

The interaction between fate and choice in the iliad

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



When does fate and when does choice play a role our lives, or in this world? That question may always be asked but in Homer's epic poem, The Iliad fate and choice happen often. Throughout The Iliad Homer creates numerous conflicts between not only the mortal Greeks and Trojans, but the Gods as well. Though there is a difference between what fate is and what choice is; their similarities coincide with each other. Fate causes one to act in a certain way, which causes one to make a decision based on their choice. The Gods stick their nose in the mortal conflicts the majority of the time. When this happens, mortals ask for advice as they trust the knowledge of the Gods, impacting the end results of many wars and the lives of the individuals. In The Iliad there are many characters who seem to question the idea of fate and their destiny. Looking at Homer's idea of fate and choice is important being a modern reader, student, and person, to try and answer when fate and choice plays a role in our lives as well. As the Gods do control fate, it is the choices in which determine the outcome of each immortal's life.

Something that is familiar to many modern people is the Bible. The Bible believes anybody who chooses to do what God asks will find out if John's teaching comes from God or whether it comes from his own experiences. Questioning whether or not something comes from destiny or fate, or whether it comes from your own actions can have outcomes that coincide together. An example is in The Iliad Achilles does not want to fight, his friend, Patroclus decides to wear Achilles armor, along with pretending to be Achilles by choice. Patroclus then meets his fate of dying, being killed by Hector. If Patroclus did not decide to wear the armor of Achilles, he may not have died but the death of Patroclus is what inspired Achilles to want to

fight, distraught and revengeful Achilles returned to war and kills Patroclus. In her essay "Character as Fate in Ancient Literature," Mary Gould says, Achilles could have quit when Patroclus was killed. He could simply have gone in the direction opposite of outrage and returned home". This shows how the choice of Achilles going to fight and kill Hector was choice. Life events feed off of each other, the choice of fighting and killing ended in fate of dying, fate of dying causes a choice of more fighting and that choice causes more fate of dying.

Another example of human choice and the consequences causing fate to fall into place takes place when Agamemnon took Chryses the daughter of the priest, causing Apollo to grow angry. After Apollo becomes angry because of Agamemnon's choice, Apollo places a plague in the army to punish Agamemnon for taking Chryses. As stated by "Professor E. Joy in her sample student essay "Fate is Simply Free Will Driven by Ego," Of the latter, it can logically be assumed that had Agamemnon not taken the woman or otherwise angered Apollo, there would not have been a plague and most if not all the men who died would have lived longer".

Characters in The Iliad embrace the idea of fate or destiny, though they understand, the roads they pave may eventually lead them to death knowing there is a safer option. Great warriors thought that if they died honorably in war, they would carve their names into remembrance. Taking Achilles story into consideration of how these men welcome fate with open arms. Thetis, Achilles' mother, tells him to fight in this battle for he will die gloriously, and if he returns home, he will live a long life but forever be forgotten. In

Homer's *The Iliad* Achilles states " Mother tells me, the immortal goddess Thetis with her glistening feet, that two fates bear me on the day of death. If I hold out here and I lay siege to Troy, my journey home is gone, but my glory never dies. If I voyage back to the fatherland I love, my pride, my glory dies... true but the life that's left me will be long, the stroke of death will not come on me quickly". After all, Achilles did choose to stay and fight this Trojan war, dies in the hands of Paris. This shows how a beautiful fate is far more important to the Greeks than living a long, happy life. The quote creates a question of if fate gives you options to choose from. Achilles is given an option to fight and die in the war or go home. This could be Homer discretely telling us that the men have some control over their own fates alongside the Gods. Or is it that Achilles thought he had a choice, when truly, his fate was already set for him after all.

One critic says, " Homer does not state that the power of fate is dissociated from Zeus and that it is an independent power in itself". Everything that occurred in the poem had to be accompanied by Zeus. Meaning there was not a story in the poem that clearly states that the immortals or gods are subordinated to fate. Many stories in the poem show that Zeus throws fate. This proves that everything that has happened is connected to fate, but the gods have not been involved in every occasion. An example would be when Odysseus was to return home by faith, yet it was Zeus who had ordered the release. Along with the openly stated point that Odysseus came to Ithaca with the help of the Gods in the first place. In many other occurrences as well proves that everything has to do with Zeus and his desires. None of the

other immortals hold the power to call the shots when it comes to fate. On page 389, book 15, lines 80-89 in The Iliad Zeus outlines the sequence of events to come and how he cannot change it, even the impending death of his mortal son, Sarpedon.

Referring back to the Bible the verse “ And the Lord God commanded the man, “ You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die”. This goes to show that in modern times everything is in the hands of our God as well, just as fate was in the hands of Zeus. Choosing to do things, asking for advice, and deciding what to do are all contribution towards the fate in which is in hand for one. The only difference is there is no way to change what is going to happen in the end. You can pray for the god’s help when you are doubtful, confused, angry, and to say thanks. Those prayers are always answered just not always in the way we want them to be. That can be the best thing or the worse thing that can happen.

The interaction between fate and choice is involved in every event that happens throughout the poem. Showing how through fate is already determined, characters still hope it will go in their own favor or continue to try and win. For example, though the wars outcome is already determined- the dedication, loyalty and the importance of the glory of the Trojan soldiers still remain strong though they know they are going to die.

This interaction between fate and choice adds to Homer’s poem by establishing a relationship with the gods and mortals, shows a bit of irony in

certain situations along with showing insight into the characters decisions. By creating this relationship Homer enhances the meaning of the poem. He does this by giving some insight into characters like how they respond to the idea of fate and choice. This shows irony of situations like when Paris tries to use choice to change fate, which cannot be altered. This allows us to see the relationship between the mortals and gods along with how the gods power sits above the wants and wishes of mortals.

Iris Gernler says “ one thing for sure fact can be deducted from this complex situation, however, and that is that everything happens for a reason... nothing is left to chance”. The mortals can try to do anything they desire to change or alter fate, but it will never change the outcome as it has been decided already.

Duffy believes “ whether fate is controlled by the gods, or not they will always go together”.