

The iliad: analysis of major characters

[Literature](#), [Poem](#)



The Iliad Hector and Achilles were two of the most notable characters in the Iliad. In many aspects of their lives, Hector and Achilles were complete opposites. For example, Hector was a family man whereas Achilles had no family and only cared about himself. Also, Hector went to battle to lead his country while Achilles went for personal reasons. Both men showed distinct opposite characteristics in the book. The following is an analysis of the opposition of Achilles and Hector's characters throughout the Iliad. Two very distinct heroes were portrayed in the Iliad. Hector was the social hero and Achilles, the individual hero. Achilles was a very selfish and greedy person; he seemed to only care about himself. In the Iliad he refused to go fight for the Greeks because Agamemnon, who was the commander and chief of the Greek army, had taken Briseis, a beautiful woman who was given to Achilles as a prize, away from Achilles. At one point in the book, Agamemnon sends Odysseus, Phoenix, and Ajax to apologize and persuade him to help in the fight against Troy. Achilles is so stubborn that even after the men offer him everything he could imagine, he still turns them down. "I cannot imagine Agamemnon, Or any other Greek, persuading me, Not after the thanks I got for fighting this war, Going up against the enemy day after day. It doesn't matter if you stay in camp or fight-In the end, everybody comes out the same (Homer, 60)." By saying this, it is obvious that Achilles will not fight for his country, because he believes he will get nothing in return. In the end, Achilles ends up going to battle only because his friend, cousin, and companion, Patroclus, was killed. Troy was putting up a strong fight to keep hold of Patroclus' body, so Achilles went to battle, which proved how selfish he was. Achilles left for Troy for one reason, revenge on Hector for the

murder of Patroclus. Hector, on the other hand, being the social hero is not in the war for himself, but rather for Troy. He is willing to risk his life for his brother, Paris, who is a part of the reason they are fighting the war, for his family, and for his country. Hector is not concerned with the honor and glory that he will receive if Troy wins, but rather making sure that Troy does win. His family, especially mother, Hecuba and wife, Andromache do not want him fighting. His wife says to him, "Your courage is going to kill you, and you have no feeling left for your little boy or for me, the luckless woman who will soon be your widow. It won't be long before the whole Greek army swarms and kills you. And when they do it will be better for me to sink into the earth (Homer, 52)." Andromache is proving here that in Greek society women are nothing without men. She is so dependent on her husband that having him fight in the war, is driving her insane. Hector may have been selfish for leaving his family, but he is a good leader because he went and fought for Troy rather than staying at home for personal reasons such as Achilles. The next major difference between Hector and Achilles is their views on fate. In Greek culture there is a lot of emphasis on fate. The people believe that everyone eventually will die and no human being can change their fate. In the Iliad, Hector did not think he was going to die, he thought he was going to be the hero. Towards the end of the story, Hector and Achilles battle one on one. It is obvious at this point that their fates are about to be determined, because one man is going to die. The gods know that at this point they cannot change Hector or Achilles' fate, but they do intervene in the fighting. Athena, who is on Achilles' side goes to Hector and pretends to be Deiphobus, Hector's brother and tells him to fight. Hector takes his advice,

but soon realizes it was a trick and Achilles eventually kills him. Long before Achilles left for Troy, his mother came to him and told him his two fates. This is what he believed. " If I stay here and fight, I'll never return home, but my glory will be undying forever. If I return to my home to my dear fatherland my glory is lost but my life will be long, and death that ends all will not catch me soon (Homer, 63)." Achilles believes in his fate, as did all the other Greeks. He knew that if he went to battle he would probably die, and for that reason, he decided not to go. Hector, on the other hand, realized that his fate was the same as Achilles', yet went anyway for he is not as selfish as Achilles and did not need a personal reason to fight. A Greek warrior is said to care about one thing, fame. After a warrior's death, his name is carried on and remembered. Achilles fought for this and because of pride and greed. Hector fought because he knew he had to lead the people of Troy. Achilles had the type of character where if he was going to die in battle, he would want to be remembered. He would want his name to be carried on throughout history. Achilles was greedy and not only wanted to be remembered, but to battle for prizes. He was blind to the impermanence of all these prizes that he cared so much about. He was not afraid of death; he just wanted to be sure his death was righteous so that people would think of him highly after he was gone. Hector, on the other hand may have been more afraid of death than Achilles because he had a family to care for and a country to lead. He was not worried about dying and being remembered, he was worried about dying and no one being there to take care of what he would leave behind. Death to these two men was a very different thing. Hector and Achilles were both courageous soldiers and honorable leaders. It

is their family values, ways of life, and motivations for fighting that make them so different. Achilles goes through a variety of character changes throughout the Iliad. At first he is too selfish to fight. He remains attached to his social status, knows that his fate is to die in battle and is holding a grudge. All of these are reasons as to why he refuses to go to battle. Then, when Patroclus is killed, Achilles seems to have a change of heart, but the only reason he is going to fight is to get revenge for his friend. By the end of the book though, Achilles character seems to take a major change. When Priam, father of Hector, goes to him and begs for Hector's body, Achilles says, "Your son is released, sir, as you ordered. He is lying on a pallet. At dawn's first light you will go see him yourself (Homer, 151)." Achilles giving up Hector's body proved that deep down no matter how godlike a warrior Achilles seems to be, he still has some compassion and human character. Hector remains proud and noble throughout the Iliad. He goes to war to defend Troy and when he is killed, is remembered as a glorious leader and fearless warrior. In conclusion Hector and Achilles were two very different men. Hector loved his family and fought for them and his country whereas Achilles seemed to love only himself and went to battle for selfish reasons. Both of them realized their fate, but it was Hector, in the end, who accepted his and Achilles who was not willing to go to battle to die until his friend was killed. Achilles did not think death was as important as fighting for his country and being remembered as a brave soldier, whereas Hector did. Therefore, Hector and Achilles' characters in the Iliad show how different these two soldiers were and also correspond with many aspects of the Greek way of life.