

# OEDIPUS' SINS: FATE OR FREE WILL AT PLAY?

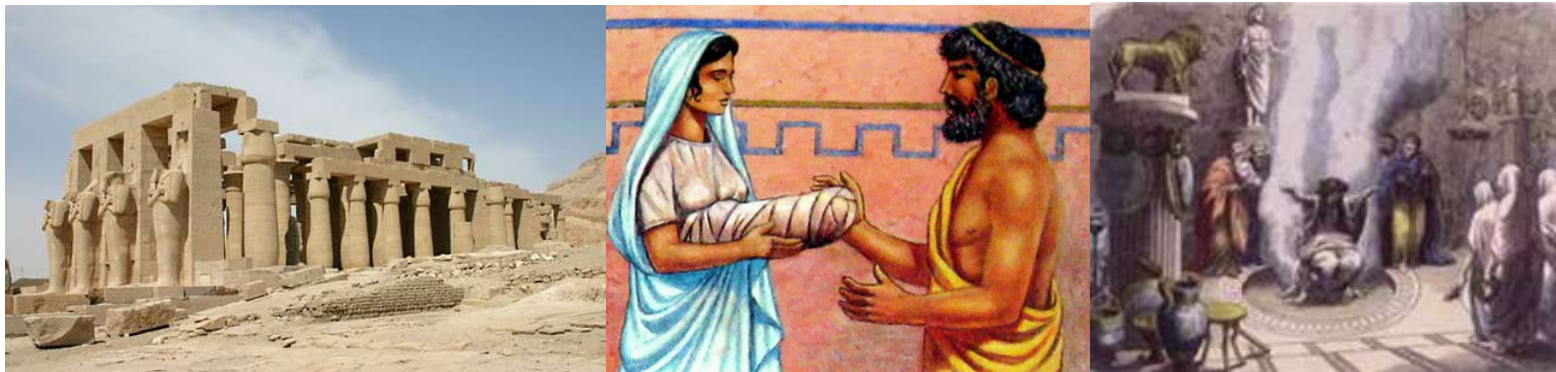
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Section 15



# OEDIPUS' STORY I

- Born to Laius and Jocasta, King and Queen of Thebes.
- Laius given a prediction by Delphi the Oracle that “doom would strike him down at the hands of his son” (*pg. 201*).
- To avoid his fate, Laius orders the 3-days old Oedipus be left in mountains to die.
- The baby luckily ends up in the hands of Polypus and Merope, the King and Queen of Corinth.
- Oedipus grows up, learns his fate from the same fate as Laius from Oracle.



# OEDIPUS' STORY II

- To avoid fate, runs away, gets in a quarrel on his way, kills Laius and his servants.
- reaches Thebes, defeats the Sphinx and gets rewarded with the Throne.
- Marries Jocasta, all the while happy that he'd avoided a tragic fate.
- Years later, a plague hits Thebes and Oracle tells the killer of Laius has to be found and punished to save the city.
- Investigation begins, Oedipus realizes he's the killer he's been looking for and that although he tried very hard, he fulfilled the prophecy and committed the grave sins.





# THE SAVIOUR'S SINS

## ■ INCEST

- Oedipus sleeps with/ marries/ has children with his own mother Jocasta
- Since incest is a social/ religious Taboo...
- Hence, committing a major sin



## ■ PATRICIDE

- Although unintentionally, Oedipus kills his father Laius
- At Phocis, a “a place where two branching roads meet” (*pg 202*)



# FATE: THE PREDETERMINED PATH

- Fate is a predetermined course of events.
- It's like the entire story of someone's life written before they're even born
- The notion of fate enforces that humans as individuals have no power/ control over what we do in our lives.
- Support the existence of an entity (maybe God) that controls the events that happen in our lives.
- The oracle informed both Laius and Oedipus about their fate.



