

# Role of fate and divine intervention in oedipus and odyssey essay

[Literature](#), [Poem](#)



In most cases, forces that are completely beyond our control define the course that our life takes. This makes predestined fate and divine interventions responsible for nearly everything that happens in a man's life. By looking at history, one is able to realize that most of Ancient Greek believed in the power of fate and the existence of forces that were beyond man's control.

By analyzing most Greek literature, one is able to realize that there is usually an "unseen hand" that clearly controls people's destiny. According to this mythology, the gods are responsible for engineering our fate and directing our lives in direction that we would not have taken by following our free will.

Although there is much literature written on this subject, Sophocles' Oedipus and Homer's Odyssey are classic examples that demonstrate how fate and divine intervention can dictate the course of our lives. In both plays, there is strong evidence, which proves that events in both Oedipus and Odysseus lives are engineered by forces that are beyond their control. (Homer 209)

In fact, it is interesting to note that fate and free will are interconnected in such a way that it is almost impossible to differentiate between the two. This is because while the gods are obviously responsible for choosing the path that one's life is to take, it still takes the free will of the involved person to follow that path.

This is evident in Homer's Odyssey where for close to eight years Odysseus is held captive by a force beyond his control. In fact, these unseen forces were responsible for his initial capture and they held him captive for almost

ten years. When the same forces decided that it was time for Odysseus to return to his own country, they released him and notified Kalypso of this fact. (Homer 265)

When Odysseus was about to leave, Kalypso tried to coax him to stay but instead he chose the latter. This can be seen when Kalypso tells him, " You should stay here, and guard this house, and be immortal" (Homer 267) Instead of heeding this advice, Odysseus decides to leave for his home country and back to his people.

Although this is the case, it is clear that Odysseus is merely following the path that the gods have preordained for him. This is seen at the beginning when the god Zeus claims, " all man's afflictions come from us, we hear." (Homer 210) This clearly shows that Odysseus was merely following a path that had already been established by divine intervention.

Apart from the detainment of Odysseus by the gods, the play contains many other scenes where the hand of fate is evident. An example is where Athena goes to Ithaka to meet Odysseus son. This meeting is called to rally the support of the community to reject Penelope's suitors. Since the disappearance of Odysseus, Penelope has remained chaste but at one point, she gives in and makes herself available to other men. It is surprising that all this happens just as Odysseus is beginning to find his way back home.

In order to buy time, the gods cause Athena to rally the support of the community to ensure that Penelope is not married before the arrival of her husband. It is clear that had it not been for the interference of the gods, the

suitors would have succeeded and Odysseus would never have gotten home in time owing to the turbulent condition at sea. One can therefore confidently conclude that the hand of fate was responsible for all the happenings in the life of Odysseus. (Homer 340)

In fact, this same hand of fate is witnessed in Sophocles' Oedipus where divine intervention is responsible for Oedipus destiny. Just like Odysseus in the Odyssey, Oedipus has the free will to follow the course that the gods have predestined for him.

Since his birth, Oedipus is destined to kill his father and become the husband of his mother. No matter the path that he chooses, this oracle delivered by Apollo has to be fulfilled. Although the gods have ruled Oedipus past, he has the free will to dictate what happens in Thebes and his future by extension. (Sophocles 37)

From the opening of the play, it is evident that Oedipus took deliberate steps that led to his downfall. Once the plague appeared in Thebes, Oedipus could have chosen to ignore it but he instead chose to send Creon to consult the oracle at Delphi. When he learned of Apollo's prophecy, he could have chosen to investigate the matter in a quiet manner but instead he cursed the murderer who was indeed himself.

This can be seen in the following text by Sophocles, " Upon the murderer I invoke this curse- whether he is one man and all unknown, or one of many- may he wear out his life in misery or doom! If with my knowledge he lives at my hearth, I pray that I myself may feel my curse." (Sophocles 45)

In order for the Greek's to identify with Oedipus, Sophocles presented him in such a way that gave him some human flaws, which were meant to equate him with the rest of the human race. For Oedipus, these flaws were his inflated ego, arrogance, an apparent disregard for the gods and an almost obsessive quest for truth.

Upon learning that he was indeed the killer of king Laius, Oedipus became enraged and claimed that the old oracle had lied. By fleeing from Corinth, Oedipus was actually trying to outrun the proclamation of the gods. Once Jocasta learned that indeed the old prophecy had been fulfilled, she tried to beg Oedipus not to pursue the matter but to let it rest. However, his only reply was, " I will not be persuaded to let chance of finding out the whole thing clearly." (Sophocles 50)

It is at this point that the truth is bared before him and he goes ahead to curse the fate in his life. In order to show the responsibility of the gods, Oedipus claimed, " It was Apollo, friends, Apollo, that brought this bitter bitterness, my sorrows to completion." (Sophocles 51) This clearly shows that it was divine intervention and not an act of free will that was responsible for what happened to Oedipus.

By looking at the two plays, it is evident that no man can elude the fate that the gods have preordained for him. However, everyone is given an option of choosing how to handle the second chance that life proffers. In the Odyssey, Odysseus reunites with his wife and forgives her for allowing other men to court her.

On the other hand, Oedipus also chooses to accept the fate that the gods have for his life and decides to resolve it using his own ideology and standards. He gives himself a punishment befitting his crime and decides not to blame the gods for anything that has happened to him. The analysis of these two plays clearly proves to us that fate not character is responsible for the course that people's lives take.

Homer. *The Odyssey*. Trans. Robert Fitzgerald. *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces: the Western tradition*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co. 1999. 209-514. Print.

Sophocles. *Oedipus the King*. Trans. David Grene. University of Chicago Press, 2010. 36-52. Print.