

AWARENESS AND NECESSITY AS  
A SOURCE OF TRAGEDY

by

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## Introduction

THE tension between awareness and necessity is a common theme in Greek thought; that tension is one source, among many, of tragedy employed in extant Greek tragedies. Clearly there are several other sources of tragedy that a tragedian could employ for dramatic effect, and there have been many arguments and theories set out to answer the question, "What is tragedy?" But such a broad topic is not the question here. I have deliberately avoided discussing tragedy *as a genre*. Instead, I am interested in the subtlety of the tension between awareness and necessity *as* tragedy. This paper moves from showing the presence of awareness and necessity in the ancient world to showing how this tension is exploited by two dramas, *Prometheus Bound* and *Oedipus the King*. Combined they show personal will thwarted by overwhelming necessities, and together they reveal that this tension affects gods and men alike. Then I continue by arguing that this tension itself is one source, among many, for tragedy; it is the presence of mind in an unavoidable world that we find so terrible in certain tragic characters.

I treat *Prometheus Bound* at length because the mythology itself of Prometheus, from which emerged the drama, can be read as an account of the origin of consciousness in humanity. Prometheus himself, according to the mythology, is single-handedly responsible for the presence of awareness in men, and his culpability in this regard burdens him with being the central focus of this topic. We see this burden epitomized in Aeschylus' drama when Prometheus has everything except his wits pinned up against a stone cliff. I argue that the story of Prometheus is the mythological account of a special type of awareness that I label *sovereignty of the mind*. It is special because it is sovereignty in a limited way, only in so far as it asserts freedom of thought. This gift was natural for Prometheus, since he is forethought *per se*. The Promethean part of man is his mind. I argue that awareness does not specifically assert *sovereignty of action*, nor consequently does it assert freedom of choice. Furthermore, this special type of awareness conflicts gravely with an ancient concept of necessity. To clarify my argument, I compare Prometheus with French Existentialism, as outlined by Sartre's treatise *What is Existentialism?* They are analogous insofar as they both affirm the presence of mind. This analogy illuminates Prometheus when we find him crucified in *Prometheus Bound*.

At this point in the paper I have set up all the issues involving the tension between awareness and necessity. There are several differing views on interpreting these issues. I provide summaries of three particularly relevant interpretations that argue about the source itself of tragedy. Next I examine *Oedipus the King* as the prime example of this tension, revealing its tragic effect upon a mortal man. *Oedipus the King* seems to follow from the story of Prometheus since in Oedipus we see a character who suffers on account of the very gift provided by Prometheus to man. Oedipus shows how the tension at hand is tragic precisely because the tragic hero has sovereignty of the mind, as provided by the Promethean paradigm, but not sovereignty of action, since he is limited by necessity. Oedipus is compelled to perform egregious acts, and the key to his tragic situation lies in the fact that he can freely think but not freely choose. I conclude this paper by presenting an alternate interpretation of Oedipus found in *The Ancient Concept of Progress* by E. R. Dodds and showing how my interpretation is slightly different than his.

## The Story of Prometheus

PROMETHEUS is the god who gave fire to man. It was part of a bundle of gifts that included various faculties and powers, ranging from technical skill to hope. His gifts were by-products of an ancient conflict among the gods, a conflict that amounts to nothing more than a struggle over succession. Before anything was formally created, Hesiod tells us, the Cosmos consisted of Chaos, a gaping jumbled presence. The elements of the Cosmos were all mixed up together. Eventually the Chaos settled, and the elements were neatly differentiated. Gaia and Uranus, the primordial gods, ruled shortly during this settlement. They bore insolent children, full of boundless pride, the Titans, who assumed a primeval sovereignty over the Cosmos by means of might. Cronus was the youngest of the Titans, and also the ruler of them all, fated to rule in place of his father. Once in power, he married his own sister, Rhea, and together they bore Hestia, Demeter, Hera, Hades, Poseidon, and Zeus, the gods fated to replace the Titans and rule on Olympus (*Theog.* 457).

When Zeus' allotted time came to rule, he declared internecine war against the Titans and promised great powers to all the newly reigning gods. Prometheus, a Titan, recognized that this transfer of sovereignty was bound to happen, so he rebelled against his own race and provided cunning to the children of Cronus, soon to reign on Olympus. Cunning is a faculty of the mind that is more powerful than the primeval might and brute force that kept the Titans in power.

Zeus was the principal beneficiary when the transfer of power was complete. He became the ruler of rulers, the single sovereign authority over the Cosmos. After Zeus forced all the Titans to obsequious and indentured conditions, where they would reside in misery forever, he proceeded to rearrange the Cosmos in a harmonious way. He created a new order for his new sovereignty (*Theog.* 845).

#### Man's Salvation

WHEN Zeus assumed control over the cosmos, man was on the proscription list. Unfortunately, we do not have consistent accounts over why, when or how Zeus intended to complete his destructive objective. Different authors provide different contexts for man's salvation by Prometheus. However, throughout them all, the message is clear: Prometheus saved man by providing him fire, and he suffered gravely for doing so.

Hesiod's *Theogony* is the oldest source for the mythology of Prometheus. He gives the context of Prometheus' gift of fire as follows. During a banquet, Prometheus tricked Zeus into selecting the bones and fat of a sacrificial animal so that the men could eat the meat (535). Zeus was incensed, so he rescinded man's privilege to use fire. Prometheus felt obliged to return fire, so he stole it from heaven and gave it back to man (562). Hesiod says that it was the trick against Zeus which earned Prometheus his punishment, not theft of fire from heaven (534).

Hesiod's account assumes that man already existed when Zeus assumed his reign. Still other accounts say that Prometheus was the creator of man, and it was during this creation that fire was provided. Specifically, Apollodorus briefly says that man was formed from mixing mud and water, then Athena breathed life into the clay model. Once living, Prometheus brought down fire to man concealed in a wooden fennel (1.7.1). Lucian gives a similar story. He concurs with Hesiod that Prometheus was punished for the trick against Zeus (9), then goes on to say he created man out of mud and water (13), and justifies his

creation on the grounds that the gods can now have a creature to which they may compare their own good fortune and further that the theft of fire is justified since man may offer burnt sacrifices to the gods (15).

