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Achilles is not the hero

Achilles is not the hero of the Trojan war, nor is he the villain. Throughout literature, we see clear-cut lines between good and evil, beauty and ugliness, supremacy and servitude. In the *Iliad*, Homer blurs these lines. The gods are not all-powerful, and mortals often defy them. The prince of the Trojans, Hector, seems to be the hero, and Achilles, the greatest of the Greeks, and their “hero”, is not.

The *Iliad*, familiar to many, is an epic poem about the war between the Greeks and Trojans, and between the gods and themselves. It is the story of how the Trojan War was fought, and how it ended. It began with a wedding that ended with three goddesses: Athena, the goddess of wisdom, Hera, the queen of the gods, and Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty, vying for the title of the most powerful goddess. This led to them asking Paris, a Trojan prince, who the most powerful goddess was and offering him a prize for his vote. Paris sided with Aphrodite, who gave him Helen, the most beautiful woman in the world, the wife of the Spartan king Agamemnon. This caused Agamemnon to wage a war with Troy, resulting in the deaths of many great heroes, including Achilles. The war also led to the deaths of Paris and Hector, the princes of Troy.

Achilles was the headstrong, defiant, and childish hero of the Greeks. He was the son of a goddess and a mortal. He was invincible except for a spot on his heel, which proved to be his downfall. Achilles was not the hero of the story nor was he its villain, and his character throughout the story proves it.

Achilles' pride was detrimental to himself and his fellow soldiers. Achilles' pride surfaced when he decided not to fight in the war after a falling out with Agamemnon, who had taken a prize from him. He thought that because he was the son of a deity, though not one himself, he ought to be treated like one. If he was not given what he thought he was owed, he would make the rest of the troops pay with their lives.

In an interview with my grandmother, she relayed the story of my late grandfather, and how the choices he made landed him in prison and away from his family, causing the family to slowly become more and more unstable. He disregarded the fact that his family could be affected, or even destroyed by the choices he was making, much like Achilles to his comrades.

Achilles was only motivated by his own feelings. Achilles returned to battle on his own accord after his comrades in arms begged him to, and his friend Patroclus died. Mary Shelley puts it best, "Alas! Why does man boast of sensibilities superior to those apparent in the brute; it only renders them more necessary beings. If our impulses were confined to hunger, thirst, and desire, we might be nearly free; but now we are moved by every wind that blows, and a chance word or scene that that word may convey to us."¹ She reminds us that it is in our nature to be moved by what we hear and feel, and how it is our greatest flaw. Though Achilles' return was beneficial, and he was instrumental in winning the war, the fact he was so caught up with his own wants condemns him for the deaths of fellow soldiers that he could have prevented. Including Patroclus, his childhood friend, who fought in his place, and paid with his life.

Similarly, after his release, my grandfather returned home to a wife and an eleven-year-old son who had grown up faster because of his absence. His return ended up being good for repairing the chasm between his son and himself. But, he still continued in his destructive ways which

¹ Shelley, Mary. "Frankenstein". (pg. 90). San Francisco: Ignatius Press; 2008.

resulted in his downfall, further affecting the stability of his family, his son in particular. In some ways his son became his Patroclus.

In the end Achilles was constantly reaching for kleos. This was not uncommon for any Greek warrior. Kleos refers to the eternal glory that a warrior would receive for his heroic deeds. But, what was the price for his glory? He lost his life, his friends lost theirs, and the most honorable man in the story, Hector, lost his as well. It all ended with his life crumbling. He was left to be remembered as the great warrior who sacked Troy but first allowed his feelings to get in the way of his duty.

My grandfather is remembered as the man who eventually came back to his family, but cost them their happiness. Just as Achilles lost troops, my grandfather lost his family.

Some might say Achilles is the hero of the story. They might say this because he won the war. But winning the war does not make you a hero. How did he get there? What were his values? Who was he doing it for?

Achilles may have played a major role in the *Iliad* and may have been a hero, but he was not the hero of the story because of his pride, how moved he was by his own feelings, and his misguided search for glory.

This should matter to all of us because we should all be conscious of the characters of the people we allow in our lives. How will they affect us? How will they affect those we love, and others around us? We should also be conscious of our own characters. Paul calls us to, “Let each of us please *his* neighbor for *his* good, leading to edification.”² Let us lift each other up for the sake of one another, not for our glory, but for the glory of Him who calls us his children.

² -Paul. “Romans 15:2”.

