

# Example of oedipus rex by sophocles research paper

[Family](#), [Parents](#)



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Write an essay explaining how Sophocles' Oedipus exemplifies or refutes Aristotle's definition of a tragic hero. Review Chapter 33 in your textbook for the background and overview of Aristotle's concept of tragedy/the tragic hero and drama. This chapter also contains critical information on Sophocles and the play Oedipus.

Outline and thesis statement

## **Introduction**

This paper attempts to prove that Oedipus exemplifies Aristotle's definition of a tragic hero in the context of the story Oedipus Rex. The thesis statement is continued in the definition of Plato's Theory of Forms which goes along to prove that Oedipus is a tragic hero.

## **Main plot**

In the play Oedipus Rex by Sophocles (rpt. In Thomas R. Arp and Greg Johnson, Perrine's Literature: Structure, Sound and Sense, 10 th ed. [Boston: Wadsworth, 2009] 1226-1271), we see that Oedipus embarks on a journey of self-discovery, ultimately gaining the knowledge to his own flaws. After Oedipus discovers his true identity, he realises that his arrogance and pride have destroyed him and the play ends in tragedy. Oedipus is definitely an enigmatic character with lots of conflicting messages and emotions and persecuted by inner torment. He is a classic character full of suicidal tendencies also.

One may examine the following quote which clearly shows that Oedipus is intrinsically a fallen hero without much hope for salvation. The tragedy is imbued in the fact that he is a hero without much hope of becoming anyone else.

## **The tyrant is a child of Pride**

Who drinks from his sickening cup

Recklessness and vanity,

Until from his high crest headlong

He plummets to the dust of hope. (Sophocles p 2)

In a way, Oedipus is very similar to Othello The Moor of Venice whose obsession with his wife's infidelity turns him to absolute and complete ruin. The main thrust of Sophocles' writing is that Oedipus was at the peak of his powers but pride and haughtiness drove him to his death.

**Description:**

Oedipus's main motivation throughout the action of the play is to find a way to end the plague which is afflicting his kingdom. He has sent his brother-in-law Creon to Delphi to find a solution and when Creon returns, he tells Oedipus that he must find out who murdered Laius and punish him. Oedipus asks for Teiresias whose help he needs to identify the murderer. Teiresias says: "Your parents thought I was wise enough" to which Oedipus replies: "Who were my parents?" When his wife, Jocasta, introduces into his mind that he might have killed Laius, he presses on with the investigation hoping to find someone who will inform him that he had killed someone else and not Laius. When the messenger from Corinth arrives, he tells Oedipus that he was definitely adopted.

His motives in actions before the play were finding out who his parents were. It was always the first thing that was on his mind. He wanted to know who he was and the only way to do this would be to find out who his parents were. We know this is true because as soon as Teiresias mentioned Oedipus's parents, he asks who his parents were. After much thought and tribulation he again sends the messenger to ask whose son he is. The messenger finally admits that it was Laius and Jocasta who pressed him to take the baby and abandon him on the hillside to die. Oedipus has now become aware that he is married to his mother Jocasta.

"I am the child of Fortune, the giver of good, and I shall not be shamed. She is my mother; my sisters are the Seasons; my rising and my falling match with theirs. Born thus, I ask to be no other man than that I am". (Sophocles p 3)

This quote intrinsically demonstrates that Oedipus is a tragic hero as it also shows that he is looking at himself from a different eye and a different perspective with all looking forward. He is also content with his particular situation which does not call for change or momentum but which focuses on the future where he is expected to meet his fate accordingly.

## **Discussion**

Teireras, the blind prophet, tried to dissuade him from finding out who his parents were. When he returned from his journey he was reluctant to answer his questions warning him that he would not want to know the answers as Oedipus himself was the killer and his marriage a sinful union. Oedipus dismisses him and the messenger tells him that Laui's killer is here before him. He is his father's killer. He has killed his mother's husband. He is a man who can see now but who will leave without seeing. " Have I killed my father?, Oedipus asks.