Alternatively, Philip Vellacott, editor and translator of Aeschylus' plays, writes in his introduction that Aeschylus assumed the following account. Man anonymously was created under the reign of Cronus and was considered a mistake. He was kept in this state of wretchedness and servitude. Then, when Zeus came to power, he promptly decided to exterminate man, but Prometheus decided to save him from Zeus by giving him fire, which enlightened him and made him less deplorable, and quashed Zeus' reason for exterminating him (9). Aeschylus himself never says why or when Prometheus gave fire to man, but only that he was punished for stealing fire from heaven (7).

Regardless of the source or context, Prometheus was gravely punished for providing fire to man. This very punishment Aeschylus illuminates for us in *Prometheus Bound*. The play opens up with Bia and Kratos forcing Prometheus toward a rocky cliff. Hephaestus reluctantly follows behind, carrying a hammer, nails and chains in order to crucify Prometheus. As Hephaestus sets to his grim task, we have a sympathetic image of Prometheus. He offended Zeus and is getting his punishment, but he did it to save man. At once Aeschylus' magnificent vocabulary and the shrill imagery of Prometheus crucified on the rock evokes inexpressible grandeur, forever sublime. Prometheus hangs there, crucified and motionless, bound by relentless iron, throughout the entire play.

#### The Gift of Awareness

MAN'S use of fire symbolizes other faculties. Specifically, fire represents awareness: the ability to think, to reflect on those thoughts, and to make use of those reflections, *sovereignty of the mind*. This symbolic gift was natural for Prometheus, since he is the god of forethought, the essence of awareness; the Promethean part of man is his intellect. Prometheus explains that the presence of mind was his gift to humanity:

ΠΡΟΜΗΘΕΥΣ  
 τὰν βροτοῖς δὲ πῆματα  
 ἀκούσαθ', ὥς σφας νηπίους ὄντας τὸ πρὶν  
 ἔννοους ἔθηκα καὶ φρενῶν ἐπηβόλους.  
 λέξω δέ, μέμψιν οὔτιν' ἀνθρώποις ἔχων  
 ἀλλ' ὧν δέδωκ' εὖνοιαν ἐξηγούμενος. (West ed. ll. 442-446)

*Prometheus*

What I did

For mortals in their misery, hear now. At first

Mindless, I gave them mind and reason. -- What I say

Is not in censure of mankind, but showing you

How all my gifts to them were guided by goodwill. (Vellacott trans.)

Several words in ancient Greek refer to the presence of mind, and all these words refer to the awareness provided by Prometheus. First, found within his own name, *μητις* means both wisdom and the skill or craft learned through wisdom; it is also a plan, an understanding, or in general a notion held in the mind. Also common is *νόος*, which usually refers to

sensibility or wit; it can be either an intuition or even a remembrance of something. Just as common, there is  $\phi\rho\rho\eta\nu$ , which can refer physiologically to the midriff or the heart, or it can refer to the cognition within one's mind, awareness per se.

#### The Existential Analogy

PROMETHEUS is the example par excellence of the gift he provides. We see him bound and fettered, and resisting that bond with the power of his mind. He affirms his awareness despite the physical constraint. He resists Bia and Kratos who attempt to chide and scold him; he remits Hephaestus, urging him not to blame himself; he rebukes the Chorus of Sea Nymphs for intending to soothe him and convince him to make amends with Zeus; he reproves Oceanus, sending him off back into the Ocean without a single admission; he reprimands Hermes who tries to eke out a secret from him; above all, he repudiates Zeus. No torture device or rhetoric -- especially no constraint -- gains an inch of persuasion, and his single defense against all these adversaries is his own complete awareness, his unfettered thought.

By mentally resisting and relying on the autonomy of his mind, Prometheus establishes the paradigm for what I should call an 'atheistic position,' labeled after Jean-Paul Sartre's atheistic position of Existentialism, which affirms the power and autonomy of one's mind. Now, while the religiosity of Aeschylus might be a hotly debated item, here religiosity is irrelevant. The atheistic position does not deny the existence, power, sovereignty of any theological character. Not by any means. Instead, it assumes His indifference and His impotence with regard to controlling an individual's intelligence. It allows the individual merely to think independently. This position we see pinned up by Prometheus is analogous to the atheistic position of Existentialism, since he does not feel obligated to defer to Zeus, just as Existentialism does not feel obligated to defer to God. This analogy should be carefully explained. It is important because it explains the significance of this Promethean awareness.

In sum, Sartre claims Existentialism is a sort of defense against the plight of a mindless man, 'desperate quietism.' It declares every truth requires a human subjectivity, and more specifically, "its first move is to make every man aware of what he is" (16). Rather than assuming the absurdity of the human condition, as it was pre-Prometheus, Existentialism "draws all the consequences of a certain atheistic position" (15). In response to the anguish, forlornness and despair, it declares man is free to choose, and further man is defined by his actions which he freely chooses.

Sartre is doing two things. He is affirming awareness, and from that awareness he assumes freedom of action. Awareness is exactly what Prometheus provides for men, and what he himself employs as a defense against Zeus, but with the Promethean awareness comes a 'belief' in freedom of choice and action. However, true freedom of choice and action is different than the belief in freedom of choice and action; one's beliefs are not always epistemologically veridical. True freedom of choice and action does not necessarily follow from the awareness that Prometheus affirms. So their assertions are slightly different.

It might be that the difference between true and believed freedom of choice and action is not too far from the assertions of Existentialism. In one case Sartre blunders and seems to acknowledge this difference. He writes, "'I think, therefore I exist' is the absolute truth of consciousness becoming aware of itself" (36). Here he cripples his assertion of

freedom insofar as he claims freedom of choice and action are external the consciousness. The 'absolute truth of consciousness' is not necessarily the absolute truth outside the consciousness. This blunder acknowledges that man has no special access outside his own awareness, and therefore cannot make any epistemologically sound claim about choice and action outside the consciousness. To be sure, Sartre rightly affirms man's ability to think freely, that is, to choose and act conscientiously, but freedom of action does not simply follow from freedom of thought. Yet this is not to disregard his main point: man can and must think freely. At bottom, Sartre claims awareness itself is the pretext for affirming his atheistic view in which man must affirm his mind and assume responsibility for himself.

