

What impression is given of Aeneas as a man and as a leader in Books 1-6 of "The Aeneid"? How similar is he to Odysseus?

To analyse the character of Aeneas in comparison to the character of Odysseus we must first recognise that they have both been sent away from home, Aeneas by force after the sack of Troy and Odysseus to fight from the Greek side. To analyse them as leaders and **"good men"** we must look at their feats and their strengths as well as recognising their flaws as people and warriors. Both characters are extremely respected as heroes. Virgil presents us with the man that founded the greatest empire of all, the Roman Empire. Odysseus had the idea of the Trojan horse, without which the Greeks would not have won the war. Both are primarily good men who serve their countries well. I found though, that they do this in two very different ways. Odysseus' nostos and Aeneas search for a new home.

Scholars continue to disagree on whether or not Aeneas is presented as a good soldier, although the question itself is certainly far from black and white, complicated by the culturally relative nature of terms such as **"conflict"** and **"courage"**, as well as by the rather oblique definition that **"good"** itself holds. Odysseus respectively. I will argue that Aeneas meets the criteria set by neither model and that, ultimately, he is an emotionally unstable, morally dubious and even an incompetent military leader. However, the very fact that he is the protagonist needs to be stressed: his character is necessarily sympathetic, dynamic and intricate. My intention is not to assert that Aeneas is a villain or a coward; he is quite obviously neither of these things and such an interpretation of the Aeneid, a text rich and ambiguous in meaning, would be nothing short of reductive. And in this way he must, and does, have some positive, somewhat redeeming features. Virgil created in Aeneas a new type of Stoic hero, a point that is perhaps most evident in Book Four when Aeneas leaves Carthage. His speech to Dido is indicative of his determination to suffer both silently, Aeneas did not move his eyes and struggled to fight down the anguish in his heart.", (Book 4) and willing, **"Do not go on causing distress to yourself and to me by these complaints. It is not by my own will that I still search for Italy."** (Book 4)

Emotional restraint and acquiescence in regard to one's own fortunes and torment is intrinsic to a Roman conception of a role model and leader. Equally, the presentation of Aeneas in Book Four can be seen to parallel that of Odysseus in Book Nineteen of the Odyssey, where the reader is told that, in spite of his wife's tears, the hero's **"eyes were steady"**. Aeneas, then, does conform to both the Roman and Homeric paradigms in his ability to endure the sufferings that Fate has allotted him. And yet his chief characteristic is not his endurance, as is the case with Odysseus, but rather his pietas, a quality essential for a Roman warrior. Time and time again in the Aeneid he is referred to as pious Aeneas, **"famous for his devotion"** (Book 6), so the Sibyl states. This devotion is threefold in that it is not only religious and extends to both his family and to his duty as **"Father"** of Rome. The latter of these has already been demonstrated by his separation from

Dido, in which he subordinates his personal wishes in order to fulfil his destiny, while one can see the first two aspects of this pietas at work quite clearly in Book Five, in which the funeral games, **"held in honour of the divine father of Aeneas"** (Book 5), combine a celebration of the familial and of the holy.

Like the **"Father"** figure that Aeneas, by fate takes on, Odysseus has great affection for his men. When he loses some of his men at Ismarus he tells us how they sailed **on "with heavy hearts, grieving for the loss of our companions"**. As well as this, when all the other ships are lost to the Laestragonians, he states, **"We lay on the beach for two days and nights, utterly exhausted and eating our hearts out with grief"**. Odysseus risks his life for them. In book 10 when the first half of his men are transformed into pigs by Circe, he goes alone to rescue them. He goes blind into this plan without any forward planning until Hermes helps him. He is so determined to help that he tells an interfering Eurylochus, **"I shall go. I have absolutely no choice."** He never abandons his men. In Book 9 when his men eat the fruit of the Locus they lose all hope and want for home. Odysseus literally drags them and ties them to benches on the ship so that they cannot escape. In the cave of the Cyclops, after they have blinded the monster, Odysseus ties all of his men to the bellies of rams and they escape leaving him, he is alone and has nobody to tie him on. He does not care because he thinks about his men before he acts as does Aeneas. In this respect they are very similar except Aeneas makes more mistakes than Odysseus does and loses his wife. As a father figure, like Aeneas, Odysseus is very well respected by his men. Near the Cyclops the men divide the goats between the ships. They give nine to all of the ships and ten to Odysseus' alone as a sign of their respect for him as their leader.

Yet this pietas, as much as it appears to pervade Virgil's characterisation of the leader, might be called into question. Aeneas, on frequent occasions, seems reluctant to implement himself and also uncertain as to the rewards it offers. In Book Five the poet externalises Aeneas' thoughts as he wonders **"whether he should forget about his destiny and settle in the fields of Sicily"** (Book 5), and throughout the first half of the poem he needs to be constantly prompted to continue in his search for his homeland: by his wife's shade in Book Two, his father's shade in Book Five, and twice by Mercury in Book Four. Mercury wasted no time, **"So now you are laying foundations for the high towers of Carthage and building a splendid city to please your wife? Have you entirely forgotten your own kingdom and your own destiny?"** (Book 4).