Jocasta also tried to dissuade him from finding out who his parents were. She was aware that she had abandoned her son to die because the oracle had told her husband Laui that his son would kill him. So they had given him up to die. A messenger had taken the baby into his care with the result that Oedipus has indeed killed his own father Laui and married his own mother Jocasta.

Finally the truth is clear to Oedipus. He grabs a knife and looks for | Jocasta intending to kill her. He finds, however, that she had hung herself. He blinds himself by taking the brooches from her dress and gouges his eyes out. He has done and seen vile things and he does not want to see again. He is

banished from the kingdom, leaving his daughters to be looked after at the palace. Oedipus leaves the palace doomed in his tragic fate and incestuous lineage.

Plato based his theory with particular emphasis on the aspects of Beauty and Circularity which means that intrinsic beauty may only be appreciated when one can truly assess what this means in a spiritual context. The theory distinguishes between beauty as in the physical form and that which is spiritual. A typical example would be a beautiful object, or a beautiful woman for example and this will contrast with a piece of music which is held to be sublime. In this sense the form is abstract so Plato would assert that the musical beauty is of a more higher plane than that which is simply physical. This may also mean that everything which may be seen and is considered as beautiful may have to yield to that which cannot be seen as this has a deeper spiritual yearning than the physical. The concept of mind over matter is also instructive here as it demonstrates that beauty may not always be the same to every person and that it is also subjective.

With the concept of Circularity, Plato turns full circle on issues such as the goodness of God and the all-round supremacy of his being. This means that God remains all powerful in certain aspects and one must bow to his greatness and goodness without much ado. This also means that everyone must submit him/herself to God as the human being is inherently flawed and cannot take decisions properly without the influence of God who is all powerful. Plato also immersed this theory into the lives of politicians who may have taken the wrong decisions and were also faced with dilemmas on moral issues. This meant that singularity and decision making could not go

on without God's influence who is intrinsically an all powerful state with control over everything. Obviously this created certain reactions from the political establishment who could not seem to understand what Plato was actually going on about and could not comprehend the actual states of the forms.

### **Feature of forms:**

The forms which have already been discussed are beauty and circularity but there are others which Plato goes into detail in his Republic. In fact Republic is actually an argument for the spiritual temperament of justice with Temperance and Justice being among the main values which the author espouses. However, the proper application of justice is something which Plato took great trouble over as he could not find a balance between the proper impartiality of justice and the actual implementation of it. The feature of the form of Courage is also intriguing in the sense that this state could be seen to be the highest form of bravery but this is also debatable. Here one can comment on the feature of such forms which remain slightly grey areas in this respect. In Republic, Plato argues that the true natures of the forms of Justice, Beauty, Courage and Temperance cannot actually be known and this exposed him to substantial amounts of criticism. Notwithstanding all this I tend to agree with his reasoning and his conclusions that form is the supreme state of mind and matter. Thus this means that Plato is right when he states that the realm of forms constitutes the real world

## **Criticism:**

Such an innovative theory came in for a huge bout of criticism from the Athenian establishment for obvious reasons, not least due to the fact that Socrates applied certain elements of it to the family life which was so dear to the Athenians. With Socrates' proposal to abolish the family and have children brought up by the state, the theory of forms received a substantial setback as it was meant to be a force for the good and ended up becoming a force for disorder and disquiet. The concept of the ideal state is something which could not really be put into practice and one could not compensate with what was viewed as the overriding force for good.

Plato leaves a lot of grey areas when he defines Good as the major force over everything as this cannot be totally understood. His basic description of forms and how these interact is also rather strange and open ended although one can arrive to a proper conclusion when counter arguments are proposed. In fact there are several counter arguments to Plato's theory not least, the argument that beauty is of a more spiritual than physical nature. Although one cannot argue that the overriding force of good is greater than anything else there are other states of mind and matter which may perhaps be closer to perfection than good itself.

## **Conclusion: The Theory of Forms as a force for good**

Plato's theory of Forms certainly appears to be a force for good in that it is built around values which emphasise that good. Although it is open to criticism on some points, it does not mean that it cannot be enacted in



several scenarios throughout life and is a theory which is also beautiful in that it reinforces the spiritual nature of God who is all powerful.

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