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Which Path Shall I Choose?

An individual's future is determined by a myriad of decisions, directing the individual down any number of branching paths. Those decisions constitute consideration, evaluation and resolution – all acts of free will. One is not fated to think, one simply does. “One could always have experienced or acted somewhat differently from the way one did.”(Child 40)

Upon learning of the prophecy that he was to kill his father and marry his mother, Oedipus “himself ran away to avoid fulfilling the prophecy.” (Biddle 768) He made this decision freely, believing that if he left, the prophecy could not come true. The other path, which he could have taken, would have been to confront the prophecy. His, believed, parents did not help him make this decision. They knowingly continued with the falsehood of being his true parents. Had they spoken the truth, Oedipus could have chosen the second path and he would have halted his own demise.

locaste is not to be left without mention in all that happens to Oedipus. As the wife of Laios, and a member of the rule, she allowed for the disposal of her three day old son, with conscious knowledge. Had she taken a different stance on the morality of the destruction of another human being, the events could have been altered. She acted freely and therefore is an accomplice to the fall of Oedipus.

Had the shepherd not acted morally and done as he was ordered to do, dispose of the child, the prophecy would have ended. "We are nevertheless free, since causality does not compel our will."
(Marcoulesco 419)

Oedipus' perseverance for knowledge as to the killer of Laios and the questions embedded in his mind by Teiresias, "I say that you are the murderer whom you seek" (*Oedipus Rex* 1.144), landed Oedipus on the track of evaluation. He was forced to consider statements made to him about himself.

When locaste retold the story of Laios murder, "By marauding strangers where three highways meet" (*Oedipus Rex* 2.193), Oedipus expresses "how strange a shadowy memory crossed my mind."(*Oedipus Rex* 2.203) He starts to assess the events and continues to put together the puzzle.

Oedipus confesses to killing a man at the highway. He was enraged because he was “forced off the road.” (*Oedipus Rex* 2.284) With malice in his heart, he chose to harm another human. As Marcoulesco comments, “Free will is the capacity to choose among courses of action... and also to assume full moral responsibility.” (420)

As the pressure builds within Oedipus to discover the truth about Laios’ murder, a messenger with news of his, believed, father arrives. He is told again that “Polybos was not your father.” (*Oedipus Rex* III.101) By his own determination, he must solve the final riddle; the riddle of who his father was and where he came from.

Many people tried to stop Oedipus in his pursuit. Teiresias told him “How dreadful knowledge of the truth can be – When there’s no help in truth.” (*Oedipus Rex* II.101) Iocaste begs Oedipus to let the mystery go “For God’s love, let us have no more questioning!” (*Oedipus Rex* III.139) Finally the shepherd says to the King, “For God’s love, my King, do not ask me any more.” (*Oedipus Rex* III.51). Each of these people knew that the King’s persistence would ultimately destroy him.

“The greatest grief’s are those we cause ourselves.”(*Oedipus Rex* IV.9) He had finally come to the end. He had found the answers to all the questions and now had to deal with the information that he had obtained. He resolved himself to do darkness:

“No more, No more shall you look on the misery about me, the horrors of my own doing! Too long you have known the faces of those whom I should never have seen, too long been blind to those for whom I was searching! From this hour, go in darkness!”(*Oedipus Rex* IV.1226-1230)

As Oedipus plunges the brooches in his eyes, he commits the final act of free will. He accepts his role in what has happened and ultimately thinks that this is a tribute to his sins.

“Belief in free will amounts to the conviction that, as individuals, human beings are endowed with the capacity for choice of action, for decision among alternatives, and specifically that, given an innate moral sense, man can freely discern good and evil and choose the good, though he often does not.” (Marcoulesco 419)

Work Cited

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