

Oedipus the King is widely regarded as a tragedy of fate. Briefly stated, it begins with a terrible plague that destroys the city. King Oedipus sends a messenger to the oracle at Delphi to find a cure. The answer that is received suggests to find out who the killer of King Laios was. Oedipus sends for the prophet Teiresias, who after much arguing, finally reveals that Oedipus himself is the murderer. Slowly but surely the history of Oedipus' situation begins to unravel, and it is discovered that there was a prophecy made that he would unwittingly kill his father and marry his mother; Oedipus fulfilled his prophecy.

The conflict here lies with the struggle between the all powerful gods and the mere will of the humans. The prophecy had been made about Oedipus as soon as he was born. Once the destiny was foretold by the gods, no amount of hope, faith, or vain effort by human beings could have prevented it.

As soon as there was interference with fate, it was counteracted by the divinities. Jocasta wanted to kill the baby, so she skewed his legs together, had a servant bring him to the forest and leave him for dead. The servant does not want to carry out this deed and therefore "saves his life" by handing the baby to someone else, so that he can be raised in another city. Further, a drunken man in a tavern tells Oedipus about the prophecy, so he runs home to question his parents about his fate. Instead of telling him the truth, they give him the impression that they are in fact his biological parents.

The idea that must be pointed out here, is that once an oracle or a prophet makes a prediction, it is destined to be and there is absolutely nothing that can be done about it. Oedipus was highly regarded as a noble and honorable king. However, if we explore beneath the exterior, we will discover that in actuality, the King has many faults and is not so honorable and noble.

Oedipus seems to be driven by an unconscious rage. Being very short tempered, he is quick to lash out at those whose opinions are different from his. The first episode appears within the first few minutes of the play. When Teiresias refuses to tell him who murdered King Laios, Oedipus becomes unjustly enraged, which in a way suggests that he himself could have committed the murder. He then proceeds to insult Teiresias violently. Teiresias is finally provoked into telling Oedipus the truth; that he is responsible for the death of King Laios. Oedipus then accuses him of lying and conspiring with Creon against him.

As the story continues, we see how Oedipus is easily irritated by a few words from a drunken man in a tavern. This once again shows his short temper. Ironically, it was those words that sent him off to fulfill the prophecy in the first place. On his way out of Corinth, we catch a glimpse of another volatile explosion. He becomes involved in a scuffle with a band of men at a crossroad. In his fit of unleashed anger, he attacks and kills the men, not knowing that one of the men is King Laios.

The problem with Oedipus seems to lie within his internal character structures. He is full of anger and rage that is expressed as quickly as it is forgotten. Oedipus is stubbornly resistant to the full details of the story, always attributing these events to mere coincidence. His ignorance comes from his fear of the appalling horror of the possible truth and it's devastating implications.

The question of morality surfacing leads one to sympathize with Oedipus. How could the gods be so cruel? How could this be justified by simply saying that it was "the work of fate"? Was it in fact fate to begin with? These questions and many more like it have been raised countless times. Few concrete answers have been found, and there is much debate over even the slightest points.

A conclusion that can be drawn, is that the plot of Oedipus the King was entirely predestined. The characters and circumstances surrounding the events were all simply instruments of fate which nobody could prevent or alter. Ultimately, Oedipus cannot be held responsible for his actions, because fate was immutable from the outset. It may not have been fair, kind, or just, but the future was preordained and irrevocable.