#### Awareness and Freedom

SO Existentialism adds an illumination to the atheistic position of Prometheus. It turns out to be an effective interpretive device that explains what I mean by sovereignty of the mind. Man has awareness, this we can be sure, and awareness provides the individual a certain amount of sovereignty; he has complete control over his thoughts, but there is no other power that he can positively affirm. The atheistic position affirms free will in the sense that man can think freely, but not necessarily act freely. It refers to a condition of the consciousness, and says nothing about the world outside of the consciousness. This is the extent of the analogy. He is free to ponder and to reflect, but this sovereignty of the mind is not necessarily extended to sovereignty of action. Action is limited by necessity, and Prometheus himself acknowledges this limit in Aeschylus' drama:

ΠΡΟΜΗΘΕΥΣ  
οὐ ταῦτα ταύτηι Μοῖρᾶ πω τελεσφόρος  
κρᾶναι πέπρωται, μυρίαῖς δὲ πημοναῖς  
δύαις τε καμφθεῖς ᾧδε δεσμὰ φυγγάνω·  
τέχνη δ' ἀνάγκης ἄσθενεστέρα μακρῶι. (ll. 511-514)

#### *Prometheus*

Fate fulfills all in time; but it is not ordained  
That these events shall yet reach such an end. My lot  
Is to win freedom only after countless pains.  
Cunning is feebleness beside Necessity.

While an individual may think freely, and may even believe he acts freely, the ancient view of the Cosmos suggests that this is a false belief. Instead, all action is performed under the guidance "ἀνάγκης," of *necessity*.

At this point it is easy to slip into an argument about free will versus determinism, but the ancient problem set out in the mythology of Prometheus cannot be limited by modern notions inherited from a history of Christianity. Strictly speaking, the problem at hand is between awareness and necessity. To be sure, free will is one aspect of awareness, just as determinism is one aspect of necessity, but the ancient concepts have a broader application. Freedom of action conflicts logically with determinism, which claims all action is causally determined by preceding events, irrespective of will. The awareness provided by Prometheus merely affirms freedom of thought. The intellectual capacity could be powerful enough that it provides the individual with the belief that he is acting according to his will, and may act

conscientiously, but this type of awareness does not endeavor to make the claim that he can act freely. The question here is not about whether there is free will. Instead, it would seem to reassign its referent: we do have freedom of thought, but not freedom of action.

#### Necessity in Ancient Greek

WHAT is necessity? Ἀνάγκη, as the Greeks would have it, is a multifarious and polyonymous concept. Essentially, it is a bond that keeps the Cosmos together and dictates all presence and action within the Cosmos. It is an intricate and invisible net that covers everything; it is the thread that gives shape to the fabric of being itself. Ἀνάγκη overshadows everything in the ancient world. It is the ineluctable presence, the inescapable action found in everything.

Pierre Chantraine attempts to work out the etymology. "No etymology grasps the real sense of *janáγκā* and its derivations: 'constriction' and at the same time 'kinship.' The underlying notion that might justify this double semantic development would be that of the *bond*" (83). Also Richard Onians succinctly adds, "The etymology of *janáγκā*, commonly translated 'necessity,' is uncertain but a connection with ἀνάγκειν, 'to strangle,' has been suggested, in which case the binding cord (or serpent) would not be far to seek" (332). Onians also adds several prime uses of ἀνάγκη. He describes that the Orphics, Pythagoreans and others regarded ἀνάγκη as a personal power that held supreme power over the entire cosmos. Further, he points out that Parmenides speaks of reality as bound by ἀνάγκη, and also that Plato's conception of the universe is a spindle of ἀνάγκη, a binding axis around everything (332). So ἀνάγκη merely asserts that any given situation is necessary, and cannot be any other way.

#### Aspects of Necessity

THROUGHOUT *Shame and Necessity*, Bernard Williams works out the multifarious manifestations of necessity. His book describes the emergence of shame culture in the ancient world and the various aspects of necessity throughout Greek history. Basically there are three functions of necessity found in the ancient world. The "inner necessity of the practical conclusion" is an aspect of necessity we see when an individual who must do a certain thing in order to appear morally correct. It is mostly a cultural phenomenon and social behavior in which an individual performs a certain way, or avoids performing a certain way, in order to avoid shame and win honor among his peers (86). Another aspect of necessity consists of the application of power by one person onto another; this is the necessity of chattel slavery and authoritative coercion. Chattel slavery and serfdom were common as anything else in the ancient world. Athens held slaves as "living property," while Sparta held the helots as "state serfs" (106).

Finally, Williams then describes 'supernatural necessities,' which are broken down twofold. There are 'divine necessities,' which "were purposive, in the sense that events were shaped towards a particular outcome. Sometimes, though not always, they were purposed as well, in the sense that they were designed by supernatural agency that had a motive" (104). This is when particular gods effect specific results, in which case the subject appears as an instrument of that god's will. Under this aspect of necessity falls fatalism, which holds that "it is not completely impossible for someone to decide to do a certain thing while recognizing

that necessarily he will do it anyway" (138). Williams continues to explain that beyond the divine necessities, there is a sense of necessity that dominates all the other senses, and the entirety of the Cosmos too. The ancient Greeks believed that around all action and all presence there was a "harness of necessity" (135). This sense of necessity may present itself to the individual "as having produced the circumstances in which he must act...and in other cases it shapes events without presenting itself at all" (139). This aspect of necessity indicates that all things occur determinably, and nothing is subjective to will or freedom of action.

