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Achilles: Navigating the Interplay of Fate and Free Will

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ABSTRACT:

In this paper, we embark on a journey to delve into the multifaceted character of Achilles, exploring the intricate interplay between the forces of fate and free will that shape his life and ultimate destiny. Through a close examination of Achilles' actions, choices, and the prophecies surrounding his existence, we aim to unravel the complexities of his character and the broader themes of heroism, mortality, and the human condition in Greek mythology.

As we navigate through the epic saga of Achilles, we will unravel the layers of his character, from his divine lineage as the son of the sea nymph Thetis and the mortal king Peleus, to his emergence as the greatest warrior of his time. We will explore the prophecies that foretell his greatness and his tragic demise, and the pivotal moments in his life where he grapples with the tension between fulfilling his destiny and exercising his free will.

Through our analysis, we seek to shed light on the enduring significance of Achilles' story, not only as a timeless mythological tale but also as a reflection of the human experience. By examining Achilles' struggles, triumphs, and ultimately his tragic downfall, we aim to uncover profound insights into the nature of fate, the complexities of heroism, and the eternal quest for meaning and immortality in the face of mortality.

Key Words: Achilles, Fate, Free Will, Prophecy

Introduction:

Achilles, the quintessential hero of Greek mythology, embodies the timeless struggle between fate and free will. Renowned for his unparalleled prowess in battle and his tragic destiny, Achilles stands as an enduring symbol of heroism and human frailty. His legendary exploits during the Trojan War and his tragic demise have captivated audiences for centuries. In this paper, we will explore the multifaceted character of Achilles and examine how the forces of fate and free will shape his life and ultimate destiny.

The Prophecy of Achilles:

The prophecy surrounding Achilles is a central aspect of his mythology, shaping his character and influencing the events of his life. It originates from a series of prophecies and omens surrounding his birth and early childhood, which were interpreted by his mother, Thetis, and other figures in Greek mythology. (Moore, 1921)

Thetis, a sea nymph and mother of Achilles, receives multiple prophecies regarding her son's fate. One of the most well-known prophecies comes from the seer Calchas, who predicts that Achilles will be the greatest Greek warrior of the Trojan War but will also die young. This prophecy sets the stage for Achilles' internal conflict between the pursuit of glory and the fear of mortality.

Another prophecy concerning Achilles is delivered by Thetis herself. She foresees that her son will have a choice between two destinies: he can either live a long, peaceful life in obscurity, or he can achieve immortal fame on the battlefield of Troy, knowing that his life will be cut short. This prophecy highlights the theme of fate versus free will in Achilles' life, as he must ultimately decide his own destiny. (Burgess, 1995)

Additionally, there are other omens and signs that foreshadow Achilles' fate throughout his childhood. For example, Thetis attempts to make Achilles immortal by dipping him in the River Styx, holding him by the heel. However, because his heel remains untouched by the waters of immortality, it becomes his one vulnerable spot—the Achilles' heel—symbolizing his eventual downfall.

The prophecies surrounding Achilles serve to underscore the inevitability of his fate while also emphasizing the role of choice and agency in shaping his destiny. Despite the foretelling of his early death, Achilles exercises his free will by actively participating in the Trojan War and choosing the path of heroism and glory, knowing the risks involved.

Overall, the prophecy of Achilles encapsulates the complex interplay between fate and free will in Greek mythology, as well as the enduring themes of mortality, heroism, and the quest for immortality.

Achilles' Choice to Join the Trojan War:

Achilles' decision to join the Trojan War is a pivotal moment in his life, marked by a complex interplay of personal motivations, societal expectations, and divine influences. Several factors contribute to Achilles' choice to participate in the war against Troy, despite being aware of the risks involved. (Gould, 1999)

Achilles is driven by a deep-seated desire for personal glory and fame. As the son of the sea nymph Thetis and the mortal king Peleus, Achilles is destined for greatness. However, he seeks to carve out his own legacy as a warrior of unmatched skill and valor. Joining the Trojan War presents Achilles with an opportunity to showcase his abilities on the battlefield and earn immortal fame through heroic deeds. (Chapell, 2023)

As a Greek hero and a member of the Myrmidons, Achilles feels a strong sense of duty and honor to defend his homeland and uphold the honor of his people. The abduction of Helen, the wife of King Menelaus of Sparta, by Paris of Troy triggers the conflict known as the Trojan War. Achilles, like many other Greek warriors, views the war as a righteous cause and feels obligated to participate in the defense of Greece and the recovery of Helen. (Sale, 1963)

The prophecies surrounding Achilles' fate also play a significant role in his decision to join the Trojan War. While some prophecies foretell his greatness as a warrior, others predict his early death in battle. Achilles is aware of these prophecies, including his mother Thetis' warning about the choice between a long but ordinary life and a short but glorious one. Despite the risks, Achilles chooses the path of heroism, influenced by his divine heritage and the desire for immortal fame.

