

Who is the hero of the Iliad: Achilles or Hector

Literature



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Achilles, on the other hand, participates for the glory that this war is going to bring him, even if it means his death. The motivation of Hector is selfless, while the motivation of Achilles is selfish.

Hector holds the position of a traditional hero with the Trojans and is their undisputed leader looked upon with respect. "When Hector heard this he was glad, and went about among the Trojan ranks holding his spear by the middle to keep them back, and they all sat down at his bidding". (Book III).

On the contrary, Achilles is a feared warrior in his camp, but at loggerheads with Greek king Agamemnon, who wants his presence on the battlefield as a motivation for the Greek army, which can be seen from this speech of Achilles to Agamemnon "You are steeped in insolence and lust of gain. With what heart can any of the Achaeans do your bidding, either on foray or in open fighting? I came not warring here for any ill the Trojans had done me. I have no quarrel with them. They have not raided my cattle nor my horses, nor cut down my harvests on the rich plains of Phthia; for between me and them there is a great space, both mountain and sounding sea". (Book 1).

Throughout the book, Homer paints Achilles in a near godly fashion. The human ingredient of fear is absent in Achilles and this makes his acts of bravery and valiance beyond the means of a mere human. On the other hand, Hector is seen in the as a human with all its failings including fear. The event in life causes fear, but how fear is conquered even at the pain of death makes a human a hero. The scene of the killing of Hector by Achilles brings this out to the forefront. Hector alone outside the walls of Troy runs away from Achilles demonstrating the human characteristic of fear. He, however, overcomes it to come and face Achilles and meet his death in spite of the pleas of his father King Priam "Hector, my son, spurn not this breast, but

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have pity upon me too: if I have ever given you comfort from my own bosom, think on it now, dear son, and come within the wall to protect us from this man; stand not without to meet him. Should the wretch kill you, neither I nor your richly dowered wife shall ever weep, dear offshoot of myself, over the bed on which you lie, for dogs will devour you at the ships of the Achaeans". (Book XXII).

Respecting the bodies of fallen enemies is an expected characteristic of a hero. The manner in which Achilles treats the body of Hector after his death in revenge for all the comrades of Achilles that Hector has killed in battle demonstrates a mean streak in Achilles and not the characteristic of a hero. He conveys his intentions of this to the dying Hector in these words, "Though Priam son of Dardanus should bid them offer me your weight in gold, even so, your mother shall never lay you out and make lament over the son she bore, dogs and vultures shall eat you utterly up". (Book XXII). (1).