Furthermore, necessity is polyonymous in the sense that there are many words which refer to ἀνάγκη; some reveal different aspects of necessity while others reveal unique meanings. What they have in common is the suggestion of something inevitable, something that "has to be," that is "bound to happen" (Winnington-Ingram 150). Necessity is the unavoidable, inevitable, inescapable, ineluctable quality of everything around us. Metaphors of necessity abound in ancient Greek literature. The single most persistent and powerful metaphor for necessity is that of the rope, or knot. While the etymology is confusing, it seems that πέρασ, limitation or end, assumed the meaning πείρατα, rope ends, and extended to πείραρ, knotted rope (Onians 313). So the rope or knot often means a binding necessity. Elsewhere, especially in tragedy, it is called a yoke or a net, as Orestes exclaims in *Libation Bearers*: "And this thing: what shall I call it and be right, in all eloquence? Trap for an animal or winding sheet for dead man? Or bath curtain? Since it is a net, robe you could call it, to entangle man's feet" (Greene 129).

Ropes and knots *bind* things together. A commonly used verb for binding is δεῖ, which usually gives the meaning "it is necessary," or "bound to happen." Appearing for the first time in the *Iliad*, δεῖ binds together the entire activity of the Trojan War into necessity:

τί δὲ δεῖ πολεμιζόμεναι Τρώεσσιν  
Ἄργείους; (Il. 9.337-9.338)

Why is it necessary for the Argives  
to make war on the Trojans? (Calasso trans. 97)

And Onians clarifies this point, "to express this simple verb 'to bind' is resolved and becomes 'to spread a bond over'...This popular idiom expressing necessity reveals this very image" (331).

Also χρεώ bears a similar meaning -- that the given situation is necessary or destined - - in the sense that it is revealed by an oracle or prophesy. When some inflection of χρεώ is used to describe a situation, it does not imply that the oracle is predicting an event, or that some god is exercising his capricious power. Instead, it is a statement of an obvious, ineluctable situation. E. R. Dodds points out that Apollo said King Laius must, χρέναι, die at the hands of Jocasta's child; there is no saving clause, so it is necessary (69).

There is μέλλω, which has less force than δεῖ or χρεώ. It describes "something destined," or usually "something likely to happen," so it indicates a strong possibility. It might be rendered "doubtless," "must have," or even "destined to," and, in contrast to χρεώ, this word usually does describe the capricious power of the gods or a temporary and possibly unavoidable situation. Odysseus must have, μέλλω, become hateful to father Zeus, and therefore wanders aimlessly (*Od.* l. 4, 274).

Many other words related to necessity fall into a general category described by fatalism, which is a theory that events are fixed in advance, or predetermined, in such a way that individuals are incapable of changing the outcome of those events. Fatalism is a teleological aspect of necessity. Strictly, **μοῖρα** is "a portion." It describes a lot of land, or portion of life. It is the measured amount, the length, quantity or degree. "The individual comes to birth with an apportionment, a **μοῖρα**, of life, and nothing is more striking in the lot of human beings than the difference in their life-spans and the unpredictability of their deaths (Winnington-Ingram 150). *A3isa* is very similar to **μοῖρα**, in that it refers to a portion of life, but it usually refers to the actual dispensation or decree of that portion. The **θέσφατον** is "the decree" set out by a god, "the ordainment" of a certain portion or lot. **Μόρος** bears a pejorative sense of **μοῖρα**, which is a "lot," "destiny," or "portion," so **μόρος** describes a portion or destiny turned ill. So an individual's **μόρος** is his "doom," or even "death." Loosely translated, **ἄτη** is "divine infatuation," and it came to mean "ruin" or "guilt;" it dismisses an agent's claim to actually do anything. Any hint of greatness, wither honorable or shameful, is at once divine infatuation (Calasso 94). All these terms refer to the conclusive facts about an individual's life that cannot be changed, and which are sometimes decipherable by a prophet or diviner (Onians 303).

Determinism, a theory that all action and stasis is *causally* determined by preceding action or states of being, appears to be another aspect of necessity. Its counterpart in the ancient world would be **δαίμων**, about which Winnington-Ingram says, "this word (which may or may not mean 'apportioner') has a stronger suggestion of personal agency, but is conceived in this association vaguely, as a divine power co-existent with a man and determining the course of his life: when it determines for good, he has **εὐδαιμονία**, but has **δυσδαιμονία** when it determines for ill" (151). So there is a **δαίμων** that follows a man's life, which causally determines the sequence of actions he performs. While determinism is clearly related to necessity, proving its relation is not at all the subject of this paper; this will be discussed below.

Finally, I should mention the personifications of necessity. **Ἀνάγκη** herself belongs to the world of Cronus. She was his companion and shared his throne, just as Hera shared Zeus' throne. Though a divine figure, **Ἀνάγκη** never had a face. Her emissaries, depending on the era and author, are Erinyes and Moirae, or Bia and Kratos, and sometimes Ate (Calasso 125). There are many theological personifications that embody the concept necessity: Adrasteia, Moira, Tyche, Ate, Aisa, Dike, Nemesis, Erinyes, Heimarmene (Calasso 124). These are all female figures who typically personify the meaning of the abstract word. They make an abstract concept concrete by giving it a face.

So necessity is embodied by all of these; it is the inevitability and powerlessness of human beings; it is the pre-determined and causal sequence of human action or presence of the physical world. For the ancients, necessity was a powerful and ubiquitous force that forestalls all effort, human and divine.

### The Impasse

AWARENESS is a paradox. It is a source of corruption to man but also his salvation. The sovereignty of the mind established by awareness conflicts with necessity. Man could think freely but not act freely. Apparently Zeus and Prometheus were both trying to save man from

this conflict. Zeus intended to save man by preventing him from having awareness, since sovereignty of the mind becomes frustrated in the face of necessity. Prometheus intended to save man by providing awareness, since sovereignty of the mind is the only meaningful response to necessity. They both understood that there is a *tragic* tension between awareness and necessity; they just had subtly different remedies for that tension. And indeed it is this very tension itself that evokes a tragic effect in drama. The tragic hero may appear to make conscious choices, but in fact he has no control over his abominable actions at all. He is the tragic hero precisely because he is aware, but he has control over nothing except his ability to be aware, and under duress of necessity, he performs the most egregious act conceivable among humanity. Further, we empathize not with his sufferings, but with his awareness that he suffers beyond control. So this paper's single claim is that the tension between awareness and necessity is one source of tragedy in Ancient Greek Tragedy.

