

Oedipus rex

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Pride and self confidence determine your fate. You are either hubristic or you have arête. The problem with hubris is that it can cause a sort of hamartia; it truly is a fatal flaw. In the play Oedipus the King by Sophocles, the hubris and hamartia of Oedipus and Jocasta lead them to their drastic fate.

Excessive pride and confidence of outsmarting the gods made their tragic prophecy come true. When a prophet comes to Oedipus to tell him who the murderer of Laius is and accuses Oedipus of the crime, Jocasta looks at the prophet as ignorant and explains to Oedipus that she had outsmarted the gods, saying “ A prophet? In that case, rid your mind of fear, and listen to me. I can teach you something. There is no human being born that is endowed with prophetic power. I can prove it to you-and in a few words... So, in this case, Apollo did not make the son kill his father or Laius die by his own son’s hand, as he had feared. Yet these were definite statements of the prophetic voices. Don’t pay any attention to prophecies. If God seeks or needs anything, he will easily make it clear to us himself. ”(50) She has no respect for prophecies anymore, saying “ But, my lord, even if he should depart from his former account in some particular, he still would never make the death of Laius what it was supposed to be-for Apollo said clearly that Laius was to be killed by my son. But that poor infant never killed Laius; it met its own death first. So much for prophecy. For all it can say, I would not, from now on, so much as look to right or left. ”(59) and “ O prophecies of the gods, where are you now? Polybus was the man Oedipus feared he might kill-and so avoided him all this time. And now he’s dead-a natural death, and not by the hand of Oedipus. ”(64-65) Jocasta obviously believed that she has outsmarted the gods. She does not believe the prophets, she has no respect

for them. When she says “ Fear? Why should a man fear? His life is governed by the operations of chance. Nothing can be clearly foreseen. The best way to live is by hit and miss, as best you can”(67), she doesn’t realized that the prophecy had come true. Even though she thought she had outsmarted the gods, the prophecy did come true; it was not up to her. This makes me wonder, if Jocasta did not believe she could outsmart the gods by giving her child away to be killed, would she have ended up marrying her son? She wouldn’t have, she would have known it was her son and not married him. No woman wants to marry the boy she raised, but because she gave Oedipus away she did not raise him; she did not know. Oedipus had the same hubristic quality as Jocasta, he thought he could outsmart the gods himself. When Oedipus went to the Oracle in Delphi and found out he was going to kill his father and marry his mother, his initial reaction was to run from the only people he had ever known to be his parents. Now, what’s the reason he would run away from them? To outsmart the gods, to get away from the tragic fate. Oedipus was so sure that he outsmarted the gods that he ignored all the signs that the prophecy had come true. The drunken man telling him about his adoption, Tiresias telling him “ I say that without knowing it you are living in intimacy with your nearest and dearest. You do not see the evil in which you live”, when Jocasta tells him “ A prophecy came to Laius once-I won’t say from Apollo himself, but from his priests. It said that Laius was fated to die by the hand of his son, a son to be born to him and me. Well, Laius so the story goes, was killed by foreign robbers at a place where three highways meet. As for the son-three days after his birth Laius fastened his ankles together and had him cast away on the pathless mountains”, and

when he starts to realize that he may very well be the murderer of Laius. All of these things were signs showing that he has followed right into his unfortunate destiny. If Oedipus would have just stayed in Corinth with the parents that raised him and forced himself, by freewill, to not kill Polybus or marry his wife, he would have never met his biological parents. Jocasta's hamartia was caused by her hubris in thinking she outsmarted the gods by getting rid of her child. Oedipus' hamartia was caused by his hubris in thinking he outsmarted the gods by running away from his fate. In both cases if they would have not tried to outsmart the gods, they would not have had reason to run right into what the gods had planned.