

Oedipus was blind in his knowledge. As the light of knowledge enlightened him, Oedipus feels that he probably doesn't need this light of knowledge. His act of blinding himself is an act of self-punishment and self-protection, since he is deeply horrified by his own crimes and unwilling to face others' gazes:

"I, with *my* eyes,
how could I look my father in the eyes
when I go down to death?" (trans. Robert Fagles)

As the audience visualises Tiresias' prophecy becoming true on stage, this peripeteia or tragic reversal of fortune, as a result of Oedipus' own understanding of error (the anagnorisis), deeply intensifies the cathartic mood of the play. Rather than ending his life, Oedipus lives to bear the weight of two curses, one imposed on his family line by the gods and the other self-imposed when he announces his intention to send Laius' murderer into exile. (650 Words)

THE ROLE OF FATE IN *OEDIPUS THE KING*

Often described as a tragedy of fate *Oedipus the King* is an example of a tragedy occurred due to the act of uncontrollable fate. Fate for Sophocles is not something essentially external to human beings but something at once inherent in them and transcendent. Oracles and prophets in this play may show the will of the gods and indicate future events, but it is the individual who gives substance to the prophecies. In this case it is Oedipus' quest for knowledge. Oedipus shows fearlessness in the face of turmoil, and his unstoppable quest for public utterance of the truth of the oracle leads him, tragically, to the knowledge that he has fulfilled its terms. Bernard Knox rightly argues: "The hero of the play is thus his own destroyer; he is the detective who tracks down and identifies the criminal—who turns out to be himself."

The character of Oedipus has historically inspired a combination of fascination and repulsion. It is generally acknowledged, however, that he is to be admired for many reasons, and especially for demonstrating, as a responsible leader, his desire for honesty and directness in approaching the problem of Thebes' plague. During a time of plague, fires, and other forms of decimation, Oedipus decides to take action to restore life and prosperity to his kingdom, only to discover through this quest that his identity is not what he thought. He learns that he has killed his father, married his mother, and had children with her; his wife-mother Jocasta kills herself, and Oedipus blinds himself and goes into exile.

The distinction between the truthfulness of oracles and prophecies of the gods (fate), as opposed to man's ability to influence his life's trajectory through his own actions (free will or self-determinism) is a major theme in the play. While arguments exist regarding the predominance of these schools of thought, *Oedipus the King* emphasizes the eventual and tragic triumph of the former over the latter. Despite his best efforts to be a good and wise king and to substantiate his claims about the evil machinations of Creon and Tiresias, fate works against him and finally shows that he was wrong to believe in a conspiracy. Before the play begins, he had already done what Apollo had said he would do: kill his father and marry his mother. It may be considered how then, in all conscience, we can speak of Sophocles as showing us Oedipus' fate coming about. Oedipus' fate is, of course, not complete before the play begins. Apollo commands the search for the guilty man, commands Oedipus, knowing him well, knowing both that he is guilty and will search and therefore find himself. This Oedipus does. That is the literal record of the action.

Fate can never exist without a character, or characters, who execute it. Sophocles' play shows us Oedipus' fate as if it were coming about now, whereas, in reality, it had come about in the past. Oedipus' fate is complete before the play begins. The patricide being taken into the present action, as if it were happening now, takes its place and its meaning in Oedipus' fate as a part of the process that is going on now. This is the process of Oedipus meeting his fate, still going on and completed nowhere but here.

Variations on the legend of Oedipus are mentioned in fragments by several ancient Greek poets including Homer, Hesiod, Pindar, Aeschylus and Euripides. But the impact of Sophocles' play, with its presentation of pity and fear is so influential that modern thinkers re-examined their theories in perspective of this gruesome subject. The fate of Oedipus thus is generalised by Freud in his *Interpretation of Dreams* who coined the term 'Oedipal Complex': "It is the fate of all of us, perhaps, to direct our first sexual impulse towards our mother and first hatred and our first murderous wish against our father. Our dreams convince us that this is so." (656 Words).