

Aeneid college essay



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Fate plays a huge role in Books I, II, IV and VI of the Aeneid. From the very beginning of the Aeneid Fate decrees that Aeneas must reach Italy with all of his crew and go on to found Lavinium:” He was a refugee chased by Fate from the land of Troy, first to reach Italy where Lavinium was to be built.” From Lavinium, Aeneas’ son, Iulus, will leave to found Alba Longa. Years later Romulus and Remus will be born and their tale of how Rome was founded will become reality. Does Aeneas have a choice in whether these events happen? The answer is simple: no.

This is because Fate is final and cannot be altered even by the gods. Whether Aeneas has feelings, emotions and wishes along the path to completing his fate, will in the end determine whether he is a puppet or not. It is important to realise that Fate is a greater power than Gods and Goddesses. The will of Jupiter is not Fate. Jupiter is simply the arbiter: he makes sure that Fate happens.

Fate can only decide, for example, the start and the end of men and cities; it does not decide the ‘ path’ taken to reach the end, but the end is always reached i. e. Fate is always completed. Gods cannot interfere with Fate (they cannot change destiny).

However, Gods can intervene with Fate by changing the direction of the ‘ path’. A typical example of divine intervention is during the Greek siege of Troy. The Greeks knew that they were to overcome the Trojans because of Fate but they were “ baffled” at how. Athena intervened to help the Greeks build the Wooden Horse in order to defeat the Trojans and helped Sinon, a Greek agent, convince the Trojans that she was on their side.

She also sent serpents to kill Laocoon, who was suspicious of the Wooden Horse. His death was in turn taken by the Trojans as further proof that the horse was good. In the first book of the Aeneid Juno intervenes to change Aeneas' path on his journey to Italy. In this way she can delay the fall of her beloved city, Carthage, by slowing Aeneas down. Juno hates the Trojans and Aeneas himself firstly because she loves Carthage, which one day will be destroyed by the Romans (who are the descendants of Aeneas).

Secondly, Juno lost in the beauty contest at the wedding of Peleus and Thetis to Venus (who loves the Trojans). The decision that Venus was the most beautiful was made by Paris, who was the son of King Priam of Troy. Lastly Juno was jealous of Venus because Jupiter (Juno's husband) loved and admired greatly. Also Venus was Aeneas' mother. A key moment in Aeneas' relationship with his mother, Venus, is when in Book I she visits Aeneas in disguise of a Tyrian girl, telling him to go to Dido's palace.

After she has left Aeneas he realises who she was and cries out in despair to her asking why she must always visit in disguise. In Book II there is the rare occasion of a God directly influencing Aeneas: Venus tries to remind Aeneas of his responsibilities: "Why don't you go and find out how your weary old father Anchises is, whom you left behind, and whether your wife Creusa and son Ascanius are alive?" In Aeneas' description of the fall of Troy (in Book II) he describes Sinon, who opens the Wooden Horse as "divinely protected by an unfair Fate". This agrees with the fact that it was Fate that the Greeks would overcome the Trojans. At the siege Aeneas was prepared to die if necessary but Fate had a different destiny for him. However, when we first meet Aeneas in the Aeneid he is crying out to the stars, wishing that he had

fallen at Troy as a great Trojan hero. He wanted to fight at Troy but Fate, through his father, Anchises, did not allow him:” My son, I consent, and no longer refuse to go with you.

“ This scene at Troy shows that Aeneas had wishes but was not given the privilege of being able to follow them. In Book II Aeneas is free to act and follow his different impulses but ultimately his not staying to fight and die is decided for him by Fate. In the same book Hector and Creusa visit Aeneas in dreams and are representatives of Fate and through them Aeneas finds out that though he had thought that he had free will the Fall of Troy “ has happened just as the Gods decreed.” However, to show that Aeneas has wishes in Book IV he says:”.

.. if the Fates allowed me to live my life as I wished.” This clearly shows that Aeneas does have feelings and emotions and puppets do not have these qualities.

