

Phaedra: an example of enlightenment values literature review sample

[Sociology](#), [Women](#)



The plot of Jean Racine's play, "Phaedra," follows the pattern of sexual intrigue and treachery. The plot of the play revolves around Phaedra, the second wife of Theseus, the king of Athens, and Hippolytus, the son of Theseus from his first wife Antiope. When the young Hippolytus shuns the worship of Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty and love, an angry Aphrodite compels Phaedra, Theseus's second wife, to lust after her stepson in order to punish Hippolytus. Phaedra tries to resist the urge of her improper passions, but when Oenone, Phaedra's nurse reveals to Phaedra's desire for Hippolytus, he fiercely condemns women (Racine 22). Since Hippolytus does not reciprocate her feelings, Phaedra decides to make Hippolytus suffer by leaving a letter declaring that Hippolytus tried to rape her. Thus, it is apparent that Phaedra's uncontrolled sexual desires for Hippolytus led to the dangerous, dramatic and tragic turn of events that end with tragedy (Kafalenos 81).

As apparently depicted in the play, some emotions can be dangerous and can be so powerful that they can take control of a person. This is what happens to Phaedra, loses control of herself to her love and passion for Hippolytus. The intensity of love and sexual desire lead her to falsely claim that Hippolytus tried to rape her. This incident from the play teaches the lesson that emotions must be kept in control rather than being allowed to take control of a person's course of actions. Thus, it is apparent that an individual's course of life is often determined by their emotions, whether they are aware or not. Phaedra chose to deceive her husband, leading to a tragic fate because of her emotions. Although she feels ashamed and guilty, she is not able to control her emotions.

While emotions like love and passion can be endangering, they can also be pure as well. Love and passion can be positive when they make people's lives happier and more fulfilling. For instance, Aricia manages to lead to joyful and satisfying because of her emotions. The same love and passion that demeans Phaedra exalts Aricia and grants her a special brilliance. Thus, it is also apparent that humans would have no reason to achieve happiness if they had no emotions. Emotions provide people with a reason to live and to be happy. It is true that emotions can also cause misery, pain and suffer as they did to Phaedra, but what is important is ward off negative, uncontrolled emotions, and keep emotions in control. It is necessary to distinguish positive emotions from negative ones (Roisman, 185).

Another aspect that this play sheds light on is how people should responsible for their choices. The language in the play reveals the conflicts of love and virtue. It must also be noted, the characters in the play ultimately take responsibility for their actions and choices. For instance, Phaedra accepts that she made a mistake by feeling illicit love and sexual desires for her stepson. While it can be argued that Phaedra was not able to control her emotions because the goddess Aphrodite had compelled her. However, the truth is that she was just too weak and ultimately gave it to her emotions. She considers herself helpless and that is why her emotions take control of her. Considering this point of view, it is apparent that human emotions, especially uncontrolled love and sexual desires, have been presented as a sign of weakness (Kafalenos 81).

Human life is not complete without love, passion and other emotions. When they are positive, emotions allow a person to achieve happiness. However,

when these same emotions are not managed and kept in control, they can endanger a person. Jean Racine's play, "Phaedra," clearly presents this notion. The uncontrolled intensity of Phaedra's love and passion for Hippolytus, her stepson, cause her to falsely accuse him and condemn him of something he did not do, and setting in motion a series of events lead to the innocent Hippolytus's tragic demise. Arguably, Phaedra's case may have been exceptional because of the role played by the goddess Aphrodite. Nonetheless, her weakness also had a part in the fact that her emotions took control of her. The play is a good example of enlightenment values since it highlights aspects, such as the difference between positive and negative emotions, emotions as a sign of weakness, responsibility of actions, virtues, etc.

Works Cited

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