchanted, and you can come to no harm so long as you wear it. As soon as you touch land take it off, throw it back as far as you can into the sea, and then go away again." With these words she took off her veil and gave it him. Then she dived down again like a sea-gull and vanished beneath the seething dark waters.

M) again, from Plato Phaedo (89b):
Now he had a way of playing with my hair, and then he smoothed my head, and pressed the hair upon my neck, and said: Tomorrow, Phaedo, I suppose that these fair locks of yours will be severed. Yes, Socrates, I suppose that they will, I replied. Not so if you will take my advice. What shall I do with them? I said. Today, he replied, and not tomorrow, if this argument dies and cannot be brought to life again by us, you and I will both shave our locks.

N) again, from Plato Phaedo (117e and following):
... then he lay on his back, according to the directions, and the man who gave him the poison now and then looked at his feet and legs; and after a while he pressed his foot hard and asked him if he could feel; and he said, no; and then his leg, and so upwards and upwards, and showed us that he was cold and stiff. And he felt them himself, and said: When the poison reaches the heart, that will be the end. He was beginning to grow cold about the groin, when he uncovered his face, for he had covered himself up, and said (they were his last words) - he said: Crito, I owe the sacrifice of a rooster to Asklepios: will you remember to pay the debt? The debt shall be paid, said Crito: is there anything else? There was no answer to this question; but in a minute or two a movement was heard, and the attendants uncovered him; his eyes were set, and Crito closed his eyes and mouth. Such was the end, Echecrates, of our friend, whom I may truly call the wisest, and most just, and best of all the men whom I have ever known.

11. A "hero" not yet mentioned: Alexander the Great.
12. Hegel said: Achilles, the ideal youth of poetry, commences the Greek achievement; Alexander, the ideal youth of reality, concludes it.
13. Alexander kept a master copy of the Iliad and a dagger under his "pillow" [= headrest]; the dagger marks him as the chief priest of the Macedonians. What is the symbolism of the Iliad under his headrest?
14. Alexander claims descent from Achilles, on his mother's side; he sacrifices at the sôma of Achilles at Troy; Alexander's own tomb is called the sôma.
15. Alexander Romance, 3rd century of our era; a key figure is Nektanebo II, the last Egyptian pharaoh, who in real life fled Egypt in 343. In the narrative of the Alexander Romance, Nektanebo and not Philip of Macedon is the real father of Alexander. Since the pharaoh is the reincarnation of the god Ammon, who is the "Zeus" of the Egyptians, Alexander is the son of the Egyptian Zeus in terms of the Alexander Romance.
15. Menander the Rhetorician reports: Alexander is to be addressed as son of Zeus.
16. In the Alexander Romance, birds at the edge of the earth say to him: "Alexander, stop standing up to the gods and go back to your palace at home and stop striving to ascend the road to the heavens." See Passage I and J.

O) One is no longer at home anywhere, so in the end one longs to be back where one can somehow be at home because it is the only place where one would wish to be at home: and that is the world of Greece.—Friedrich Nietzsche.

P) In the Alexander Romance, birds at the edge of the earth say to him: "Alexander, stop standing up to the gods and go back to your palace at home and stop striving to ascend the road to the heavens." When he reaches the Island of the Blessed, Alexander sees his own obelisk in a dream (the obelisk marks his starting point, at "home" in Alexandria) and a figure with gleaming eyes at the Island of the Blessed (this figure marks the extremity of his quest): Alexander will reach the status of a god, will have an oikos in Alexandria, as a nekros. J2. Water of life myth in Alexander Romance.
J3. When he reaches the Island of the Blessed, Alexander sees his own obelisk in a dream (the obelisk marks his starting point, at "home" in Alexandria) and a figure with gleaming eyes at the Island of the Blessed (this figure marks the extremity of his quest): Alexander will reach the status of a god, will have an oikos in Alexandria, as a nekros. There is no place like home. See again Passages I and J.
J4. Let us return to the concept of the Yukuna, *myth. For this society, myth *is* their identity. Without this identity, there is no point in being a Yukuna.

Q) In Modern Greek folklore, the Daughter of Alexander, the surviving Nereid of modern times, has the habit of surfacing for air on the occasion of sea-storms. When asked, she will always tell the pilot of a ship beset by the storm: zêi kai basileuei kai ton kosmon kurieuei. 'He lives and reigns and rules the cosmos.' So long as the concept of the hero is alive, the word is alive, and vice versa.