

## The Indecision of Achilles

*The Iliad* is one of the oldest works recording the specifics of war and its consequences. War is a topic of immense societal focus. It is simultaneously reviled and glorified. It is hard to capture both of these sentiments in a single work of writing – should the writer glorify war, as propagandists do, or should the writer condemn it plainly? *The Iliad* is, however, able to capture this contradiction whole and unblemished, and it does this through the indecision of Achilles.

At the beginning of *The Iliad*, Achilles is preoccupied with receiving the respect and rewards he is due as a warrior. He left the Greeks because they “failed to honor the best Greek of all” (The Iliad, 1.259). Later, however, his desire for material goods is eclipsed by his desire for a peaceful life. Achilles decides at this point that “nothing is worth [his] life,” (The Iliad, 9.15). Achilles would rather deny fate and return home than die at war. Achilles, however, fails to maintain this anti-war resolve. Though he is not swayed by the losses the Greeks faced without him, he returned to battle after Patroclus is killed in order to avenge him (The Iliad, 21.106-.112). While this is perhaps an easier motive to empathize with, it still entails Achilles’ return to war, and his acceptance of his death in combat. He became intoxicated with vengeance and lost his desire to live a life beyond the war.

The most important character in *The Iliad* can’t seem to make up his mind as to whether he loves or hates war. This indecision is what allows *The Iliad* to portray the contradiction of war as seen from both viewpoints. By describing Achilles’ journey through indecision, *The Iliad* illuminates society’s own indecision.