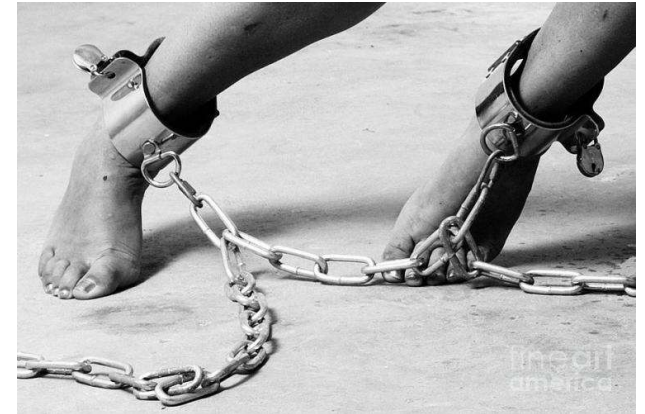
# HUMANS AGAINST FATE

- Laius tries **averting the prophecy** (his fate) by getting his son killed
- Oedipus tries **avoiding his fate** by running far away from his parents (in Corinth) to an unknown city and starting a new life
- As McHugh states: “*Laius’ attempt to assert his free will is foiled when fate intervenes, in the form of the “good will” of a Shepherd who spares the infant’s life*”
- **Fate intervenes** and saves Oedipus against all odds and nurtures him for his tragic end
- As Tiresias says “Make no mistake you are a doom born man” (pg 67)



# THE INESCAPABILITY OF FATE

- No matter how hard both tried to escape their fate,
  - Oedipus survives
  - Fate miraculously crosses Oedipus' and Laius' paths at the place where the three roads meet
  - Of all the possibilities, Oedipus gets thrown off-road, gets angry
  - and commits his first sin: **Patricide**
- 
- Miraculously ends up in Thebes (of the countless cities)
  - Defeat sphinx, is offered the throne and marriage with Jocasta and hence, unconsciously Oedipus commits his second sin: **Incest**



# OEDIPUS: FATED TO DOOM?

- No matter how hard he/ his father tried...
- No matter how much they believed they'd escaped their fate...
- Oedipus unconsciously follows fate's mysterious path
- And rather than avoiding his fate, meets it head-on
- So, the question is: **WAS OEDIPUS IN CONTROL OF HIS LIFE? DID HE HAVE ANY FREE WILL IN HIS ACTIONS?**





# THE NOTION OF FREE WILL

- Free will: the ability to have liberty to act on your desires/ thoughts.
- It pivots the entire responsibility of our actions on us
- No-one else governs what we do!
- **So, what did Oedipus willingly do? Were his sins committed out of free will?**



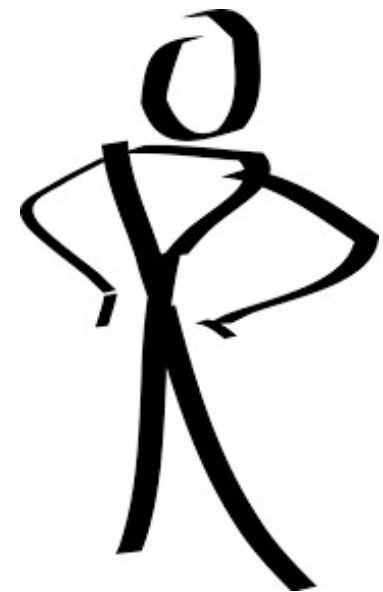
# DID OEDIPUS PRACTICE HIS FREE WILL?

- Considering the notion of freewill...
- The act Oedipus performed consciously (willingly) were:
  - Ignoring his fate and running away from it
  - Isolating himself from Corinth and his parents
  - Running to a new city and starting anew
- Hence, the actions he committed under his freewill were against the prophecies and so, against his fate.



