

Greek mythology essay sample

[Literature](#), [Mythology](#)



Throughout history fate vs. free will has been debated over and over. Do we really have control over our lives, or are there higher beings controlling our lives? When we look at Greek Mythology we often run into the gods of that era. Sometimes they are merely backdrops to the human element of the story, but in *The Odyssey*, the gods play a prominent if not vital role to the central themes of the story. We must ask ourselves if Odysseus was ruled by his own whims or if he was ruled by fate, this paper aims to open up possibilities and reveal that anything is possible. I would like to believe that there is something great out there and that fate and free will coexist harmoniously, this I believe is the happy medium between fate and free will.

Fate has a place in the Greek world but its place is not the same as it is in other scenarios or worlds. It is important to understand the word before we discuss it. Fate as far as Greek mythology goes is not just fate. By most standards fate means that things occur for an unknown reason that no one has any control over. However, in the world of Greek Mythology fate does not just happen. The gods engineer fate and they interfere to make things happen that might not otherwise have happened. Since the players do not always know of the gods' involvement, things may actually appear to be fate but in reality be engineered happenings. Sometimes what they gods make happen is for the best of the person or people involved, but other times the gods just want to watch the mortals struggle and see how they get themselves out of certain situations. In *The Odyssey*, it is clear that Zeus is just sitting back watching things unfold. It is only after Zeus' daughter Athena involves herself, when Odysseus begins his journey home.

Free will on the other hand is not engineered. It speaks to the concept of having full authority over one's aspirations and ultimate direction. The key there is "ultimate." The gods can make up the plan and choose the path, but the people had to walk it. Therefore, fate and free will are not mutually exclusive and they both go on throughout *The Odyssey*. Odysseus is given the opportunity to become immortal if he would stay with Calypso, but it is his choice to leave, therefore leading him down another path, but again, he had to walk down it.

In *The Odyssey* life is one's own responsibility; instead of leaving all things up to fate, the characters had a significant influence upon his or her own existence. The gods in *The Odyssey* are the ones who held Odysseus captive for over eight years. They were responsible for his capture in the first place and then refused to let him go for almost a decade. When they finally decided he should be allowed to find his way home they made it known to his captor Calypso. However Odysseus still had to choose to leave. Calypso tried to keep him by offering immortality. Odysseus could have stayed but he chose to go. Some say that the gods knew Odysseus would not stay and that is why they decided to let him go. However, knowledge of an act doesn't take away the fact that Odysseus chose to leave all by himself. The gods took much of his life away and Odysseus had more reason than anyone to give up and say to himself, "This is my fate." Once the gods have controlled the "fate" of certain people they let the happenings take their course. It is true that the gods interfere with the lives of the people, but that never takes away their free will.

In some areas it is pertinent that the gods interfere. For example, Athena went to Ithaca and advised Odysseus's son to call an assembly. The purpose of the assembly was supposed to be to gather community support in opposing Penelope's suitors. Penelope had waited a long time for her husband Odysseus to come home and in the end she began allowing suitors to come around. In these times, a rich widow would not be allowed to stay single for long. Suitors would come and try to marry her off, but there was no proof of Odysseus' death so what the suitors were doing was ethically wrong. Just as Odysseus was finding his way home, money-hungry suitors bombarded Penelope, and Athena thought a community effort to keep the men away was in order. Here again is a prime example of the god's important role in the development of the story. Without the interference of Athena the suitors may have moved more quickly than they did. In addition to that, the gods worked hard at getting Odysseus home as quickly as possible. We can say that the gods interfered because they wanted a certain outcome and that is very true. However helping situations along doesn't insure the outcome, it just makes it more likely. The gods wanting a certain result is a different matter from free will. It is important to distinguish the two.

In The Odyssey both free will and fate occur. As we study what the true meaning of free will is, we can be surer of the representation of it in The Odyssey. Many times throughout the story there were choices made that affected the outcome. In one instance we can observe the suitors in Ithaca. They behaved in an atrocious manner and chose poorly throughout the whole story. The gods, who might have interfered and changed the course of

history by affecting the choices the suitors made, could foresee where their choices would lead them. Instead the gods chose to sit back and allow the people to make the choices they were going to make. Those choices caused consequences and reactions that the suitors could not get out of. This was the fate of the suitors brought on by the gods because of the choices that the suitors had made. This is the way of free will and it represents the actions that were allowed in the myth. Again this could just be the gods' way of having fun at the mortals' expense, but their fun comes in watching the suitors make their own decisions, which ultimately end in their deaths.

The Odyssey represents free will in that it gave choices. Choices were given to the gods but more importantly the people made their own choices. The choice Odysseus made to disguise himself, instead of going straight home to tell his wife he was back, was of his own doing. The choice his wife made to wait for eight years and then make the decision to remarry was her doing. All of these choices that were made by those involved in the myth are evidence of free will. The Odyssey, along with other Greek Mythology, gives us guidance in our lives today. We can turn to the stories and see morals and values that we want to emulate. Heroes were the finest kind in the myths. We can also see the values and morals we do not agree with and know we would stay away from those.

The Odyssey presents us with the wonderful world of magic and gods while at the same time presenting us with a plain view of fate and guidance by showing us that the gods can interfere a little then sit back and let the choices fall where they may. Free will is exercised all over that story and free

will gives the story the twists and turns that we have come to expect from all Greek Mythological classics. The thought that we don't have as much control over our lives as we think may be misleading. In The Odyssey the choices that were made encompassed the mold, which the gods believed, they should fit into. The gods merely start paths; the players are the ones who have to choose where they want to go and how they want to get there.

Fate and free will are broad subjects which can be taken apart and broken down piece by piece until there is nothing left, but we will never fully understand how they work and how they affect our everyday lives. For all we know, there could be gods controlling what we do and how we do it, on the other hand, we could take full responsibility for our lives and own up to the fact that we made decisions by ourselves and we have to live with them. I would like to believe that there is a bigger picture and that things happen for a reason, almost like fate, but we still get to choose for ourselves where we will go and how we will get there.