Proving that the Cosmos, especially as it was conceived by the Greeks, is purely deterministic (so there is no free will), which is one aspect of necessity, or even that any certain author thought that it was, is not the purpose of this paper. This would be a monstrous epistemological burden requiring privileged access to the ancient Cosmos that is just not available to us. Instead, I am suggesting something much more simple: that *if* the Cosmos were governed by necessity deterministically, and we are capable of a type of awareness that gave the impression of free will, *then* there could be stories about this tension that demonstrate its essentially tragic quality.

#### Opposition

HOWEVER, there are several differing views on interpreting these issues. In general, the best opposition to my view is the argument from several authors that the concept "determinism" simply did not exist in early antiquity. From *Justice of Zeus*, Lloyd-Jones writes, "Dodds rightly says that for Sophocles' time, belief in divine foreknowledge did not imply that all actions were predetermined; indeed, the philosophical notion of determinism did not exist before the Hellenistic age"(106). First, "predetermined" or "divine foreknowledge" is not the same thing as "determinism." Determinism only states that all action or stasis happens causally. Second, the predetermined actions mentioned in ancient Greek literature are governed by  $\mu\omicron\iota\rho\alpha$  or similar agents, while other actions are governed by other aspects of necessity, or by  $\text{jan}\acute{\alpha}\text{g}\acute{\kappa}\acute{\alpha}$  itself, which do bear the potentiality to limit the possibility of choice. So nothing in the ancient language boasts that all action is predetermined or determined; the ancient vocabulary merely claims that all action is necessary; these are subtly different assertions. The following are three particularly relevant summaries of arguments that assert the source of tragedy.

#### View 1: Tragic Decision

IN *Tragic Freedom and Fate in Sophocles* Emese Mogyoródi attempts to "provide reinstatement for freedom, as against views that overemphasize the determination" of the tragic element in Tragedy (359). His initial example is Ismene, who, he claims, is capable to choose, and in fact has made a different choice than her sister Antigone. The play *Antigone* is obviously about the burial rights owed to Polyneices, their brother, who, according to Creon, attacked Thebes

unjustly, and disgraced the Gods in doing so. Antigone feels compelled to bury her brother while Ismene feels compelled to follow the command of Creon and leave him unburied.

Mogyoródi claims that regardless of the surrounding debates and philosophical views of "tragic decision," the "dramatic setting, discourse, textual organization, and vocabulary underline the fact that in this play, too, we are presented with a genuine 'situation of choice'" (360). He further states that his own intent is not to remove consciousness from the tragic elements in the story or that "awareness of choice is key to her tragedy," rather he posits that "impetuousness or harshness in [Antigone]" and her "unswerving adherence to her principles" is a "prerequisite for tragedy." He admits the limits of this view, "Yet a trait of character alone does not suffice to make a tragedy; decision, choice, and action in the sense of Snel's 'archetype' are also required" (361).

Mogyoródi later suggests that Antigone, similar to Ismene, is opportuned with choice, however she is determined to bury her brother out of honor and guilt, for she fears shame in the face of the gods rather than men; this is a tragic decision that Antigone makes. More akin to Williams "necessity of practical conclusion," Antigone simply makes a tragic decision and Ismene does not, based on their own motives. In both characters, each accepts the conclusion of her decision. So the tragic quality of their conclusion, or "fate," is "inorganic" and "completely determined from outside" (363). In her own words, Ismene explains, "Life was your choice, and death was mine" (Greene 555).

#### View 2: Anguish of Choice

THOMAS Rosenmeyer affirms an "anguish of choice" by claiming tragedy lies grounded in that the character is aware that he has a choice. He says, "the concentration upon determining factors obstructs any perception of spontaneity. There are other differences. Pre-Stoic Greek has no word for "duty," only the vaguest notion of "obligation," and little that corresponds to the modern concept of will. There is thus ample cause for proceeding with the utmost caution in trying to talk about qualities of action and degrees of freedom of decision" (263). So the anguish remains in the choice itself. For example, he says, "Agamemnon's submission to the will of Artemis was a necessity; it is certainly to be preferred to its converse, that Agamemnon freely chose to kill his daughter" (300).

Rosenmeyer is skeptical about the loose discussion of will. "When it is said that tragedy "is most moving when the human victim is involved against his will (like Agamemnon) or unawares (like Oedipus) in criminal error for which the penalty must be paid," the ease of the wording and the use of "will" and "unawares" give us pause" (300). And he continues to describe another difficulty. "For several decades now, it has been customary to emphasize the element of decision making and choice in tragedy, and of the mental anguish that precedes the choice...only in drama...do choice and the freedom of choice come to be fully realized. Henceforth we can speak of a tragic dilemma, the decision making in the face of contradictory options" (301).

#### View 3: Realizing Constraint

R. P. Winnington-Ingram argues a view very similar to mine. In *Sophocles: An Interpretation*, he peruses several mythological stories presented in the Greek tragedies of Sophocles, and compares them with the other tragedians. Initially, he argues that the inexorable power of the

gods and destiny make the free man realize the constraints put on him; indeed there are severe limitations he encounters, and when he realizes this, he might find himself to be no freer than an ox. He agrees that ancient notions of "constraint" or the "inevitable" come from the terms for slavery and herding, as outlined by Onians in *The Origin of European Thought*. (153). To clarify his view, he adds "Agamemnon suffers for his own acts: but were these free acts? No question has been more ardently debated than this. It shall not be debated here. But it must be pointed out that the notion of fatality...does raise a problem of human freedom (153).

