

Neglect leads to ultimate destruction

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In Franz Kafka's classic, *The Metamorphosis*, family members of Gregor Samsa, the main character who is a giant insect, ignore Gregor for a majority of the plot. Disregard for Gregor eventually obliterates him. In *Oedipus the King* by Sophocles, Oedipus neglects the wise words of many oracles and even his mother, something leading to his demise. In both of these masterpieces, the authors use irony to show that hubris, excessive humility, and egotism epitomize the causes of neglect and thus ultimately lead to a tragic fiasco. The continued disregard toward an individual leads to the bane of both parties. Both Kafka and Sophocles cleverly allow the reader to suffer throughout the plot with sardonic scenes. Oedipus typifies hubris, or excessive pride toward oneself. Oedipus, a Corinthian, rules the city of Thebes and defends it like his prized fortress. As a young child, Oedipus kills a "stranger" at the crossroads, but that stranger later turns out to be his biological father King Laius. After Oedipus grows up, he becomes the King of Thebes and marries the widow queen Jocasta although he does not realize that she gave birth to him. During his rule, a plague strikes the city of Thebes, and an oracle tells Oedipus that the murderer of Laius caused the plague. Consequently, Oedipus vows to find the murderer of Laius and banish him. He calls forth the blind prophet. The first witness Teresias and other witnesses specifically admonish Oedipus and tell him that he murdered Laius, so he will get the promised fate. Although Teresias warns Oedipus about the torment that he will receive, Oedipus ignores him. Sophocles creates irony from this point onwards because Oedipus has already predetermined his ultimate fate. The neglect of his peers has haunted him. Kafka portrays a similar case in *The Metamorphosis*, but instead of his peers,

Gregor Samsa, the protagonist of the plot, endures the consequences of neglect himself. The plot begins with Samsa waking up to find that he has mysteriously become a giant insect. As a result, he misses his morning bus to his office, and a chief clerk comes to his house to have a talk with his parents about his absence from the office. Gregor's family needs the financial assistance with which Gregor has been providing them. However, his family finds they do not need him, so they (except his mother) disregard him and treat him like a mere pest in the house. Kafka presents the plot with dramatic and situational irony. Gregor eventually commits suicide because he cannot witness his family suffer any more. In both works irony guides the causes of neglect. The actions of a character portend to the resolution of the plot. In *Oedipus the King*, Oedipus' hamartia (tragic error) turns out to be his hubris. Throughout the play several instances portray him as a bombastic and grandiloquent king who has no respect for others. As the plot progresses, he also gains more pomp. For example, after he answers "man" to the Sphinx's previously unsolved riddle, he believes that he can do anything. All his hubris gives him more reason to disregard everyone's advice. Whether a blind prophet, an oracle, or even Apollo himself may seem to be right, he thinks that only he must be right, and his righteousness will prevail. Oedipus ultimately pays for discounting everybody; Jocasta commits suicide, Oedipus blinds himself, and his children have no future. All can be summed up by the Chorus' words, "A black sea of terror has overwhelmed him." On the other hand, Gregor Samsa in *The Metamorphosis* has too much humility, something that causes his neglect by the antagonists of the novel. Although his physical state throughout the novel deserves partial culpability,

he does not do anything but allow himself to suffer throughout the plot. In several instances, if he had just tried to express his feelings, maybe someone would have noticed him, especially his mother or his sister Grete. For example, when Grete delivers the milk and bread to Gregor, he realizes that he does not like it anymore. Instead of just looking at it, he could have communicated in some way to his sister by telling her that bread and milk was not his favorite anymore. Also, Gregor could have expressed his discontent regarding his father's treatment of him, but instead he does absolutely nothing. He knows that his father has not been treating him fairly for anything, especially money, and Gregor still does not retaliate. His apathy and excessive meekness toward everything leads to his neglect by his own family. Consequently, death proves to be what he deserved. In both works, enough evidence proves that pride in excess or lacking quantities devastates the character that exhibits it. The authors illustrate the quintessence of ego through the protagonists of their works. Both Oedipus and Gregor possess complacency displayed through their actions. Although Gregor's family alienates him throughout most of the plot, several instances embody Gregor's inner thoughts. Gregor wishes his subservience to his family would sometime end, and he may live freely. However, his escape turns out to be his metamorphosis and ultimately his death. For instance, when Gregor's sister and parents weep after they first see him, Gregor expresses strong opinions about them. He articulates that he merely does them a favor by providing them with financial assistance. Gregor also implies that he "dislikes his enslavement" in the family. Through his words, Gregor evidently proves that even a reserved person like himself can have strong

internal thoughts. Kafka constantly states that Gregor “[could] have gone away of his own free will.” In contrast, Oedipus illustrates that an exceptionally arrogant person can obviously have an egotistic personality. As soon as Teresias informs Oedipus that Oedipus has killed his father, Oedipus gets incensed, expresses his disgruntlement with the blind prophet, and banishes him. Because Oedipus has a strong ego, he blatantly ignores Teresias and states that Teresias has been “cursed”. Of course, his statement haunts him in the end. Egotism eventually leads to neglect although it might not be explicitly expressed in *The Metamorphosis*. If Gregor had been a more active person who took action about his enslavement instead of just whining about it, he would have been respected more instead of being alienated by his family. Similarly, if Oedipus had just listened to the words of advice he had received and built on them instead of being headstrong, even the Thebans would have accepted a lesser punishment for Oedipus. Evidently, the authors in both *The Metamorphosis* and *Oedipus the King* utilize irony to demonstrate that hubris, humility, and egotism epitomize the causes of neglect. Oedipus possesses excessive hubris and neglects what others say, and Gregor Samsa has too much humility does nothing about his subservience to his family. Therefore, neglect gradually cripples the inner self and ultimately leads to an absolute debacle.