

Discussion Questions, *The Iliad*

1. What is the will of the gods, and how can men understand and benefit from fulfilling the gods' will?
2. In book three, Priam indicates that it was the will of the gods that the war between the Greeks and Trojans be fought. Priam claims that Helen was not the cause of the war, and seems to indicate that men are not responsible for the war. Does Priam's belief seem plausible? Are men responsible for their actions, even if prompted by the gods? Is Priam's response a justification for his son's abduction of Helen?
3. Helen claims that Paris is a man with a changeable mind, and she seems to believe that this is part of his flawed nature (book six). Shortly after complaining about Paris's fickleness, Helen changes her mind and relents toward Paris. Is part of the attraction (and repulsion) of these two characters related to their fickleness?
4. What role does fate play in the poem? Is fate more powerful than the gods, or is fate an outcome of the gods' will? Does the role of fate signify that man is predestined to a series of actions, or does man (and the gods) have free will?
5. In book six, the seer tells Hector to rally his troops and the citizens of Troy for the battle with the Greeks. While in the city, Hector encounters Andromache, who asks him to consider her fate and the fate of her son, before entering battle. This meeting brings into stark contrast the tension between duty to one's family and duty to one's polis. How does this encounter serve to illustrate the tension between self and family and the larger populace?
6. In Book twenty-two, Apollo and Achilles meet on the field of battle. Achilles advances against Apollo, and the god declares that he cannot be injured by Achilles, since he is not "one of the fated." What does Apollo mean by this statement? Achilles responds by saying that he would kill Apollo if it was within his power. Why does he say this? How do these statements reflect the workings of fate in the Iliad?
7. In book twenty-four, Priam journeys to Achilles' camp to request that Hector's body be returned to undergo proper funeral rites. Priam reminds Achilles that his own father, Peleus, must worry about him, and that he (Peleus) would want his son to experience a proper burial. Until this time, Achilles is adamant in not wanting to return Hector's body to the Trojans. He changes his mind after meeting with Priam. Does Achilles' change of heart seem believable? Was Zeus' warning to Achilles somehow responsible for the hero's change of mind? Does Achilles' impending death soften his stance regarding the return of Hector's body? Does Achilles feel sadness toward Priam for the death of his sons?
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9. In book seventeen, the Trojans attempt to capture the immortal horses of Achilles after Patroclus is killed. Zeus takes pity on the horses, and allows them to go back to the camp of the Greeks. Prior to this passage, Zeus has not dealt with any creatures, other than man, in the *Iliad*. Does Zeus' pity of the immortal horses ring true? Is this pity motivated solely by the immortality of the horses, or do we see a side of Zeus as a creator god?