Winnington-Ingram's view, he tells the reader, does not intend to remove the vitality from life, and the ancients hardly let these notions prevent them from acting. "There have been times and places, in human history, at which the feeling of inexorable fate has been so strong as to sap vitality: if what is bound to be will be, then all human striving is futile. The Greeks of the classical period were not like that at all: vigorous, self-assertive, emulous, ambitious, they pursued their aims in some confidence that they could attain them." He goes on to say that the Greeks highly prized freedom, and further that the terms for the debate between free will versus determinism is modern, yet the essential issues are very clearly present in antiquity. The elements of the problem, he explains, are "destiny, the gods, justice and human freedom. That there are limitations upon human freedom is obvious. That justice can be sought, if not found, in the operation of gods conceived in the likeness of men is understandable. That there is justice in the decrees of fate is another matter" (154).

### Oedipus

IN contrast with these three views, the story of Oedipus provides substantial evidence for my view: that the tensions itself between awareness and necessity is one source for tragedy. The story of Oedipus follows from the story of Prometheus since, in Oedipus, we see a character who suffers on account of the very gift to man provided by Prometheus. Oedipus shows how the tension at hand is tragic precisely because the tragic hero has sovereignty of the mind but not sovereignty of action, since he is limited by necessity. Oedipus is compelled to perform egregious acts, and the key to his tragic situation lies in the fact that he can freely think but not freely choose.

The story of Oedipus comes to us through Sophocles' episodal account of the Theban cycle. This cycle is a series of curses, passed on generation after generation, with explosive and devastating results. Oedipus is the son of Laius and Jocasta. Laius is the descendant of Cadmus, who founded Thebes while he was wandering in search of his sister Europa. Tribulations and curses of Cadmus were inherited by all his descendants, not ending with Oedipus, but extending to his children and beyond. In this particular drama, Apollo represents Oedipus' necessary condition, and the image of light represents his awareness of this condition.

There are several key scenes demonstrating the tragic tension borne by the conflict between necessity and awareness. The *moment of awareness* appears to be the climatic tragic scene. Once Oedipus becomes aware of his condition, nothing but pain and sorrow lie in store for him and his family. Jocasta kills herself. Oedipus blinds himself. And in yet other episodes his children die in cruel and tragic ways. The scenes from the drama that I examine reveal Oedipus in two ways. Despite the use of his intellect, his sovereignty of mind, the entire course of his life was unconditionally inevitable. The oracle, which comes from Apollo

himself, simply announces the way things will be for him. In the second way, Oedipus is everywhere revealed to be affirming his awareness and the power of his ability to think; and there is a problem in Thebes which he feels compelled to illuminate with the power of his mind. Oedipus becomes the tragic hero at the moment when he learns that throughout this entire life he believed he was acting voluntarily for his best interest. When he sees that this is not the case, he submits to Apollo; he submits to his necessary condition. When Creon returns with the news that some individual, some pollution who killed king Laius, must be removed from the city, Oedipus asks:

ΟΙΔΙΠΟΥΣ  
ποιού γὰρ ἀνδρὸς τήνδε μηνύει τύχην; (Wilson ed. l. 103)

...  
ἀλλ' ἐξ ὑπαρχῆς αὐθις αὐτ' ἐγὼ φανῶ. (l. 132)

*Oedipus*  
Who is the man whose fate the God pronounces?

...  
I will bring this to light again. (Greene trans.)

Oedipus publicly announces that he will exhaust every measure to discover who killed Laius, and in doing, as we know, he will bring his own fate to light. That is, he will become aware of the necessary condition that envelops him.

Teiresias is the prophet who knows Oedipus' condition. He knows Oedipus' ruin, and he is reluctant to tell him just how terrible it really is:

ΤΕΙΡΕΣΙΑΣ  
φεῦ φεῦ, φρονεῖν ὡς δεινὸν ἔνθα μὴ τέλη  
λύηι φρονούντι. (ll. 315-316)

*Teiresias*  
Alas, how terrible is wisdom when  
it brings no profit to the man that's wise.

But insatiable Oedipus will not bear this delay. He threatens the old prophet with violence, so the prophet tells Oedipus, in a rash of anger, that it is none other than Oedipus himself whom he seeks. This satisfies Oedipus less, and he immediately blames the priest, and Creon too, of treason. But this is no good, and he returns:

ΤΕΙΡΕΣΙΑΣ  
οὐ γὰρ σε μοῖρα γ' ἐμοῦ πεσεῖν, ἐπεὶ  
ἴκανός Ἐπόλλων, ὧι τάδ' ἐκπράξει μέλει. (ll. 376-377)

*Teiresias*  
It is not fate that I should be your ruin,  
Apollo is enough; it is his care to work this out.

The prophet goads Oedipus on to his final destruction:

ΤΕΙΡΕΣΙΑΣ  
ἄλλων δὲ πλήθος οὐκ ἐπαισθάνηι κακῶν,

ἄ γ' ἐξαιίστώσει σε σὺν τοῖς σοῖς τέκνοις. (ll. 424-425)

...  
 σοῦ γὰρ οὐκ ἔστιν βροτῶν  
 κάκιον ὅστις ἐκτριβήσεταιί ποτε. (ll. 427-428)

...  
 καὶ ταῦτ' ἰὼν  
 εἴσω λογίζου· κἂν λάβῃς ἐψευσμένον,  
 φάσκειν ἔμ' ἤδη μαντικῆι μηδὲν φρονεῖν. (ll. 460-462)

*Teiresias*

And of the multitude of other evils  
 establishing a grim equality  
 between you and your children, you know nothing.

...  
 Misery shall grind no man as it will you.

...  
 Go within, reckon that out, and if you find me  
 mistaken, say I have no skill in prophecy.

Later we learn exactly what Oedipus is about to reveal himself. Jocasta reminds us what the oracle said to Laius:

ΙΟΚΑΣΤΗ

ὡς αὐτὸν ἤξει μοῖρα πρὸς παιδὸς θανεῖν,  
 ὅστις γένοιτ' ἐμοῦ τε κακείνου πάρα. (ll. 713-714)

*Jocasta*

It was fate that he should die a victim  
 at the hands of his own son, a son to be born  
 of Laius and me.

