

Fate Determines

Do humans have free will or is everything predetermined? This question has bothered philosophers for ages, and in Greek mythology, fate is controlled by the three Fates. However, the free will of the characters within Greek mythology is still unclear. Analyzing the way characters view free will and fate, however, reveals their values and mindsets. In Euripides' *Women of Troy* and Homer's *Iliad*, the way the characters perceive and react to fate reveals insight into the types of personalities they embody.

The characters depicted with strong personalities find comfort in their fate, allowing their most important personal values to be displayed. In the *Iliad*, Hector fully believes and accepts the absolute power of fate. He reassures his wife Andromache that "no man is going to hurl [him] to Hades, unless it is fated." Despite this belief that he has no control over his fate, he continues to fight for his family and honor. He knows that other men would shame him for shrinking from battle, and personally, he had "learned always to be brave." Even more important to him, however, is his family and wife. He wishes to die fighting before Andromache is "forced by powerful Fate" and enslaved by the Greeks. Hector's determined reaction to fate reveals his most important personal values. He doesn't try to fight fate, but nevertheless cannot resist following his heart and honor into battle, and protecting his family. Similarly, the prophet Cassandra from Euripides' *Women of Troy* reveals her personality because of her struggle with fate. Cassandra was cursed to see the future but to never be believed, which would understandably drive most

people insane. However, as much as they alienate her, Cassandra cares for Troy and the Trojans. Even as “a god possesses” her, she determinedly tries to reassure the Trojan women and her mother Hecuba that her “bridal-bed promises death” to Agamemnon. Cassandra knows her entire tragic fate in great detail, but instead of letting it depress her, the knowledge accentuates her optimism as she looks forward to going “triumphant to the house of Death.” Hector and Cassandra, who both fully accept fate’s power, derive comfort and certainty from fate, and despite knowing that they cannot change their fates, they both do not give up, continuing to live by their core values.

On the other hand, Andromache and the Chorus are portrayed as weaker characters because they emotionally collapse because of their fate. The Chorus in *Women of Troy* constantly moans about their fate, at one point asking Andromache to teach them to “sound the depths of [their] own misery.” They, unlike Cassandra, do not know what is destined to happen in their future, yet they waste time worrying over a future they have no control over. They fantasize over which cities they want to end up in most, and spend much of their time pitying themselves. After losing their city and people, it is understandable for the Chorus to behave this way, but putting them in contrast with a strong character like Hector casts them as weak. If the Chorus had surrendered themselves to fate as fully as Hector and Cassandra had, they would not have experienced as much suffering nor wasted their efforts wishing for things that they ultimately could not change. The Chorus believe they can change their fate when they whine and pray about their destiny, but they do not put their efforts into anything productive the way Hector does. Because Euripides included the Chorus with the purpose of being a common and relatable character, they reflect the average Trojan resident. The weaker characters, when faced with

scenarios equally tragic as what the strong characters faced, react by crying and wishing instead of bravely embracing their inevitable fates.

In addition, there are also characters who actively attempt to fight fate and express their free will, displaying their tenacity. In both the *Iliad* and *Women of Troy*, Menelaus is faced with a major decision involving another character's life. In the *Iliad*, Menelaus chooses to spare Adrestus' life, and postpones Helen's death in *Women of Troy*. Though his decision, like everything else in the world, was fated to happen, Menelaus did not take on the same mindset as Hector when making the decision, or he would have left it up to fate instead of choosing an outcome himself. Since he did not, this shows that Menelaus trusts in his own free will and decision making. Additionally, Helen also actively tries to change her fate. After being dragged out in front of Menelaus, where she is sure to be killed or sent back to be killed, Helen works very hard to convince Menelaus of her innocence. It is very likely that she is fated to die at this point, but Helen nevertheless fights her fate. In her argument for her innocence, she claims that it was the gods who "condemned [her] life to this harsh bondage" and denies having any free will to escape Aphrodite's power. Her fate was to fall in love with Paris. However, her fate while she makes these arguments is to die, and she is fighting that fate by telling a story about how she lost all her free will. She cannot both lack free will and fight her fate, but regardless of whether she actually believes she has free will, she resourcefully tells her captors what they want to hear. It is not effective, but shows Helen's gritty personality. Menelaus and Helen, unlike the other characters, try to deny fate some of its power, demonstrating their self-sufficient and resourceful personalities.

In Euripides' *Women of Troy* and Homer's *Iliad*, characters see and respond to fate and free will differently, exposing differences in their personalities. Today, free will and determinism

is still a topic discussed by philosophers, debate teams, and often, everyday people. Philosophy currently splits the discussion into compatibilists and incompatibilists, where compatibilists believe that free will and determinism can coexist, and incompatibilists believe the opposite. Just as the way mythological characters reacted to fate provided insight about their personality, researchers are discovering that ordinary people are naturally compatibilists or incompatibilists, which may reflect on their character.