# OEDIPUS' PRIDE: THE FINAL TRAP OF FATE?

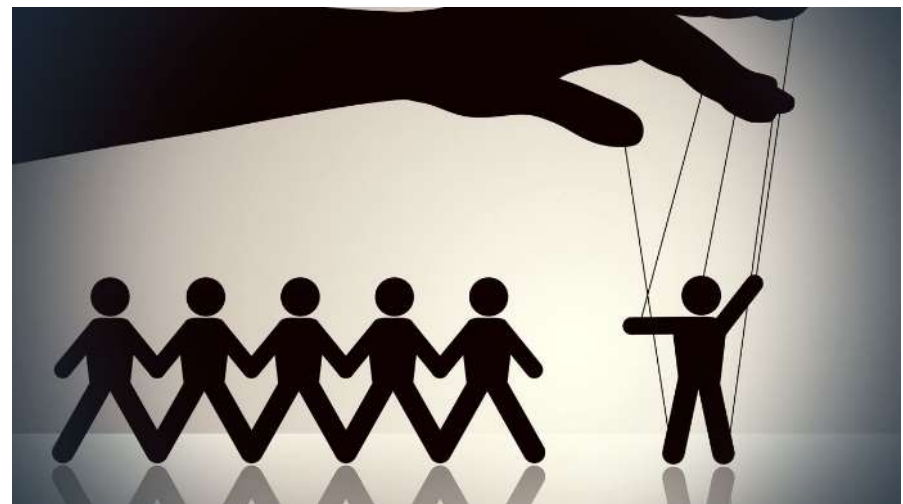
- Although numerous people warned him to quit his search, a proud Oedipus willingly continued his pursuit of killer.
- Tiresias warned: “you are the murderer you hunt” (pg 180)
- Jocasta, having realized the truth pleaded: “I beg you, don’t do this” (pg. 222)
- But Oedipus, slave to his own pride goes on
- So, although he didn’t practice his free will while committing the actions, he did conform his acts
- And sealed his fate entirely willingly.



# OEDIPUS' FREE WILL: A STRING OF HIS FATE?

- Throughout his life, he assumed he'd avoided fate using free will
- And that he had adhered to his respectable character
- But his free will to avoid his fate was what made it true!
- As McHugh states: "*compulsively continued his search for the murderer despite the warnings he received*"
- Ended up falling the trap of fate and releasing the grave truth to public
- So, Oedipus free will was fate's path in disguise...

- So does he stand at fault?



# PSYCHOANALYSIS: UNCONSCIOUS INCLINATIONS

- According to the father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud
  - As published in his paper, Oedipus' complex states:
  - Male infants/ children are naturally attracted to their mother
  - And consider the fathers as enemies, willing to eliminate them
  - Hence, Oedipus' sins are subconsciously embedded in everyone's minds
- 
- But, Oedipus never got to be with his parents long enough.
  - And his subconscious never governed his actions.
  - So, **who/ what's responsible for the "Saviors" sins?**





# WHO TO BLAME?

- Oedipus' was predestined to commit incest and patricide according to the prophecy
- Although Oedipus' actions were governed by his fate, his realization of those sins could've been avoided, if he wasn't proud and thirsty for knowledge
- Regardless, he actively tried avoiding his fate throughout his life
- He and Laius tried to hold a “conflict between the all-powerful will of the gods and the vain efforts of human beings” (*The interpretation of dreams, ch5*)
- *Hence...*



# CONCLUSION

- No matter how hard he tried averting the prophecy using his free will, Oedipus kept falling in the trap of fate.
- Hence, Oedipus stands innocent because he didn't have any control over his life and it was fate at play.
- He was predestined to “doom”
- **OEDIPUS's TRAGIC LIFE WAS A RESULT OF FATE's ILL-PLAY**
- Considering this conclusion and the story of Oedipus,
- It is apparent that humans are never fully responsible for their actions and hence,
- The concept of free will is shadowed by fate!



# REFERENCES

- [http://www.worldcat.org/title/literary-theme-fate-versus-free-will/oclc/877172917&referer=brief\\_results](http://www.worldcat.org/title/literary-theme-fate-versus-free-will/oclc/877172917&referer=brief_results)
- <http://www.umsl.edu/~gradyf/theory/Freudipusrex.htm>
- Sophocles: The Three Theban Plays (Oedipus The King).