These temptations are presented to Odysseus throughout **"The Odyssey"** but he does not give into temptation whereas Aeneas marries Dido, falls in love with her. Odysseus has a very strict work ethic, which clearly shows his devotion to Ithaca. He is offered immortality by Nymph Calypso if he just stayed with her, but instead the first image that the reader is given of him is knelt on a beach crying for his homeland. He is tempted again by the witch Circe. Odysseus has the weakness of enjoying women. He stayed with Circe for one year before his men reminded him of home. He also stayed with Calypso for seven years. Although we must take into thought that there were reasons why he had to

stay with her. Even through these periods of extreme temptation and immensely beautiful women, Odysseus wants to return home. He is driven by the goddess Athene but she is not the true reason for his passionate longing for Ithaca. Aeneas is different. He no longer longs to go home, he has no home. He does long for his promised citadel but is also a cell for the gods to create a new Empire. Venus' intervention is what points Aeneas towards leaving Dido who he tells, **"I left you against my will"** (Book 6).

Aeneas seems rather less than devoted to his duty at this moment. He is shown to be quite contented in Carthage and it seems unlikely that he would have left its **"sweet"** shores under his own volition. Dido is Aeneas' first serious test, and he seems to give way without a struggle (Book 4), and one may see the character here as close to the antithesis of Odysseus who, in his pig-headed determination to return to Ithaca, even rejects Calypso's offer of immortality. Indeed, Aeneas, **"whose sword was studded with yellow stars of jaspers"** (Book 4) is a picture of decadence. Nor is devotion to duty the only aspect of his pietas that can be found wanting, and as much as Aeneas appears to be a truly devoted son it should be noted that he repeatedly fails to protect his family. When one considers those personages in the poem that could be seen as intimate with Aeneas it must be realised that virtually none survive. Cruesa, his first wife, is lost at Troy; Dido, debatably his second, commits suicide and Anchises, his father, dies in the port at Drepanum. Only his son and heir, Ascanius, is still standing at the end of Book Twelve. Of course, it may be argued that the hero is culpable for not a single one of these deaths were it not for the fact that, with the exception of Anchises, Aeneas readily confesses to his personal failure in the role of warrior-protector. For instance, he admits to being **"confused"** and **"robbed"** of his **"wits"** when, in Book Two, he quite literally loses his wife, **"I never saw her again. Nor did I look behind me or think of her or realise that she was lost."** (Book 2).

Odysseus is performing an act of duty to himself. Aeneas is carrying to burden of a nation without a home. This difference means that any mistakes that Aeneas makes are taken more seriously. By the end of the poem Odysseus, himself returns home with all his men lost. But he succeeds his nostos. He is still a hero. Aeneas could not have lost many men because he would have no people to found his city with. Odysseus' mistakes are critical to his own nostos. When Aeneas remains at Carthage, his people's fates are at risk. Odysseus has a painful curiosity, which in some cases I am sure contribute to his reputation as **"The master strategist"**. At the Cyclops's cave, even though his men are scared and eager to leave the empty cave, Odysseus makes them stay in hope for guest friendship. This leads many men to be **"dashed against the rocks as if they were puppies"** and being eaten alive by the Cyclops - a big mistake on the part of Odysseus.

Another huge flaw in his character is pride. When Polyphemus is blinded, Odysseus shouts a boast of who he is and where he is from so that the ruined Cyclops can hear. This was a huge mistake because Polyphemus is the son of Poseidon and he prays to his father that Odysseus will never see the shores of Ithaca again which is why his nostos took so long because he had a god against him. As if this is not enough, because of this taunt the Cyclops hurls many boulders into the

sea to sink their ship. A couple nearly hit and sink the ships, this means that Odysseus actually endangers the life of his men whilst caring so much for them, because of his pride.

By his own admission he simply forgets about Cruesa and as a result the encroaching Greek forces slaughter her. It is important to understand that it is impossible to extricate Aeneas the warrior from the various other roles that he fills in the poem, as lover, as husband, as father, and as son. The character is a complex composite in which all these facets become inextricably bound together and as a result his shortcomings as guardian to his family has an impact on his position as a warrior and as a guardian to the citizens of Troy. Once again Aeneas seems to fall short of the Homeric model and it is worth remembering the value which Odysseus places on household, his actions throughout the final section of the Odyssey are motivated by a determination to secure not only his material possessions, but also to protect Penelope and Telemachus from the threat of the Suitors.

However, there are moments in the poem where Aeneas appears as neglectful and ineffectual as a military leader, as he does as on the domestic front. Aeneas is the judge and jury of his own actions and a poignant sense of guilt is infused in this moment of realisation. A Roman warrior is also a moral warrior, and it is the words of Anchises in Book Six, **"you must be the first to show clemency"** (Book 6), that the hero violates when he slays Lucagus and Lausus.

