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## The Concept Of Individualism In Iliad

The denotation of individualism is the principle of being independent from group mentality and having freedom of actions and thoughts without limitations. Ancient Greece placed an emphasis on the individual, making it a major aspect of Western Civilization. Greeks were the first to experiment with ideals of individualism through direct democracy, in which certain citizens were encouraged to take an active role in government. As this idea developed and spread throughout Greek culture, people were encouraged to act and create based on their own talents that were unique to them. However, the only way to know this was to have a sense of self, or as Socrates proclaimed, "know yourself" and this will lead to a path of individuality. This concerns rising above social conformity and taking responsibility of one's own actions, which can be seen through two unique but very different Greek heroes, Achilles and Agamemnon. They are portrayed in the "Iliad" with similar and opposing values and virtues, which stem from their unique strengths and weaknesses. The contrasting personalities of Achilles proves that individualism can be shown in different lights. Although it can be beneficial to ignore society's standards, it can lead to feelings of isolation and alienation. Despite the challenges they were destined for, Socrates and both Greek heroes were able to overcome the negative aspects of possessing individuality, even in the face of death.

Socrates expresses individualism and the idea that the individual has dominance over all other things through his philosophy and search for wisdom. It is because he held this trait that he was sentenced to death. One of the main accusations held against Socrates was his corruption of the youth. The young men of the wealthier class enjoyed watching him aggravate Athenian elderly, especially politicians, by persistently asking difficult and embarrassing questions, exposing the ignorance of those who claim to be wise. Despite Socrates's accusations against him, he remained the same, truthful and simplistic, even when his death sentence was quickly approaching. His trial and death were a sacrifice for the individual, resisting conformity to the respected standards of Ancient Greek. Socrates says, "Men of Athens, at hearing the speeches of my accusers, I cannot tell; but I know that their persuasive words almost made me forget who I was: - such was the effect of them, and yet they have hardly spoken a word of truth" (Apology Pg. 19). He did not change his perception of the world or halt his methods of seeking wisdom just because he was told to. This proves Socrates had no fear of death, unlike the rest of the "wise" people. He says "For to fear death, my friends, is only to think ourselves wise without really being wise, for it is to think that we know what we do not know. For no one knows whether death may not be the greatest good that can happen to man" (Apology Pg. ). He believed a life lived through injustice is known to be inadequate, and not the life he wished to live. Socrates would rather die in honor while fulfilling his search for wisdom, than giving up and live a life of dishonor. He, unlike those accusing him, has no passion for what is in the heavens or under the earth, or for worldly things, such as money, reputation, or politics. Plato says this when describing Socrates:

"When a man is refuted in argument, and when that has happened to him many times and on many different grounds, he is driven to think that there's no difference between honorable and disgraceful, and so on with all other values, like right and good, that he used to revere... when he's lost any respect or feeling for his former beliefs but not yet found the truth, where is he likely to turn? ...And so, we shall see him become a rebel instead of a conformer" (The Republic

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Socrates was a man interested only in seeking human virtue, wisdom and excellence, heading for a path to individualism. He is more invested in individual morality, not social politics. In his eyes, if you participate heavily in government, there is no time to care for one's own soul or to become moral experts. One must pursue his or her best interest, but the only way to do that is to become as virtuous as possible. The individual is of utmost importance to Socrates because the individual has different freedoms. There is freedom from control of the state and desires of pleasure, and there is freedom from self-deceit, or believing false testaments to be true and hold important value. The individual must be worthy of their freedom, resisting worldly temptations and by yearning for and seeking out ultimate wisdom and virtuous perfection, which was accomplished by Socrates himself. Socrates teaches that the human is not just a mere body, but also a soul. The soul of a human justifies reason and logical thought and allows one to make their own decisions and become a self-sufficient individual, independent of others.