However, Aeneas now finally understands his destiny that lies in Italy (as decreed by Fate):” But Italy, great Italy, is the land I must make for...” Gods other than Athena’s role (mentioned above) intervened in the Greek siege of Troy.

For instance, Apollo indirectly worked against the Trojans by giving Cassandra the ability to prophesise but also cursing her by making no one believe her. This resulted in the Trojans not heeding her warnings about the Wooden Horse. Aeneas’ dramatic description of the Fall of Troy shows how in general the Gods opposed the Trojans. Early in Book IV Venus asks Juno to “

tamper with his [Jupiter's] feelings" to try to alter Fate, even though this is not possible.

Later in Book IV Aeneas is not even allowed to pick independently whom he loves as his own mother, Venus, and Juno seem to act on whims in making Dido and Aeneas fall in love. So many Gods intervene in Aeneas' life and so even minor Gods play vital roles: the god Rumour spread the news of the love between Aeneas and Dido to Iarbas, who was a previous suitor of Dido and also a son of Jupiter. Iarbas then prays to his father because he thinks that it is unfair that Dido rejected him. Jupiter, heeding his son's message, sends Mercury to Aeneas.

Mercury message to Aeneas results in Aeneas deciding to leave Dido making for Italy. Therefore Mercury, a minor God, plays a very important role in Aeneas' departure. Aeneas has had very little control over these events. However, Aeneas was not completely under a love spell and so he was capable of forgetting his Fate. As arbiter Jupiter had intervened to carry out Fate. This means that Aeneas had a very small amount of free will.

Contradicting the claim that Aeneas has little free will, in Book VI Anchises says to Aeneas: "Has your duty, long-awaited by your father, overcome the hard journey?" This indicates that Aeneas' pietas (duty to, in this case, his father) overcame two obstacles: firstly, Aeneas' impulse to die heroically at Troy; and secondly, his urge to indulge in pleasure with Dido and stay at Carthage. This leads us to believe that Aeneas has great pietas and therefore is no puppet. Pietas is one's duty to Gods, family and country. Surely Virgil did not intend to make portray Aeneas as a puppet because in the case of

Aeneas' actions being controlled by the Gods and Fate the readers of the Aeneid would not be able to sympathise and relate to Aeneas.

Aeneas as a puppet would be a 2-dimensional character and this would damage the Aeneid. Aeneas' strength of character is proved in Book VI by reaching the Underworld as it is an immense task. When Aeneas informs Dido of his plans to leave he clearly shows that he is following Fate against his own wishes: " Though it's not what I'd choose myself, I am going to Italy." Surely Aeneas should have realised that his destiny lay in Italy and not with Dido before he decided to stay with her.

Was it Fate that Aeneas was to fall in love with Dido or did Aeneas' love for Dido overpower his pietas. If this was the case it proves that Aeneas is no puppet. It seems that Juno and Venus acted on whims to encourage love between Dido and Aeneas. Ultimately, the final result of the love between Dido and Aeneas is that Dido curses Aeneas' descendants; and because of the curse Rome and Carthage will always be bitter enemies. There is a view taken by some that humans (therefore Aeneas) are puppets to the arrogant and omnipotent Gods, and that through disguises and tricks the gods are trying to either, help Aeneas successfully complete and meet his destiny of founding Rome, or to discourage him.

The Gods and Goddesses (especially Juno and Venus) use Aeneas as a puppet and exploit his mortal qualities in an attempt to help or destroy him. Venus, unlike Juno is trying to help Aeneas fulfil his destiny. This is obviously because Aeneas is her son. It is true that all in all, the Gods and Goddesses use Aeneas, the Greeks and the Trojans for their own purposes in a show of

their divine power and inner feuding. However, this view portrays Aeneas as a pure puppet of the Gods, which simply is not true as he has feelings, emotions and pietas. Aeneas is a mixture between a puppet and a free mortal because the end result of his actions in general are decided by Fate and when the Gods are not intervening, he does have Free Will.