Odysseus often hesitates before acting, because he uses his reason and power of strategy to evaluate things. This patience is one of his most important attributes. This saves him and his men many times and it can be seen best, in my opinion in the disguising of himself, with Athena's help, into a beggar, just waiting for the right time to reveal himself back in Ithaca. Also, his plan to avoid the taunts of the Sirens song is also very effective. He fills up his men's ears with wax and has himself tied up so that he can listen to it without acting on it, therefore saving both his own life and the lives of all his men in this instance. Odysseus is prudent. He takes great care whilst on Circe's island to stop anything going wrong by dividing his men and taking a very active role himself. Also, he deliberately does not tell his men about Scylla so that they are not scared meaning that many less of them are killed than would have been under different circumstances. He is fair and shows this by using lots to decide who performs which duty such as in the cave of the Cyclops and to divide the groups into two on Circe's island. With these lots he clearly shows that he knows his men well. He says, **"The lot fell on the very man that I myself would have chosen"**. This good judgement of character is also clear when Polites **"the one he liked and trusted the most"** is brave enough to knock on Circe's door.

Even though at times Odysseus inevitably does lead his men into danger, Homer does show us that they are argumentative and can be extremely awkward. During the sacking of Ismarus he advises his men to leave before new troops came, **"but my fools of men refuse"**. And he decides not to take the members of his crew into confidence about the bag of winds which means his men, filled with curiosity open it, blowing them far out of course. Another example of Odysseus' men doing what they shouldn't is with Hyperion's cattle, which they eat. Odysseus states

that, **"I am one against many"**. He is a human leader and makes mistakes, as does Aeneas.

Aeneas is a leader devoted to his men, family and gods but he still seeks the glory of a future empire. Although Aeneas has his moment of self-pity during the storm, he does show good leadership qualities when dealing with his men afterwards. As a result, Virgil creates a new and different hero by combining human frailty with human strength. As a Trojan leader, Aeneas respects prophecy and attempts to incorporate the idea of his own destiny into his actions, in spite of emotional impulses that conflict with his fated duties. His ability to accept his destined path despite his unhappiness in doing so makes him a graceful hero and a worthy recipient of the honour and favour the gods bestow upon him. His compassion for the sufferings of others, even in conjunction with a single-minded devotion to his duty, is another aspect of his heroism. Sympathetic to the weariness of others on the journey, he delivers speeches to his fleet to keep the men's spirits high.

Immediately, as Aeneas begins his first speech, Virgil shows Aeneas' human frailty, **"Aeneas' limbs are loosened by chilly fear"** (Book 1). Aeneas is frightened by the storm and is in despair because of his impending death. He regrets not being able to die an honourable and glorious death in battle against Diomedes, a fierce warrior, **"Could I not have fallen on the Trojan fields and have poured out this spirit with your right hand"**. Thus, Aeneas shows a loss of hope because he cannot have a glorious death; instead he must settle for a nameless and pitiful one.

Aeneas' second speech, however, is more uplifting because he tries to revive his men's spirits after the storm. He lists their past obstacles, such as the Scylla and the Cyclops, and puts the storm in a different perspective. These words give his men strength and encouragement to persevere. Aeneas also gives them hope and faith, **"A god will also give an end to these things"**. Aeneas provides his men with the hope that he himself did not possess in the first speech. This ability is an important quality of leadership that

Virgil portrays through Aeneas's second speech. What Aeneas says is not what he feels, **"He controls the deep pain in his heart"**. Aeneas does what is necessary to continue the mission even if it is contrary to his desires. Aeneas thinks more about his men than about himself, thus exemplifying his piety. For the sake of his men, Aeneas feigns hope on his face although he is worried.

With both speeches, Virgil shows important qualities of a leader. Aeneas puts the feelings of his people before his own as every leader should. Aeneas's human frailty allows him to identify with his people; he is not too divine to feel the pain and grief that the rest of Trojans feel. Aeneas keeps his men alive by both feeding their bodies with food and feeding their souls with hope, **"And perhaps one day it will please us to remember even these things"**. By saying these words, Aeneas provides the Trojans with a father figure - exactly what they need in these troubled times. The Trojans need someone who is wiser and in control to guide them through their journey.

Virgil intended Aeneas to be the perfect Roman embodying the most valued personality traits. The Romans greatly valued the personal qualities of a strong devotion to duty, a strong character, and putting the common good before personal gain. Aeneas would therefore exhibit strong leadership qualities from a Roman civilisation's point of view. However, from today's point of view we are most ably allowed to look around his character and compare it to what we class as a **"good"** man and a **"good leader"**. Aeneas and Odysseus are both good leaders. They both succeed in their missions. But Aeneas, in my opinion, goes through more temptations and hardships than Odysseus and has a far grander mission with two gods against him. He is open to make more errors because he is shown as the lesser man, a younger man who has been through less than Odysseus. He does not have to master strategy of Odysseus which makes it difficult for him until he is prompted by the gods. The main difference between these two characters is that Odysseus has the ambition to return home and is merely helped by Athene. Aeneas is pushed and played with by fate and the will of the gods.