And Oedipus remembers his version of the oracle:

ΟΙΔΙΠΟΥΣ

καί μ' ὁ Φοῖβος ὦν μὲν ἰκόμην  
 ἄτιμον ἐξέπεμψεν, ἄλλα δ' ἀθλίωι  
 καὶ δεινὰ καὶ δύστηνα προὔφανε λέγων,  
 ὡς μητρὶ μὲν χρεῖή με μειχθῆναι, γένος δ'  
 ἄτλητον ἀγγρώποισι δηλώσοιμ' ὄραν,  
 φονεὺς δ' ἐσοίμην τοῦ φυτεύσαντος πατρός. (ll. 788-793)

...  
 ἄρ' ἔφυν κακός;  
 ἄρ' οὐχὶ πᾶς ἀναγνος; εἴ μ' ἐχρή φυγεῖν,  
 καὶ μοι φυγόντι μῆστι τοὺς ἐμοὺς ἰδεῖν  
 μηδ' ἐμβατεῦσαι πατρίδος, ἢ γάμοις με δεῖ  
 μητρὸς ζυγῆναι καὶ πατέρα κατακτανεῖν  
 Πόλυβον, ὃς ἐξέθρεψε καξέφυσέ με.  
 ἄρ' οὐκ ἀπ' ὧμοῦ ταῦτα δαίμονός τις ἂν  
 κρίνων ἐπ' ἀνδρὶ τῶιδ' ἂν ὀρθοίη λόγον; (ll. 822-829)

*Oedipus*

Phoebus sent me home again unhonoured  
 in what I came to learn, but he foretold  
 other and desperate horrors to befall me,  
 that I was fated to lie with my mother,  
 and show to daylight an accursed breed  
 which men would not endure, and I was doomed  
 to be murderer of the father that begot me.

Was I not born evil?  
 Am I not utterly unclean? I had to fly  
 and in my banishment not even see  
 my kindred nor set foot in my own country,  
 or otherwise my fate was to be yoked  
 in marriage with my mother and kill my father,  
 Polybus who begot me and had reared me.  
 Would not one rightly judge and say that on me  
 these things were sent by some malignant God?

Oedipus is about to learn the hard way that it was necessary, *χρή*, that he fled because it was necessary, *δεῖ*, that he kill his father and marry his mother, and that these things were the unavoidable compulsion of some necessity, *δαίμονός*, that has followed him from birth. There was no option for him to save his family or himself. Jocasta begins to understand what eats Oedipus away. She pleads to him, urges him to live unthinkingly, for those who disregard the oracles live worry-free lives:

ΙΟΚΑΣΤΗ  
 τί δ' ἄν φοβο  
 ιτ' ἄνθρωπος ὦι τὰ τῆς τύχης  
 κρατεῖ, πρόνοια δ' ἐστὶν οὐδενὸς σαφῆς;  
 εἰκὴ κράτιστον ζῆν, ὅπως δύναίτο τις.  
 σὺ δ' ἐς τὰ μητρὸς μὴ φοβοῦ νυμφεύματα.  
 πολλοὶ γὰρ ἤδη κὰν ὀνείρασιν βροτῶν  
 μητρὶ ξυνηυάσθησαν. ἀλλὰ ταῦθ' ὅτῳ  
 παρ' οὐδέν ἐστι, ῥαῖστα τὸν βίον φέρει. (ll. 976-983)

*Jocasta*  
 Why should man fear since chance is all in all  
 for him, and he can clearly foreknow nothing?  
 Best to live lightly, as one can, unthinkingly.  
 As to your mother's marriage bed, -- don't fear it.  
 Before this, in dreams too, as well as oracles,  
 many a man has lain with his own mother.  
 But he to whom such things are nothing bears  
 his life most easily.

She implores him to ignore his acute awareness, his curiosity that got him so far, and will prove to be his ruin. But, by nature, Oedipus cannot sit still:

ΟΙΔΙΠΟΥΣ  
 καλῶς ἅπαντα ταῦτ' ἄν ἐξείρητό σοι,  
 εἰ μὴ κύρει ζῶς ἢ τεκούσα. νῦν δ' ἐπεὶ



awareness of his condition fixes upon him so unbearably, that he purges out his eyes, that he may never look upon the curse again:

ΟΙΔΙΠΟΥΣ

Ἄπολλων τάδ' ἦν, Ἄπολλων, φίλοι,  
ὁ κακὰ κακὰ τελῶν ἐμὰ τάδ' ἐμὰ πάθεα.  
ἔπαισε δ' αὐτόχειρ νιν οὐ-  
τις, ἀλλ' ἐγὼ τλάμων,  
ὅττι γ' ὄρωντι μηδέν ἦν ἰδεῖν γλυκύ; (ll. 1331-1335)

*Oedipus*

It was Apollo, friends, Apollo  
that brought this bitter bitterness, my sorrows to completion.  
But the hand that struck me  
was none but my own.  
Why should I see  
Whose vision showed me nothing sweet to see?

So he acknowledges performing the acts himself, but under the compulsion of some force greater and more powerful than his ability to control his actions. Oedipus accepts his necessity, and humbly submits:

ΟΙΔΙΠΟΥΣ

οὐ γὰρ ἄν ποτε  
θνήσκων ἐσώθην, μὴ ἴπι τῶι δεινῶι κακῶι.  
ἀλλ' ἢ μὲν ἡμῶν μοῖρ', ὅποιπερ εἶσ', ἴτω. (ll. 1457-1459)

*Oedipus*

I would not have been saved from death if not  
for some strange evil fate. Well, let my fate  
go where it will.

