

An essay on oedipus, a mythical greek king of thebes

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Today we are more familiar with Oedipus, the mythical Greek King of Thebes, in connection with early 20th century psycho-babble than we are with the man as a historical figure or the question whether or not human beings are free to choose their own destiny. Writer Sophocles presents him as a tragic hero, a man who has been dealt a terrible blow by Fate. Oedipus represents two different strands of an enduring leitmotif in Greek myth and drama: humanity's flawed nature and the role an individual plays during the course of fulfilling their destiny. What could the son and killer of Laius, the son and later husband of Queen Jocasta have done to escape his horrific fate? Free Will versus Destiny Sophocles' tragedy "Oedipus the King" presents us with the age-old question whether or not human beings have free will or if all their actions are dictated by the Gods. Can the individual ever rise to the challenge and defy destiny? Oedipus falls prey to what the Fates have decreed for him but could have prevented it. It is always easier to deal with conflict by choosing violence than to reason with an opponent or compromise.

It is always more convenient not to ask too many questions, when the object of our desire is within our grasp. At first glance, Oedipus seems to fulfil the prophecy accidentally, but upon closer inspection using his free will – namely his intelligence – would have prevented him from falling into a trap set by the Gods/Fate. Free will includes using one's insight into one's own motives and foreseeing consequences to one's actions and choosing one's actions accordingly. Oedipus acts, but never reasons. Summary The tragedy starts with Oedipus' father Laius, who wants to forestall a terrible prophesy by

leaving his son to die on a mountainside. His choice is to preserve his own life rather than that of his son.

Had he valued his son's life above his own, the tragedy of Oedipus would not have happened. Brought up by foster parents King Polybus and Queen Merope of Corinth, young Oedipus is horrified when told of the prophesy by the oracle of Delphi. Yet, this does not stop him from valuing his own pride over the life of a stranger, whom he meets on his way to Thebes. Oedipus kills a man in a dispute over right of way. That stranger, as it turns out, was King Laius of Thebes.

Had Oedipus used reason and compromised, King Laius would have been merrily on his way and none of the tragic consequences, including marriage to his mother Jocasta and producing four children with her, would have followed. Conclusion Human nature means we rarely foresee or question the consequences of our actions. Irrespective of the existence of God(s), destiny or Fate, human beings are still in possession of free will, but the temptation to use the path of least resistance trips most of us up along the way.