In "The Iliad," it is obvious that Achilles embodies the idea of individualism, which can be exhibited through his strong emotions, but also his actions and motives. At the very beginning of the epic poem, Achilles persona shines though, establishing his "rage" just within the first line. His human characteristics do not fit the normal standards of a united military. He is temperamental, merciless and selfish. However, he is a great warrior, stronger and smarter than other men. The aspects of individualism Achilles possesses are negative and detrimental to his life and his army. He reveals the self-centered side of him, with only revenge on his mind. Every action must be to his benefit in order to protect his masculinity and pride, which was ripped away when his prize, Briseis, is taken from him. Throughout "The Iliad," Achilles has his own battle with rage, and his journey to the moment of realization is due to this internal conflict. Despite the vicious war surrounding him, his greatest battle is with himself. This is a downside to individualism, which created anxiety from feeling outcast and alienated from his people and most importantly from himself. With only the restoration of honor on his mind, Achilles has no concern for how his actions affect those who are close and loyal to him. His decision to refuse to fight in the war was an independent and individual choice based on his heightened rage and passion. In Book 16, his sense of independence surfaces. Patroclus warns Achilles of how bad the war is going, and says "Achilles, son of Peleus, greatest of the Achaeans, spare me your anger, please, such heavy blows have overwhelmed the troops" (The Iliad, Book 16, Line 23). Achilles agrees to lend his armor and troops but refuses to fight himself. He is aware that the battle cannot be won without him present. His pride is still wounded, as he continues to act without humanity. Achilles is semi-divine, considering his mother, Thetis, is a goddess, while his father is a mortal. As Achilles's rage grows stronger, he is straying further and further away from his human side and begins to retrieve his strong emotions from his godlike side. As the book progresses, Achilles takes responsibility for his actions all on his own, guilt setting in and finally showing a good side to his individuality. Homer says, "A black cloud of grief came shrouding over Achilles... Overpowered in all his power, sprawled in the dust, Achilles lay there fallen, tearing his hair, defiling it with his own hands" (The Iliad, Book 18, Line 24). Although he knows he must die, he still maintains a sense of eternal life. Achilles eventually accepts his fate of death, which is a step to achieving happiness according to Socrates, who had no fear of death itself. Achilles represents individuality, both its negative and positive aspects. Although he shows his human side, with rational thought, he is overcome by the alienation of himself from the rest of the world. He functions within his own realm, following through with actions that are to his own benefit. He lacks the important individual values associated with success and ultimate happiness and wisdom.

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Throughout the Iliad, Agamemnon possesses many of the same characteristics of Achilles. However, with his pride at stake, he tends to use manipulation in order to benefit himself. Agamemnon acquires the negative aspects of individualism, which he somewhat overcomes. These damaging traits doubt his qualifications as a king. For example, he feels the need to test his troops in Book 2. Agamemnon exclaims, "But first, according to a time-honored tradition, I will test the men with a challenge, tell them all to crowd the oarlocks, cut and run in their ships" (The Iliad, Book 2, Line 85). This action is detrimental to the morale of his army, who now believe that their leader has no loyalty and faith in them. He consistently allows his overwhelming emotions to influence critical decisions in government and warfare. For example, to restore his honor, Agamemnon claims Briseis, who happens to be Achilles's prize. He says,

"Not so quickly, brave as you are, godlike Achilles – trying to cheat me. What do you want? To cling to your own prize while I sit calmly by – empty handed here? No – if our generous Argives will give me a prize, a match for my desires, equal to what I've lost, well and good. But if they give me nothing, I will take a prize for myself – your own" (The Iliad, Book 1, Line 153).

He does not understand that the needs of his people should come before his own, especially his desires. This tragic flaw is what encourages him to keep Achilles's prize, despite Nestor's advice to let her go. Agamemnon's individualistic traits reveal his selfish inner motives. For example, he is dishonorable, lacks faith in the gods and regrets offending Achilles when he offered him treasures as an incentive to fight. He worries his own men will turn against him and blame him for the many deaths of the Achaeans, which he deserves. In Book 14, Agamemnon is cowardly, and fears losing the war. He says "How on Earth can a wounded man make a war?... No shame in running, fleeing disaster, even in pitch darkness. Better to flee from death than feel its grip" (The Iliad, Book 14, Line 77 & 96). By proposing to sail away while his army stays and fights, he shows cowardice and weakness due to his overwhelming sense of pride. Agamemnon finally comes to realize just how badly his decisions have affected others and led to irreversible consequences. By recognizing his mistakes, he expresses a positive side to individualism, coming to this conclusion independent of others.

Though Greek literary works, such as "The Iliad" and Socrates's philosophy teachings in "The Trial and Death of Socrates," the concept of individualism is revealed to be a substantial focus in Greek culture. Although this idea is linked with positive and negative aspects, the two Greek heroes mentioned, along with Socrates, were able to rise above and allow for the benefits of individuality to lead them toward the fulfillment of truly knowing themselves, including their strengths and weaknesses. Being an individual stems from using this knowledge as a way to fulfill one's happiness in life, allowing to express themselves freely and creatively, based on their talents attributed to them. Socrates was wise, because although he did not know everything, he recognized his faults, making him wiser than even the greatest politicians. Achilles, though very stubborn and isolated, was a confident leader, obtaining the skills needed to win the Trojan war and create a spark of motivation in his troops. In the beginning of "The Iliad," Agamemnon lacks all the traits of a moral and efficient king, repeatedly making decisions for his own benefit, rather than for the good of the public. In hindsight, he comes to realize his actions had detrimental consequences to the outcome of the war and finally understands what it means to be a virtuous ruler. Individualism involves rising above society's limiting factors (for Achilles, this was alienation due to his emotional persona. For Socrates, this was the politicians and accusations) and staying true to one's beliefs and talents, despite being faced with challenges, especially death, in which there should be no fear.