Dodds

DODDS was a professor at Oxford, and when he gave examinations on Classical Studies, he posited the question "In what sense, if any, does the *Oedipus the King* attempt to justify the ways of God to man?" (64). The responses to that question fell into three general categories, which Dodds discusses. He thinks that they are all wrong, then produces his own interpretation of *Oedipus Tyrannos*. Two of the responses are of interest here. (1) *Oedipus Tyrannos* is a moralizing tragedy. Those who hold this view say that we get what we deserve. Oedipus is shown to be a bad individual, getting what he deserves for doing harm to others. He bears "fatal *hamartia*." (2) *Oedipus Tyrannos* is a tragedy of destiny; man has no free will but is a puppet at the hands of the gods who pull the strings that make him dance.

The first response is quashed when Dodds points out that Sophocles intends to represent Oedipus as a good person. "In the eyes of the Priest in the opening scene he is the greatest and noblest of men, the savior of Thebes who with divine aid rescued the city from the Sphinx" (66); and throughout the play, the chorus repeatedly mentions his wisdom. Moreover, the *hamartia* that this view falls back on is used by Aristotle to mean "an offense committed in ignorance of some material fact and therefore free from *ponbria* or *kakia*" and

cannot mean to imply an intrinsically tragic flaw. This only makes sense, for had the characters of tragedy "acted knowingly, they would have been inhuman monsters, and we could not have felt for them that pity which tragedy ought to produce" (67).

Dodds continues to say that the moralists of the first response have one more card to play. "Could not Oedipus, he asks, have escaped his doom if he had been more careful?" Dodds responds by showing that the oracle was "*unconditional*" (line 790): it did not say 'If you do so-and-so you will kill your father'; it simply said 'You will kill your father, you will sleep with your mother.' And what an oracle predicts is bound to happen" (69). So Oedipus does what he cannot avoid. "Apollo said that he *must* (chrenai) die at the hands of Jocasta's child; there is no saving clause." The *unconditional* oracle may show that the first response is not a sound argument, but it sets up a serious problem for Dodds' criticism of the second response.

Dodds admits that if Oedipus is innocent, and he bears a doom which he cannot avoid, the play seems like it could be a "tragedy of destiny," as the second response suggests. But this too he attempts to refute. He sets up the problem as such. Moderns are easily persuaded by this response since we "either believe in free will or else we are determinists" (70). He argues that this response is anachronistic, that in fact the Classical Greeks had no concept of determinism. Doubtless Homeric heroes have their "predetermined 'portion of life'," the "moira," as Homer calls it, but "moira" does not prevent individuals from "being free agents," from acting freely (70). Further, "neither in Homer nor in Sophocles does divine foreknowledge of certain events imply that all human actions are predetermined" (70). To support this claim, Dodds refers to the Messenger who says that Oedipus is jabbing out his eyes "voluntarily" -- it was "self-chosen," as opposed to the "involuntary" parricide and incest. Oedipus is bound teleologically to a miserable fate, but his actions on stage are done as a "free agent" (70).

Dodds strait away takes this opportunity to present his own interpretation of *Oedipus Tyrannos*. "What fascinates us is the spectacle of man freely choosing, from the highest motives, a series of actions which lead to his own ruin" (71). Dodds cites every event on the stage as action based on choice. Oedipus determines to get rid of the plague; he consults Delphi, he launches an investigation, he reveals the truth about his situation. In short, the cause of Oedipus' downfall is not fate or "the gods", since nothing in the oracle demands him to discover the truth. What causes his ruin, Dodds says, "is his own strength and courage, his loyalty to Thebes, and his loyalty to the truth. In all this we are to see him as a free agent" (71). Dodds concludes by saying that *Oedipus the King* is a play about "the blindness of man and the desperate insecurity of the human condition" (76). Oedipus is great precisely by virtue of his "inner strength", which forces him to pursue the truth to any conclusion at any cost, and to "accept and endure it when found" (76). "To me personally," Dodds continues, "Oedipus is a kind of symbol of the human intelligence which cannot rest until it has solved all the riddles -- even the last riddle, to which the answer is that human happiness is built on an illusion" (76).

#### Conclusion

TO conclude, I should point out the distinction between Dodds' view and my own. I partially agree and partially disagree with Dodds' several claims. Doubtless this drama is about the

indomitability of the human intellect, and Oedipus' ruin is his own strength and courage to practice his intelligence. He is indeed a symbol of the intelligence peculiar to humans. But consider what his strength and courage urged him to do: he desired nothing but awareness of truth, the purest lucidity of the world around him. Now the *unconditionality* of the oracle concerning the life of Oedipus quite plainly means that Oedipus is bound by necessity to perform certain actions. This does not mean Oedipus had no free will if free will refers to freedom of thought, but it does mean that Oedipus had no free will if it refers to freedom of action. Oedipus may believe he is making a choice, but in fact the events of his life are inevitable, so he performs conscious acts, not acts of choice. His ruin lies firmly grounded in the moment when he suddenly becomes aware that he was bound by an unconditional oracle to perform egregious acts. Oedipus sought awareness at every turn, and it was his awareness of his inevitable life that we find so moving about the play. He becomes the tragic hero at the moment when we see his drive to affirm the presence of mind and power of intellect juxtaposed with the necessity of the world around him.

The distinction between my view and Dodds' view is important since it reveals the essentially tragic quality of Oedipus. Just as when we see Prometheus crucified upon the cliff, it is their futility that we find so terrible. Acknowledging this tension is relevant even today since the human spirit commonly finds itself thwarted by imposing external necessities and finds itself lamenting its insatiable condition. Yet with the interpretive device provided by French Existentialism, there is some meaning to be found in their futility. It is precisely the agony of realizing that our actions may be futile, and the lament of having all our actions turn against us, that makes this paper useful. Once the mind's external limitations are acknowledged, it opens up within itself and exalts to its potential.

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Tragedy is kind of drama that presents a serious subject matter about human suffering and corresponding terrible events in a dignified manner. The play chose the story of a British king and his sufferings at the hand of his two disobedient sons as a subject matter. The importance of the play lies in the fact that it transformed the style of English drama, from morality and mystery plays, to the writing of tragedies in the Elizabethan era. Tragedy Examples. Below is the list of prominent English tragedy writers and their famous works: A. Christopher Marlowe. Marlowe was the first English dramatist worthy of the tradition of Greek tragedy.