Achilles' decision to join the Trojan War is also influenced by peer pressure and societal expectations of heroism. As a prominent figure among the Greek warriors, Achilles faces pressure to demonstrate his courage and prowess in battle. Moreover, the heroes of Greek mythology are often judged by their actions on the battlefield, and Achilles seeks to uphold his reputation as the greatest warrior of his time.

The Rage of Achilles:

Throughout the Trojan War, Achilles grapples with intense emotions, particularly his infamous rage. His conflict with King Agamemnon over the spoils of war serves as a catalyst for this rage, leading Achilles to withdraw from the battlefield. However, his anger is not solely a result of external circumstances but also reflects deeper internal struggles. Achilles' rage is fueled by his sense of injustice and betrayal, as well as his fear of being forgotten or dishonored. This internal turmoil underscores the complexity of Achilles' character and his ongoing negotiation between fate and free will.

The Death of Patroclus:

Patroclus is not only Achilles' beloved friend but also his most trusted companion. In Achilles' absence from the battlefield due to his conflict with Agamemnon, Patroclus takes up Achilles' armor and leads the Myrmidons into battle to aid the struggling Greeks. This decision showcases Patroclus' loyalty and commitment to his friend. (Clarke, 1978)

Patroclus, wearing Achilles' armor, engages Hector in single combat outside the walls of Troy. Despite his initial success in driving back the Trojans, Patroclus is ultimately overwhelmed by Hector and slain. (Arieti, 1985). The gods play a significant role in shaping the outcome of the duel between Patroclus and Hector. Apollo, the god of prophecy and archery, intervenes on behalf of Hector, weakening Patroclus and enabling Hector to deliver the fatal blow. (Woodworth, 1930). This divine intervention adds an element of inevitability to Patroclus' death, as the gods manipulate the course of mortal affairs according to their own agendas. (Duckworth, 1956)

Upon learning of Patroclus' death at the hands of Hector, Achilles is consumed by grief and rage. The loss of his closest companion unleashes a torrent of emotions in Achilles, driving him to seek vengeance against Hector and the Trojans. It serves as a turning point in the Trojan War, galvanizing Achilles to re-enter the fray and seek revenge against Hector. Achilles' grief and rage propel him back into battle, leading to his eventual confrontation with Hector and the fulfillment of his destiny. Patroclus' death also foreshadows Achilles' own demise, as it is a harbinger of the tragic fate that awaits the greatest hero of the Greek army. While Patroclus' death is fated, Achilles' response to this loss demonstrates his agency and the power of his free will.

The Choice of Achilles' Death:

The choice of Achilles' death, also known as the "Choice of Achilles," is a significant moment in Greek mythology that highlights the hero's agency and his confrontation with the inevitability of fate. According to various versions of the myth, Achilles is presented with two alternative destinies by his mother, the sea nymph Thetis, prior to the Trojan War. This choice, which encapsulates the themes of mortality, glory, and free will, serves as a defining moment in Achilles' life. (Dilman, 1999)

The prophecy surrounding Achilles foretells his unparalleled skill in battle and his eventual death in the Trojan War. Achilles' decision reflects his internal conflict between the desire for personal glory and the fear of mortality. On one hand, he longs for immortal fame and the chance to secure his legacy as the greatest hero of his time. On the other hand, he grapples with the knowledge that this pursuit will ultimately lead to his demise. The

choice presented to Achilles encapsulates the broader themes of heroism and mortality in Greek mythology, where heroes must weigh the pursuit of glory against the inevitability of death. (Matthaei, 2009)

Ultimately, Achilles chooses the path of heroism and glory, accepting the risks and sacrifices that come with it. His decision demonstrates his agency and autonomy in shaping his own destiny, despite the constraints of fate. By embracing his fate and willingly sacrificing his life for the sake of glory, Achilles epitomizes the heroic ideal in Greek mythology. (Solomon, 2003)

The choice of Achilles' death serves as a poignant reflection on the human condition, exploring the tension between free will and predestination. Achilles' decision to embrace his fate highlights the complexities of mortality and the eternal quest for immortality through deeds of heroism and valor. In the end, Achilles' choice defines his legacy as a legendary hero whose name will be remembered for eternity. (Morrison, 1997)

Conclusion:

Achilles, the iconic hero of Greek mythology, embodies the eternal struggle between fate and free will. His life is marked by prophecy, tragedy, and moments of profound agency. While fate may shape the course of his life to some extent, Achilles demonstrates the power of free will in shaping his own destiny. Through his actions and choices, Achilles navigates the complexities of human existence, leaving behind a legacy that continues to resonate with audiences across cultures and generations.

In conclusion, Achilles' journey serves as a poignant reminder of the enduring tension between fate and free will, and the eternal quest for meaning and purpose in life.

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